

Sources

Political consequences of Empire

The politics of largesse and individual generals' distributions

The wealth that conquering generals could acquire from ca. 200 BCE onwards allowed them to win the allegiance of their soldiers in the field through the distribution of war

booty and to seduce the populace at home through magnificent triumphal processions, public games, and public building projects.¹

Then after Scipio Africanus [201 BCE] had sent the bulk of his army by sea, he himself, in making his journey through Italy, which was rejoicing in peace no less than in victory, while not only the cities rushed forth to pay their respects, but crowds of rustics crowded the roads, reached Rome and rode into the city in the most magnificent of all triumphs*. He delivered into the treasury 123,000 pounds of silver. To each of his soldiers he distributed 400 asses* out of the spoils of war.

Livy, *History of Rome*, 30.45.3–4 [ca. 25 BCE]

Marcus Porcius Cato displayed in his Spanish triumph [194 BCE] 25,000 pounds of silver bullion, 123,000 silver denarii*, 540,000 silver Oscan coins, and 1,400 pounds of gold. From the spoils of war he gave to each of his soldiers 270 asses, and three times that amount to each of his cavalry.

Livy, *History of Rome*, 34.46.2–3 [ca. 25 BCE]

Quintus Fulvius Flaccus, one of the consuls*, celebrated a triumph over the Ligurians [179 BCE]. This triumph was certainly due to Flaccus' influence rather than his achievements. He displayed in his triumph a great mass of arms taken from the enemy, but practically no money. Yet he still distributed to each of his infantry soldiers 300 asses, twice that amount to each of his centurions*, and three times that amount to each of his cavalry.

Livy, *History of Rome*, 40.59.2–3 [ca. 25 BCE]

Manius Acilius Glabrio and the censorial elections for 189 BCE

The people favored Glabrio because he had placed a large number of voters in his debt through the distribution of many largesses. When a large number of aristocrats were outraged that a new man should be so far preferred to them, two tribunes of the people, Publius Sempronius Gracchus and Gaius Sempronius Rutilus, brought an accusation against Glabrio, that some of King Antiochus' money and much of the booty taken from his camp had neither been displayed by Glabrio in his triumph nor turned in to the state treasury. . . . M. Porcius Cato said that gold and silver vessels which he had seen in the camp along with other booty from the king had not been displayed in the triumph. . . . The proposed fine was 100,000 asses.

Livy, *History of Rome*, 37.57.11–58.1 [ca. 25 BCE]

Enormously successful individual generals threatened to disrupt the political equilibrium of the senatorial aristocracy. With the growth of the urban population at Rome, control of the electorate became increasingly difficult for the senatorial aristocracy.² Powerful individuals, through reputation and private expenditure, began to explore

ways to harness the newly emerging complex political networks. In the decades after 200 BCE, the sources report cases of electoral bribery or *ambitus*, as well as lavish expenditures on games (*ludi*) in order to win votes. The Senate attempted to control its constituency in these areas through legislation.

Electoral bribery

The consuls, with the authority of the Senate brought before the Roman people a law to check electoral bribery [181 BCE].³

Livy, *History of Rome*, 40.19.11 [ca. 25 BCE]

Roman politicians of the great aristocratic houses had traditionally relied upon networks of clientage in order to monopolize the electoral process and return members of their families to the highest magistracies

of state. In addition to the unwieldy growth of the urban populace, the secret ballot laws of 139 BCE threatened to disrupt the traditional game of Roman politics.

Abuses of allies and provincials and their political ramifications

Abuse of provincials by Roman magistrates led to a series of ad hoc civil procedures against the offenders, with little in the way of corrective justice as a result. In 149 BCE the tribune Lucius Calpurnius Piso Frugi carried a law which established a standing court for cases of extortion.⁵ Initially senators manned the juries, but the interests of the senatorial provincial governors and the businessmen who bought state contracts for tax collection in the provinces fre-

quently were at odds. During his tribunate Gaius Gracchus transferred the composition of the courts to the equestrians (to simplify a complex problem, we may say that the equestrian class was the wealthy, non-political sector, often engaged in business; in opposition to the political class, the senatorial aristocracy). Control of the juries continued to be a contentious political issue in the decades that followed.

*Spanish complaints to the Senate (171 BCE)*⁶

Envoys from the two Spanish provinces were next introduced to the Senate. They complained of the greed and arrogance of Roman magistrates, and they begged the senators as suppliants that they would not allow them, their allies, to be more foully despoiled and harassed than their enemies. Because they complained of further injustices and it was plain that money had been extorted from them, the praetor Lucius Canuleius, to whom Spain had been allotted, was given the task of assigning for each man, from whom the Spaniards were seeking to recover money, five judges of senatorial rank and to allow the Spaniards to choose advocates. The senatorial decree was read out to the Spanish envoys, who had been called to the Senate house, and they were ordered to name their advocates.

Livy, *History of Rome*, 43.2.1–5 [ca. 25 BCE]

Greek complaints to the Senate (170 BCE)

In Chalcis temples had been plundered, and Gaius Lucretius had transported the spoils in his ships to Antium; free-born people had been ushered into servitude; allied possessions had been plundered and continued to be plundered. . . . On the day of the trial the tribunes accused Gaius Lucretius before the people and proposed a fine of 1,000,000 asses. All 35 tribes voted for condemnation.

Livy, *History of Rome*, 43.7.10–11, 8.10 [ca. 25 BCE]

Resources of the Empire

Now Judas heard of the fame of the Romans, that they were very strong and were well disposed toward all who made an alliance with them, that they pledged friendship to those who came to them, and that they were very strong. He had been told of their wars and of the brave deeds that they were doing among the Gauls, how they had defeated them and forced them to pay tribute, and what they had done in the land of Spain to get control of the silver and gold mines there, and how they had gained control of the whole region by their planning and patience, even though the place was far distant from them.

1 Macc. 8.1–4 [after mid-second century BCE]

The Spanish mines (195 BCE)

Having restored order in the province, [Cato the Elder] arranged for the collection of large revenues from the iron and silver mines, and as a result of the regulations made at that time the wealth of the province increased every day. By reason of these achievements in Spain the senators decreed a thanksgiving for three days.

Livy, *History of Rome*, 34.21.7–8 [ca. 25 BCE]

Polybius, in mentioning the silver mines of New Carthage [in Spain], says that they are very large; that they are distant from the city about 20 stadia* and embrace an area

of 400 stadia in circuit; and that 40,000 workmen stay there, who (in his day) brought into the Roman treasury a daily revenue of 25,000 drachmae*.

Strabo, *Geography*, 3.2.10 (C 148) [ca. 15 BCE]²⁰

Much later the Spaniards understood the peculiar qualities of silver, and they struck notable mines, receiving a huge income from working the veins of the most excellent silver in the world. . . . These mines are incredible in their deposits of copper, silver, and gold. Unskilled laborers have been known to take out a Euboic talent in three days' time, since the ore is filled with solid silver dust which shines forth from it.

Diodorus of Sicily, *Universal History*, 5.36.1–2 [ca. 30 BCE]

Inscriptions show that whereas in the past the proceeds to the state treasury from taxation were some 50,000,000 drachmae, Pompey's additions to the empire (60s BCE) were now bringing in 85,000,000; and that he was adding to the state treasury in coined money and gold and silver plate 20,000 talents, and this apart from the money he had given to his soldiers, each of whom had received at least 15,000 drachmae*.

Plutarch, *Life of Pompey the Great*, 45.3–4 [ca. 115 CE]

*The state of the Treasury*²¹

The gold contained in the national treasury at Rome in the consulship of Sextus Julius and Lucius Aurelius [157 BCE] . . . amounted to 17,410 lbs, the amount of silver was 22,070 lbs, and in specie there was 6,135,400 sesterces; in the consulship of Sextus Julius and Lucius Marcius [91 BCE] . . . there was . . . [lacuna] lbs of gold and 1,620,831 lbs of silver. Gaius Julius Caesar, on first entering Rome during the civil war that bears his name [49 BCE], drew from the treasury 15,000 gold ingots, 30,000 silver ingots, and 30,000,000 sesterces in coin; at no other period was the state more wealthy.

Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 33.55–6 [ca. 75 CE]

Remission of the citizen tax in Italy

People have added an unbounded popularity with the common people to the exploits of Aemilius Paullus in Macedonia, because he brought so much money into the state treasury that the people no longer needed to pay special taxes until the times of Hirtius and Pansa, who were consuls during the first war between Marc Antony and Octavius Caesar [43 BCE].

Plutarch, *Life of Aemilius Paullus*, 38.1–2 [ca. 115 CE]

Aemilius Paullus also after the defeat of King Perseus [168 BCE] paid in to the treasury from the booty won in Macedonia 300 million sesterces; and from that date onward the Roman nation left off paying the citizens' property tax.

Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 33.56 [ca. 75 CE]

After the defeat of King Perseus [168 BCE] Paullus [L. Aemilius Paullus] satiated the ancient hereditary poverty of our city with the wealth of Macedonia so that

the Roman people then for the first time freed itself from the burden of paying war-tax.

Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Deeds and Sayings*, 4.3.8 [ca. 30 CE]

Wealthy Roman aristocrats as art collectors

As you have advised, I have acquired the 20,400 sesterces for Lucius Cincius for the statues of Megarian marble. I have already fallen in love with those Pentelic marble statues of Hermes with bronze heads, which you wrote about. Please then send these and anything else that you think suitable for my place and for my enthusiasm for such things, and your own taste – send as many as soon as you can – especially those which you intend for the gymnasium and colonnade.

Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 1.8 [67 BCE]

I am impatiently waiting for the statues of Megarian marble and those of Hermes, the ones you mentioned in your letter. Please don't hesitate to send anything else of the kind that you may have, as long as it is suitable for my Academy. My bank account can handle it. This is my little vice; and I especially want things that are fit for the gymnasium. Lentulus promises his ships.

Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 1.9 [67 BCE]

Asinius Pollio, as he was an avid collector, was concerned that his art collection attract visitors. In his collection are *Centaur's Carrying the Nymphs* by Arcesilaus, *Muses of Helicon* by Cleomenes, *Oceanus and Jupiter* by Heniochus, *Nymphs of the Appian Water* by Stephanus, the double busts of Hermes and Eros by Tauriscus (the native of Tralles, not the celebrated worker of metal and ivory), *Jupiter the Patron of Strangers* by Papyllus, Praxiteles' student, and Apollonius and Tauriscus' composition from Rhodes, that is *Zethus and Amphion*, and then Dirce and the bull with its rope, all carved from the same block of marble.

Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 36.33–5 [ca. 75 CE]

Among Euphranor's contemporaries was Cydias. The orator Hortensius paid 144,000 sesterces for Cydias' picture of the Argonauts, and he made a shrine to house it at his villa at Tusculum.

Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 35.130 [ca. 75 CE]

Roman and Italian businessmen and Roman war making

In the course of the second century BCE enterprising Romans of the non-senatorial class became increasingly wealthy through commercial activities which senators had considered to be beneath their dignity.

This "commercial class" thrived on state contracts for public works and tax collection in the provinces. Its political influence, though indirect, grew steadily.²²

Publicani* are those who . . . deal with the public property of the Roman people, for it is from this that they get their name.

Ulpian, *Digest*, 39.4.1.1 [ca. 160 CE]

Throughout Italy there are a vast number of contracts; these the censors* give out for construction and maintenance of public buildings, and in addition duties on many other things are farmed out: navigable rivers, harbors, gardens, mines, lands, in short everything that forms a part of Roman power. The people undertake all these things, and we could almost say that everyone has an interest in these contracts and the work they bring. Certain people actually purchase the contracts from the censors, others are their partners, some stand surety for them, while others pledge their own estates for this purpose.

Polybius, *Histories*, 6.17.2–5 [ca. 150 BCE]

Merchants and profiteers follow the Roman army

[P. Decius Mus] gathered his soldiers together and spoke: “Will this one victory or these spoils satisfy you? Will your expectations not equal your courage? All Samnite cities and the riches left behind in them belong to you, since, after defeating their legions in so many battles, you have finally thrown them out of their country. Sell these prizes and with hope of gain lure the traders on to follow your column” [296 BCE].

Livy, *History of Rome*, 10.17.4–6 [ca. 25 BCE]

Private enterprise during the Hannibalic War (215 BCE)

In dire financial straits after crushing defeats at Trasimene (217 BCE) and Cannae (216 BCE), the Senate was in a compromised position for provisioning the army, and the

business class filled the need, but clearly had the upper hand in negotiating state contracts.

Three companies of 19 men appeared in person to take the state contracts on the appointed day. They had two demands: exemption from military service for as long as they were under state contract, and that the state should underwrite their cargoes, assuming liability for any damages caused by the violence of enemies and storms. They contracted when these demands were met, and the state was carried on by private funds.

Livy, *History of Rome*, 23.45.1–3 [ca. 25 BCE]

A publican swindle in the Hannibalic War (212 BCE)

The conduct of M. Postumius of Pyrgi interfered with the consular levy, and this almost caused a serious insurrection. This man was a tax farmer (*publicanus*), and for many years he had no rival in dishonesty and greed in the state . . . Because the Roman state had assumed liability for damages sustained from violent storms in cases of army shipments, these men fraudulently reported imaginary shipwrecks, and they caused

by their own trickery even those which were correctly reported. They would put small cargoes of cheap materials in old, battered vessels and sink them at sea . . . This criminal behavior was reported to M. Aemilius, the praetor, and he brought it to the attention of the Senate, but there was no senatorial decree, because the senators did not want to offend the tax farmers as a class at such a time of crisis.

Livy, *History of Rome*, 25.3.8–13 [ca. 25 BCE]

The whole of Asia was . . . afflicted by the accustomed ways of the Roman usurers and tax collectors [71 BCE]. Lucullus later drove these people off, harpies that they were, snatching up the people’s sustenance; but then he tried merely, by reprimanding them, to make them more moderate in their exactions, and he worked to stop the disturbances in the towns, as there were hardly any that were in a peaceful condition.

Plutarch, *Life of Lucullus*, 7.5–6 [ca. 115 CE]