

Lesson 1.1: What was the Roman Republic?

Learning Intentions

- To understand how Rome transitioned from monarchy to republic in 509 BC
- To explore the role of founding myths in shaping Republican identity
- To analyse the theoretical foundations of shared governance embodied in SPQR

Understanding the Content

What was the Roman Republic? The Roman Republic (509-27 BC) was a system of government that replaced the monarchy after the expulsion of the last king. It was based on shared power, annual magistracies, and the principle that authority belonged to both the Senate and the People of Rome together.

The Foundation Myth The Republic began with revolution against tyranny. After Lucretia's rape and suicide, Lucius Junius Brutus led the overthrow of Tarquinius Superbus (the Proud), the last king of Rome, in 509 BC. The Romans swore an oath never to tolerate kings again, establishing a new system based on *libertas* (freedom from one-man rule).

Key Republican Principles:

- Shared power** → No single person held absolute authority
- Annual magistracies** → Officials served for one year only
- Collegiality** → Most offices had at least two holders who could veto each other
- Checks and balances** → Different parts of government could block each other
- SPQR** → "Senatus Populusque Romanus" (The Senate and People of Rome)

From Myth to Reality

Legendary Origins	Political Significance
Aeneas from Troy - Trojan hero, son of Venus - <i>Founded the Roman race</i>	
Romulus and Remus - Twin brothers raised by wolf - <i>Romulus kills Remus, founds Rome</i>	
the Seven Kings - 753 - 509 BC period of Monarchy - <i>Numa, Servius Tullius etc.</i>	
Brutus and the Republic - Led revolution against Tarquin - <i>First consul of the Republic</i>	

Exercise 1.1: Source Analysis - Read each source and answer the questions about Republican identity

1. "The Roman people were free at last, free from the domination of kings" - Livy 2.1
 - What does this tell us about how Romans viewed the transition to the Republic?
 - Why might Livy emphasise 'freedom' when describing this moment?
2. "SPQR - The Senate and People of Rome" - Standard Roman abbreviation
 - What does this phrase suggest about where power lay in the Republic?
 - How does this differ from power under the kings?
3. "I swear that I will never allow anyone to be king in Rome" - The Republican Oath
 - Why was this oath so important to Republican identity?
 - What does it reveal about Roman fears?
4. "Brutus watched unmoved as his own sons were executed for treason" - Livy 2.5
 - What does this story teach about Republican values?
 - How might this myth shape political behavior?
5. "Remember that you are descended from Aeneas and Romulus" - Common political rhetoric
 - How did politicians use Rome's mythical past?
 - Why was divine/heroic ancestry politically useful?

Exercise 1.2: Key Terms - Define and explain the significance of each

Term	Definition	Significance
Res Publica		
Libertas		
SPQR		
Pudicitia		

Exercise 1.3: Analytical Questions - Consider the deeper implications

1. Why did the Romans create and preserve elaborate foundation myths rather than simply forgetting their monarchical past?
2. What tensions might arise between the two parts of SPQR (Senate and People) in political decision-making?

Exercise 1.4: Essay Planning - Create brief outlines for these questions

1. "The Roman Republic was defined more by what it opposed than what it supported." How far do you agree? Key points to consider:
 - Opposition to monarchy
 - The role of libertas
 - Positive Republican values
 - Constitutional innovations
2. To what extent did Rome's foundation myths shape political culture in the Late Republic? Key points to consider:
 - Use of exempla (moral examples)
 - Justification for actions
 - Political rhetoric
 - The Brutus precedent