

## The End of the Republic

In the presentation, we have looked at the historians' perspective on why the political institution of the Roman republic ended. Here I propose to look at some further texts on the reasons and motifs of the end of the Roman republic according to other contemporary authors.

### Lucretius, 2.7-13: the restless public life of Rome

*sed nil dulcius est, bene quam munita tenere  
edita doctrina sapientum templa serena,  
despicere unde queas alios passimque videre  
errare atque viam palantis quaerere vitae,  
certare ingenio, contendere nobilitate,  
noctes atque dies niti praestante labore  
ad summas emergere opes rerumque potiri.*

But nothing is sweeter than to dwell in the serene temples on high, fortified by the teaching of the wise, from which you can look down on others and see them wandering this way and that, going astray as they seek the way of life, striving in talent, competing in nobility, struggling night and day with extreme effort to emerge on to the heights of wealth and to wield power.

### Lucretius, 3.59-63: *avaritia* and *cupido* as wealth and political success become the new goal (1)

*denique avarities et honorum caeca cupido  
quae miseros homines cogunt transcendere finis  
iuris et interdum socios scelerum atque ministros  
noctes atque dies niti praestante labore  
ad summas emergere opes, haec vulnera vitae  
non minimam partem mortis formidine aluntur.*

Besides, avarice and the blind lust for office, which compel wretched men to go beyond the limits of right, and sometimes as accomplices and ministers of crime to struggle night and day with extreme effort to emerge on to the heights of wealth, these wounds of life are fed to no small extent by the fear of death.

**Lucretius, 5.1120-26 *avaritia* and *cupido* as wealth and political success become the new goal (2)**

*at claros homines voluerunt se atque potentis,  
ut fundamento stabili fortuna maneret  
et placidam possent opulenti degere vitam,  
nequiquam, quoniam ad summum succedere honorem  
certantes iter infestum fecere viai,  
et tamen e summo, quasi fulmen, deicit ipsos  
invidia interdum contemptim in Tartara taetra.*

Men have wished to be famous and powerful, so that their fortune might rest on a firm foundation and themselves live a peaceful life in enjoyment of riches—but in vain. For in striving to reach the summit of honour they have made their own way dangerous, and even from the top, like lightning, envy often casts them down in contempt to the foul abyss.

**Sallust, *Catiline* 10.3-6: *avaritia*, *ambitio* and other vices (1)**

*Igitur primo pecuniae, deinde imperi cupido crevit: ea quasi materies omnium malorum fuere. Namque avaritia fidem, probitatem ceterasque artis bonas subvortit; pro his superbiam, crudelitatem, deos neglegere, omnia venalia habere edocuit. Ambitio multos mortalis falsos fieri subegit, aliud clausum in pectore, aliud in lingua promptum habere, amicitias inimicitiasque non ex re, sed ex commodo aestumare magisque voltum quam ingenium bonum habere. Haec primo paulatim crescere, interdum vindicari; post, ubi contagio quasi pestilentia invasit, civitas immutata, imperium ex iustissimo atque optumo crudele intolerandumque factum.*

And so there grew the lust first for money and then for power; those were the building materials, so to speak, of every kind of evil. For avarice destroyed honesty, integrity, and all the other virtues; instead of them, it taught arrogance, cruelty, neglect of the gods, the belief that everything can be bought. Ambition compelled many men to be liars, to have one thing ready on the tongue and something else hidden in the heart, to judge friendship and enmity by advantage rather than fact, to look good rather than to be good. At first these vices grew slowly, and were occasionally punished; later, when the contagion spread like a plague, the citizen body changed its nature, and power that had once been just and upright became cruel and intolerable.

**Sallust, *Histories* 1.11 Maurenbrecher = Augustine, *Civitas Dei* 2.18: *avaritia*, *ambitio* and other vices (2)**

*optumis autem moribus et maxuma concordia egit inter secundum atque postremum bellum Carthaginense...at discordia et avaritia atque ambitio et cetera secundis rebus oriri sueta mala post Carthaginis excidium maxume aucta sunt.*

[Rome] acted by the highest moral standards and with the utmost harmony between the Second Punic War and the final one....But discord, avarice, ambition, and the other vices that usually emerge in prosperous times, increased enormously after the destruction of Carthage.

## **Sallust, *Histories* 1.12M = Gellius, 9.12.15, Augustine, *Civitas Dei* 3.17: The Sallust Theorem and the usual culprits**

Once fear of Carthage had been removed, there was space for the waging of political feuds. Frequent riots, seditions, and finally civil wars broke out. **A few powerful men, to whose influence the majority had acceded, were aiming at domination under the honourable name of the senate or the plebs.** Citizens were not called good or bad according to their services to the republic, since all were equally corrupt; but anyone of outstanding wealth who was powerful in wrongdoing was regarded as a “good citizen” because he defended the status quo.

### **A further reflection from a scholar of our times:**

*Auctoritas*, from *augeo* (increase, augment), political meaning:

- It is a quality **inherent in** and **emanating from** the individual. The *auctor* is the one that approves of someone else's action, it has a moral responsibility and power, rather than a legal one.
- The **Senate** had such *auctoritas*, which granted them the **power to influence** a legislation. According to Cicero (*Laws* 3.28), the people had the *potestas* (the power to legislate), whereas the senate had the *auctoritas* to determine the content of those laws.
- *Auctoritas* is then related to ***fides*, *dignitas*, *gravitas* and *libertas***. *Fides* is inherent to *auctoritas*, because *auctoritas* is sought to establish *fides*. The *auctor* is a guarantor of the trust that should operate at all levels of the republic. *Dignitas* is founded upon *auctoritas*, similarly to *gravitas*.
- Cicero stresses the interdependence of the senate's *auctoritas* and the *libertas* of the Roman people (*Dom.* 130).

‘At the core of the malaise of the late republic [...] is the circumstance that such a system suffers when it is routinized rather than kept vital by the spirit that generated it. It was the self-interest of the senate and its neglect of the largest interest of the *res publica* that gave rise to the Gracchan unrest and undermined the senate's own *auctoritas*: it became an *auctoritas* in form, but not in essence.’

Galinsky, K. 1996. *Augustan Culture. An Interpretive Introduction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), p. 15.

**The End. Thank you!**