Dynamics of Royal Authority: A Comparative Study of Dominance Assertion in the Roman Republic and Roman Empire

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Abstract. This paper conducts a comparative analysis of how kings and consuls exercised dominance over their subjects in the Roman Republic and Roman Empire. By examining the contrasting strategies employed during these distinct time periods, the study sheds light on the evolving dynamics of power and control within the Roman state. Through this research process, the author found out that during the Roman Republic era, the consul mainly used the term senate to assert their dominance over the people, but as it shifted to Roma Empire period, the emperors mainly used propaganda and divine rights to assert the dominance over the people. This research's meaning includes how did consuls or emperors from different time periods of roman history asserted their dominance over the citizens and the change and shift in the methods applied by the consuls during republic and empire time.

Keywords: Royal authority; Dominance assertion; Roman.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background and Significance

Focusing on the Roman Republic and Roman Empire, this paper delves into the strategies utilized by consuls and emperors to assert and maintain their authority over the populace. In the Roman Republic, consuls navigated the delicate balance between upholding the principles of the republic and securing their individual dominance. The study explores their use of legal frameworks, public speeches, and military prowess to project authority and maintain order. Transitioning to the Roman Empire, the paper investigates how emperors harnessed propaganda, imperial cults, and administrative reforms to consolidate their autocratic rule. It delves into the significance of monuments like the Colosseum and the Pantheon in reinforcing the emperor's divine image and control over public sentiment. By juxtaposing these two time periods, the paper highlights the transformation of power dynamics from a shared consulship in the Republic to a centralized imperial authority in the Empire. It examines how the nature of dominance shifted from collective decision-making to personal charisma and imperial propaganda.

This research contributes to a nuanced understanding of the historical evolution of leadership strategies in Rome. By comparing the distinct approaches of the Roman Republic and Roman Empire, the study illuminates the complex interplay between political structures, cultural symbolism, and social dynamics in the assertion of royal authority.

What motivates the author to write this paper is that during his previous learning process, the author heard about the term Roman Republic and Roman Empire, so the author's interested in how did the consuls and emperors asserted their dominance over the people since it's a very big and prosperous empire with humongous territory. Secondly, if the reader get to know the methods utilized by the consuls and emperors, the author want to further compare and contrast the different methods during different time periods, which are the republic period and empire period. The meaning is to help distinguish which method is utilized during which time period, how are they different from each other and what caused the change in the ways that consuls and emperors successfully and efficiently asserted their dominance.

1.2. Literature Review

The Roman Empire was a vast and influential state in ancient times, spanning regions around the Mediterranean in Europe, North Africa, and Western Asia. It was characterized by the rule of emperors and underwent significant historical developments. Rome expanded its rule across the Mediterranean and beyond. The pivotal moment was Octavian's victory at the Battle of Actium in 31 BC, which led to his proclamation as the first Roman emperor, Augustus. The Roman Empire was divided into senatorial and imperial provinces. The first two centuries of the empire, known as the Pax Romana, were marked by stability and prosperity, reaching its territorial zenith under Emperor Trajan. Trouble and decline began in the 2nd century, especially under Emperor Commodus. The 3rd century saw a crisis with breakaway empires, short-lived rulers, and reunification under Aurelian. The Edict of Milan in the 4th century marked the rise of Christianity in the empire. The imperial seat moved from Rome to Byzantium (Constantinople) in 330. The Migration Period, including invasions by Germanic and Hunnic peoples, contributed to the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476. The Roman Empire left a profound and lasting impact on language (Latin to Romance languages), religion (Christianity), art, architecture, literature, philosophy, law (Roman law influencing modern legal systems), and forms of government. Its culture and institutions shaped the development of Western civilization for centuries [1]. The roman empire was roughly divided into six periods, they are the Emperor Diocletian reigned from 284-306 AD, emperor Constantine reigned from 306-337AD, Constantine dynasty from 337-364AD, Valentinian dynasty reigned from 364-379 AD, Theodosian dynasty reigned from 379-457 AD, and the end of dominate from 457-476AD [2]. Augustus, the first Roman emperor, brought stability and prosperity to Rome during his 56-year rule, initiating the famous Pax Romana. He implemented social reforms, achieved military victories, and fostered the growth of Roman culture. However, his dynasty saw a mix of emperors, including Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero, with varying levels of popularity and competence. Nero's extravagance strained the Roman treasury and led to his downfall. The Flavian emperors, starting with Vespasian, aimed to restore order and Senate authority. Titus, known for disaster relief after the eruption of Vesuvius, followed him. Nerva's rule marked the beginning of another golden age. Four emperors, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Aurelius, succeeded peacefully through adoption rather than hereditary succession. Trajan expanded Rome's borders significantly, Hadrian fortified the frontiers and implemented reforms, and Antoninus Pius maintained peace and prosperity. However, Marcus Aurelius faced conflicts, including wars against Parthia and Germanic tribes. Upon his death, he broke tradition by naming his inexperienced son Commodus as his successor [3].

1.3. Research Content and Framework

This paper sheds light on how did the consuls in roman republic time period asserted their dominance over its people and how did the emperors in roman empire time period asserted their dominance over the citizens, then further compare and contrast the ways they utilized and analyze on the reasons why did the ways change throughout different time periods. The paper also gives examples on different consuls and emperors to help people further understand the methods utilized.

2. The Case of Roman Republic

The first period the author would like to talk about is the Roman republic between 509 BC to 27 BC. At that time, the government asserted authority over its citizens through senates. The Senate was an influential body consisting of aristocrats and former magistrates. Its members served as advisors to the consuls and had the power to legislate, debate important issues, and influence policy decisions. The Senate's decisions carried significant weight. By skillfully navigating this institution, consuls were able to maintain control, gain support, and secure their positions of power.

First up, the author would like to introduce the appointment and manipulation of senators. Consuls entrenched their dominance by appointing loyalists and individuals who shared their vision as senators. Consuls controlled who could become senator and originally only men from the patrician

class (meaning the privileged elite) could reach this position. The term senate allowed for the consolidation of authority and the implementation of policies that favored their rule.

3. Analysis on the Problems

The first method the author would like to introduce of how did the consuls during that time asserted dominance over its people is through building patronage network. Consuls strategically established patronage networks to assert authority. They allocated resources, offices, and favors to secure loyalty and support from senators. By rewarding loyalty, consuls ensured a network of allies in the Senate who protected their interests. Senators, acting as patrons, supporting ambitious individuals seeking political influence. This ensured a loyal group of politicians in the government and allowed patrons to influence voting patterns during elections, aligning with the Senate's interests. The Roman Senate was not a homogeneous group; it consisted of various factions and alliances. Patrons provided support, protection, and guidance to their clients, while clients offered loyalty, political support, and service in return. The senate also offered food to communities experiencing famine; distributed land to landless and impoverished citizens, and provided them with employment opportunities. For example, Julius Caesar served as a consul in 59BCE, he is most famous for his patronage network with different people of lower classes. By doing so, those citizens will worship the senate thus support their consuls [4].

The second method is through the control over military power. The military was crucial to Roman Republic power, and consuls knew controlling legions was vital for authority. Demonstrating military prowess and gaining legion loyalty earned rulers respect and fear from the Senate and people. This coercion solidified the consul's control over the Senate and Republic. Consuls strategically allied with military commanders, using the army to assert control. With a formidable force, they enforced their will and quelled opposition from the Senate. Senators knew challenging the consul's military support risked civil unrest or war, thus reinforcing imperial dominance and Senate subservience. Julius Caesar is a prime example of a consul who skillfully used control over the military to assert authority. His military campaigns and conquests earned him the loyalty of the legions, and his soldiers became fiercely devoted to him. This military support played a crucial role in helping Caesar to consolidate power and eventually declare himself dictator for life. One of Caesar’s most famous move in history is his conquest of Gaul (modern-day France) from 58 to 50 BCE, which earned him the adoration of his soldiers, who saw him as a charismatic and brilliant leader. His army's loyalty, combined with his political acumen and popularity among the Roman populace, helped him consolidate his power and influence [5].

The third method the paper want to say is through rituals and ceremonies. Throughout Roman history, various rituals and ceremonies were utilized by the Roman Senate to assert authority over the people. One prominent example is the triumphal procession, an esteemed ritual honoring victorious generals in the ancient Roman Republic. This parade, led by the triumphant military commander, marched through Rome and culminated in sacrifices at the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus. The ceremony's significance extended beyond celebrating the general's achievements; it also showcased the military might of the Roman Republic and portrayed the emperor as successful and powerful, evoking awe and respect among the people. The procession emphasized the consul's role as the supreme leader, symbolically demonstrating their authority and legitimacy. Additionally, it served as a warning to challengers, as witnessing the defeated enemies and the consul's display of power reminded potential rivals of the consequences of opposing imperial authority. Thus, the triumphal procession played a vital role in asserting authority and solidifying supreme prestige. The triumphal procession was a powerful tool used by Roman consuls to assert authority. My example would be Gaius Marius, Marius is best known for his victory in the Jugurthine War (112–105 BCE) against the Numidian king Jugurtha in North Africa. He celebrated a triumph in 104 BCE to honor his successful campaign, during which he paraded through the streets of Rome with the spoils of war and the captured enemy leaders [6].

As for roman empire, the most popular way of kings to assert their dominance over its people is through imperial cult and propaganda [7]. The concept of the emperor as a divine figure was a cornerstone of Roman imperial propaganda. Emperors sought to create an image of themselves as gods or godlike figures to solidify their dominance over the people. This strategy borrowed from the long-standing tradition of deifying deceased emperors, but it was also used while they were still alive. Here I would like to give a couple of examples on roman emperors using these strategies. The first example would be Julius Caesar, even before the formal establishment of the Roman Empire, Julius Caesar utilized propaganda to present himself as a god-like figure. Coins were minted with his likeness and titles like "Divus Julius", which is also known as contemporary divine Julius, implying his divine connection and authority. Secondly, I would like to give the example of the first emperor of Rome, Augustus. He was a master to employ imperial cult in order to assert his dominance. He strategically associated himself with the gods and depicted himself in statues and reliefs in a manner that conveyed a sense of divine blessing. The Ara Pacis Augustae (Altar of Augustan Peace) is an example of such a monument, where he is depicted with his family in a scene that conveys his role as the guardian of peace and prosperity [8].

The projection of military prowess also served as a compelling strategy employed by emperors within the Roman Empire to assert dominance over their populace. The Roman tradition of valuing strength and conquest was leveraged by emperors as a means to demonstrate their leadership, protect the empire, and secure their authority. In the intricate web of power dynamics within the Roman Empire, military might was not only a means of defense and expansion but also a potent symbol of imperial authority. Emperors recognized the psychological impact of showcasing their military capabilities, employing both tangible and symbolic displays to bolster their dominance. My example would be the emperor Trajan. Among the notable examples of emperors who skillfully used military prowess to assert dominance was Trajan [9]. His successful military campaigns, particularly the Dacian Wars, showcased his strategic acumen and bolstered his standing among both the Roman legions and the general populace. Trajan's Column, an intricately carved monument depicting scenes from these campaigns, not only immortalized his military achievements but also emphasized his leadership in the eyes of the public. This demonstrated strength helped to secure the loyalty of the military, a pivotal factor in maintaining his authority. By emphasizing their military achievements, emperors like Trajan not only established themselves as formidable commanders but also solidified their dominance by showcasing their capacity to protect the empire and expand its borders. The aura of military strength lent them an air of invincibility that resonated deeply with the Roman psyche, enhancing their authority over the diverse population they governed [10].

4. Discussion

All the strategies aren’t suitable in today’s society background. In the past, consuls built patronage network to gain people’s support, but nowadays, it would be recognized as bribe, which is illegal for the governors to do. As for the military power, it’s now a peaceful era where wars seldom occur, so governors or presidents now can hardly use military power to assert dominance or solidify their conquer over the people or country. Lastly, with the rapid growth of technology and time, people now are not that superstitious as before, resulting in they seldom believe in the use of rituals or ceremonies, and divine rights as well. In conclusion, all the methods the author introduced above aren’t utilized by the society anymore nowadays because they all have severe flaws. The paper is now going to further explain the reasons for why did people qualified for the senate change from only elite groups to every male citizen. The first reason is the expansion of citizenship, as the Roman Republic expanded its territories, it incorporated diverse communities and peoples into its citizenship. This led to the inclusion of individuals from different backgrounds who may not have belonged to the traditional Roman aristocracy. With the increase in the citizen population, there was a need for a larger pool of senators to represent these new constituents. The second reason is something about the social and economic changes. Over time, the socio-economic landscape of Rome evolved. New

classes of wealthy individuals emerged due to trade, commerce, and economic activities. These individuals sought political influence and recognition, and membership in the Senate became a way to attain higher social status. The third reason goes to political reforms. Various political reforms aimed at broadening participation in the government played a role. For example, the Lex Licinia Sextia in 366 BCE required that at least one of the consuls had to be a plebeian, opening up the consulship to a wider section of society. Similarly, the Lex Ovinia in 318 BCE introduced a minimum property qualification for membership in the Senate, allowing some plebeians to join its ranks. The fourth reason is something called meritocratic principles. As Rome's military and administrative needs expanded, merit began to be valued more highly than strict birthright. Individuals who demonstrated military prowess, administrative competence, or other valuable skills were given opportunities to participate in governance, including the Senate. There are more reasons like Cicero's reform, influence of popular leaders etc.

5. Conclusion

The background of this paper is the course given by professor Fanny from trinity college of Oxford University, so the author became interested in the topic and later decided to do specific and thorough research on the topic, and later decided to publish the paper based on the research and the tutoring given by the professor. The steps and procedure of how the author did all the research and finished the paper are as follows. First of all, the writer chose and picked one topic to write about which is how did consuls/emperors asserted their dominance over its people. Then, the author asked his professor and mentor for suggestion, they suggested the author to write about specific time periods in order to compare ad contrast in the future, so the author focused on the roman republic and roman empire time periods since they are continuous and related to each other. Later the author started to search the internet and read essays and papers based on related topics to gain ideas, lastly the author finished the paper. The result of this research shows that the methods of these two time periods utilized by the consuls or emperors are not exactly the same but somehow related. People who are interested in this topic or in roman history should definitely read this paper in order to learn more about this and to come up with more ideas and research on this topic. The paper itself also has its flaw, which the author thinks is the lack in examples of different methods to make the paper convincing enough, and the author will improve this. In the author's future researching field, the author will also focus on more methods and examples utilized by roman consuls and emperors, and do more research and write more papers on historic topics like that.

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