

# **The Age of Civil War: political crisis and its consequences at the end of the Roman Republic, 60 – 31 BC**

## **Course material 2022/23**

With the victory of Octavian at the Battle of Actium in 31 BC, Rome changed from being a Republic to an autocracy. The thirty years leading up to what constituted a fundamental transformation of the Roman political system are the focus of this course. The period is also exceptional in providing a body of contemporary texts - most obviously the speeches and letters of Cicero - which, together with later narratives, allow for a high-resolution analysis, sometimes on an almost day-by-day basis, which is possible for few if any other periods in antiquity.

Civil war and politics - the rivalries of Cicero and Clodius and of Caesar and Pompey, Caesar's dictatorship and assassination, the regime of the triumvirs - are central to the course, but it is not just about elections, battles and great men. Alongside the political narrative we will be investigating the broader social, economic, religious and cultural changes which characterised Rome in this period, as well as the increasing centrality of the provinces, which in the Civil War years became a literal as well as figurative battleground. Using the evidence of coins, inscriptions and material culture alongside ancient literature, we will explore issues including the impact of these upheavals on religion, the role of women in public life, social mobility in Roman society, the role of the Roman army, and changes in the built environment of Rome itself. How far can these processes appropriately be summed up in Syme's phrase 'the Roman Revolution'?

### **Preliminary reading:**

R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (1939).

J. Osgood, *Caesar's legacy: civil war and the emergence of the Roman Empire* (2006).

C. Steel, *The end of the Roman Republic 146 to 44 BC: conquest and crisis* (2013) esp. ch 6-8

### **This is Part II Paper C2 of the Classics Tripos [[link to Classics Faculty website](#)]**

**For further information please follow the link below.**

### **Part II paper 8: The age of civil war: political crisis and its consequences at the end of the Roman Republic, 60 – 31 BC**

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Linked to....

**History Part II: Advanced Subject – Paper 8**

**Classics Part II: Paper C2 [2022-23]**

**Title of course:**

The Age of Civil War: political crisis and its consequences at the end of the Roman Republic, 60 – 31 BC

**Course director:**

Dr John Patterson (jrp11@cam.ac.uk)

**Course description:**

With the victory of Octavian at the Battle of Actium in 31 BC, Rome changed from being a Republic to an autocracy. The thirty years leading up to what constituted a fundamental transformation of the Roman political system are the focus of this course. The period is also exceptional in providing a body of contemporary texts - most obviously the speeches and letters of Cicero - which, together with later narratives, allow for a high-resolution analysis, sometimes on an almost day-by-day basis, which is possible for few if any other periods in antiquity.

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**Aims and objectives:**

- To introduce students to the narrative of a key period in Roman History, in which Republican government gave way, via triumviral rule, to autocracy.
- To explore the politics of a period in which an exceptional level of detail is provided by the ancient sources, notably the writings of Cicero.
- To investigate the implications for the broader social, economic, religious and cultural history of Rome of a period of military and political upheaval.

- To relate to these developments changes in the physical space of the City of Rome itself.
- To examine the increasing involvement of the provinces in the political struggles at Rome.
- To reconsider the analytical framework of these events offered by modern scholarship.

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### **A possible sequence of lectures and classes:**

1. Rome in 60 BC: the aftermath of Spartacus and Catiline
2. Politics in the 50s: oratory, bribery and violence
3. Politics in the 50s: *optimates*, *populares* and 'Great Men'
4. Politics in the 50s: Cicero and Clodius (class: Cicero *De Domo* & *Pro Milone*)
5. Conquest and its consequences: Caesar in Gaul
6. The exploitation of the provinces: Cicero in Cilicia
7. The eve of civil war
8. Caesar's dictatorship
9. Caesar's opponents
10. Cicero and the Triumvirate (class: Cicero *Philippics*)
11. The Triumvirate under strain
12. Caesar, the Triumvirate and the provinces
13. Numismatic evidence for the late Republic (class on coinage)
14. The City of Rome: aristocratic housing, public building, and provision of spectacles
15. The City of Rome: the urban plebs (migration, housing, organisation, food supply)
16. Religion: traditional religion subverted?
17. Religion: Caesar and the origins of ruler worship
18. The wealth of the Roman elite
19. The proscriptions (class: Appian, *Laudatio Turiae*)
20. Women in public life: from Sempronia to Cleopatra

21. The Roman army
22. Land distributions and their consequences
23. Social mobility and cultural change in the Late Republic & triumviral period
  
24. Conclusion: the 'Fall of the Republic'

### **Supervision arrangements**

Supervision normally in groups of 2 or 3; 5 supervisions normal (so as to be uniform for both historians and classicists taking the same examination paper).

Maximum Supervision Capacity: no cap.

### **Scope and structure of the examination paper 2022-23**

The three-hour paper will contain about fourteen essay questions concerning various topics covered in lectures, classes, and supervisions. Candidates are required to answer three questions, with no restrictions on which three they answer.

### **Specimen exam paper:**

Answer three questions:

1. Either: How important was oratory in Roman politics in the last generation before Actium?  
Or: 'Coinage provides a unique insight into the period between 60 BC and 31 BC.'  
Discuss.
2. In what ways, and with what consequences, was violence used in Roman politics between Caesar's consulship in 59 BC and the outbreak of civil war in 49 BC?
3. How helpful are the terms 'optimates' and 'populares' in our understanding of Roman politics?
4. Why did Caesar cross the Rubicon with an army in 49 BC?
5. Either: 'Caesar's reforms reflected the fact that city of Rome was now a major centre of population in its own right'. Discuss.  
Or: To what extent can the history of public building in the city of Rome help us understand the broader history of the period?
6. How should we explain the assassination of Caesar in 44 BC?
7. 'I successfully championed the liberty of the Republic when it was oppressed by the tyranny of a faction' (Augustus, *Res Gestae*). Discuss.

8. Assess the impact on the provinces of the rule of Caesar and the triumvirs.
9. Assess the impact of either (a) Parthia or (b) Egypt on the history of Rome between 60 and 31 BC.
10. Is it appropriate to see this period in terms of religious decline?
11. 'One consequence of triumviral rule was a breakdown in the social hierarchy'. Discuss.
12. Did the role of women in public life become more significant in this period?
13. 'The history of this period is essentially that of the Roman army'. Discuss.
14. Is the term 'cultural revolution' helpful in terms of understanding this period?

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May 2022