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It Wasn't Built in a Day: Reconsidering the Roman Dictatorship in Livy

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ABSTRACT

During the Roman Republic, a dictator usually acted as a temporary military commander with supreme authority. When the crisis was over, the dictator resigned, as his term was tightly restricted to six-months. The dictatorship was a reliable emergency response for centuries (501-201 BCE). It appeared regularly from the first decade of the Republic through the Second Punic War. Although the job description sounds straightforward, no single fact about the Roman dictatorship is easily definable. Traditional arguments about the dictatorship have focused on famous military dictators and their tactical actions in battle. This has limited our discussion of the dictatorship, which has often led the office to be misunderstood or simplified. The office was not static, but constantly adapted. Dictators served in multiple roles during the Republic, including completing rituals, holding elections, and calming riots. While modern scholars have revealed new nuanced perspectives on the Republic, there has been little update to the conventional understanding of the dictatorship. In order to move away from excessively legalistic interpretations of the Republic, this study examines the sixty-seven dictators that appear in the ancient historian Livy's comprehensive work. By examining detailed descriptions of a variety of dictators, it is possible to reconsider standard notions of the dictatorship. This investigation reveals the Roman dictatorship to be a complex and constantly evolving institution, which reflected the Republic's shift from an exclusive aristocracy towards experimenting with popular sovereignty.

IT WASN'T BUILT IN A DAY:

RECONSIDERING THE ROMAN DICTATORSHIP IN LIVY

by

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I. Introduction

In 392 BCE, rumor overwhelmed the city of Rome. According to Livy, "there was something like panic" in the streets. An embellished tale of an unsuccessful battle swirled throughout the city and terrified the citizens.[1] Romans feared that their Etruscan adversaries were rapidly approaching the city walls. Frightened women "flocked to the temples," frantic to gain divine protection for their homes.[2] Amidst the fearful chaos, Marcus Furious Camillus was appointed dictator. Livy wrote that "courage and hope were renewed," as Camillus's appointment brought instant relief to the city.[3]

The new dictator quickly leapt into action. Camillus worked to restore the army's confidence and to conscript new reinforcements. Romans were ready and willing to enlist in the fight, and even allies were eager to assist Camillus's efforts. He soon led his assembled legions into a "brilliantly successful" engagement.[4] Encouraged by this feat, Camillus turned his attention to the Etruscans' wealthiest city, Veii. He ingeniously organized his men to dig long tunnels under Veii's walls.[5] Finally, the dictator made vows to the gods and led his men into the enemy city. Pouring over the walls and emerging from the tunnel, they attacked from all sides. A "terrible slaughter" ensued and Camillus claimed victory for Rome.[6]

The dictator and his men stripped the city of its vast wealth and brought home immense spoils. Camillus returned to Rome to celebrate a triumph, a city-wide celebration awarded to a

[1] Livy 5. 18.
[2] Livy 5. 18.
[3] Livy 5. 19.
[4] Livy 5. 19.
[5] Livy 5. 19.
[6] Livy 5. 21.

conquering general.[7] Romans of every class filled the streets in unprecedented numbers to honor the dictator. Camillus's triumphal parade was so impressive that he worried it was impious.[8] After a decade of continuous war fought by lesser commanders, "the world's greatest general" defeated Veii in his single campaign.[9]

Although not every Roman dictatorship was as dramatic and glorious, the office played a fascinating role in the development of the Republic. Camillus represents only a piece of the institution's complex history. A dictator was an emergency command position that Livy called "the usual practice in times of crisis."[10] From disparate sources and fragments of evidence, modern scholars have created a basic job description for the office. A typical reference entry defines a dictator as six-month emergency military position, appointed to hold complete and incontestable authority, alongside a *magister equitum* to act as second-in-command. After centuries of consistent appointments (501-201 BCE), it is usually noted that "the post fell into disuse" until Sulla revived the dictatorship in 82 BCE.[11] In a final appearance, Caesar intermittently used the title of dictator from 49 to 44 BCE.[12] These two last dictatorships are usually considered to be entirely separate from the dictators of the earlier Republic.[13] While there are certainly elements of truth in this general discourse, no aspect of the dictatorship can be so simply defined.

Recent scholarship has methodically reconsidered the Roman Republic. Instead of seeing a single, fixed Republic founded in 509 and destroyed in the first century BCE, new work aims

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[7] See Beard, *The Roman Triumph*; Pittenger, *Contested Triumphs.*
[8] Livy 5. 22-23.
[9] Livy 5. 23.
[10] Livy 4. 18.
[11] Gizewski, s.v. "Dictator," Gizewski, *Brill's New Pauly*, 375.
[12] Marcus Antonius formally banned the office after Caesar's death in 44 BCE.
[13] Drogula, *Commanders & Command*, 179; Niebuhr, *The History of Rome, Volume 1*, 498.

to highlight the era's nuances and transformations.[14] The office of the dictator, however, has not been given the same treatment. Over the Republic's 500 years, Rome transitioned from the domination of a guarded aristocracy towards being swayed by popular sovereignty. Yet, the dictatorship is still widely portrayed as a static office, only changed by two power-hungry men, Sulla and Caesar, in the late Republic. Scholars focus on one category of dictators, who usually fit the ideal archetype of Camillus. There is a decided emphasis on dictators' tactics and maneuvers during combat. A one-dimensional view, built only on the actions of famous dictators, does not allow us to track the office's evolution or complexities. This oversimplified interpretation of the dictatorship requires an update. Upon closer examination, the dictatorship was implemented for a variety of reasons and developed alongside the Republic.

Reconsidering the dictatorship, however, is fraught. Records of the early Roman Republic are scarce and riddled with mysteries. In this study, I evaluate our understanding of the dictatorship using the ancient historian Livy's account as a foundation. His writing spans the early and middle Republic and offers the only surviving record of certain events. Livy's comprehensiveness is an asset in exploring the dictatorship. He allows us to examine a variety of less celebrated dictators, the wider context and consequences of dictatorships, and the office's changes throughout the Republic. To challenge the standard narrative of the office, I catalogued every dictatorship that Livy mentioned and took note of the conditions surrounding their appointment and the usage of their office. This work is referred to throughout and included as an appendix.[15]

[14] See historiography discussion in Chapter II, "History and Historiography," especially Flower, *Roman Republics*.
[15] Appendix A.

Using Livy's narrative, I reconsider the origins of the office, the men who were appointed, the powers of a dictator, the circumstances surrounding appointments, the appointment process, ceremonial and religious aspects, the role of the *magister equitum*, and resignations. I find that the Roman dictatorship was decidedly complex and exceptionally flexible. Perhaps beyond any other office, the dictatorship of the early Republic was responsive to changes in the political system. The dictatorship was, as Livy emphasized, a response to an emergency or crisis. Therefore, the office was necessarily adjusted each time it was implemented. Each dictator filled Rome's particular needs at a moment in time. The position was adaptable, and therefore mirrors the Republic's development.

Academic discussions often attempt to explain the Republic in simple legalistic terms, and this restrictive paradigm has also shaped our understanding of the dictatorship. As a result, examinations of the office are often filled with inaccurate generalizations. In an attempt to approach the dictatorship more holistically, I consider the dictators who completed mundane tasks within the city alongside illustrious generals. By expanding rigid definitions of the dictatorship, this investigation will also confront conventional ideas about the supposed nature of Republican politics. Livy allows us to reconsider assumed facts about the dictatorship. As a result, we can reevaluate the institution and its implications for the study of the Roman Republic.

II. History and Historiography

The Roman Republic existed for almost 500 years (509-49 BCE).[16] Generally, dictators are separated between so-called "true Republican dictators" versus the dictatorships of Sulla and Caesar.[17] This periodization creates one era to encompass every dictator from 501 through 201 BCE, a total of sixty-seven (in Livy), and a second category that contains only two: Sulla and Caesar.[18] I find this to be a vast oversimplification, as the dictatorship's use changed significantly before Sulla redefined the office in 82 BCE. The Republic had a considerable variety of dictators, allowing us to track a steady evolution from "true Republican dictators,"[19] to an altered version during the third century BCE's Second Punic War.

Livy's narrative encompassed many periods of political development and innovation. Harriet Flower presented a compelling model of multiple sub-stages of the Republic, which can help us understand the progression of these changes. According to Flower, after Rome's regal era, there were two Pre-Republic periods of "political experimentation," followed by a patrician-centric initial form of the Republic, and finally a more stable system led by a mixed-class nobility that existed until approximately 300 BCE.[20] The difficult Second Punic War emerged in the middle of one more stage, dominated by a further evolution of the nobility. In examining the dictatorship, these segments offer a useful timeline. The dictatorship first appeared in Livy during a chaotic transitional period and persisted throughout significant reforms to the original system. Rome developed from a tight aristocracy towards popular sovereignty. Nonetheless, as

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[16] Flower, "Introduction," 2. These are the traditional dates for the Republic, which are debatable.
[17] Sulla and Caesar will not be considered in the body of this study, see Chapter IV "Conclusion" for brief discussion; Keyes, "The Constitutional Position of the Roman Dictatorship," 298.
[18] See Appendix A.
[19] Keyes, "The Constitutional Position of the Roman Dictatorship," 298-299. Keyes proposed that the dictatorship took a new form during the Second Punic War; Golden, *Crisis Management*, 11-40. Golden also notes the dictatorship's transformations.
[20] Flower, *Roman Republics*, 48-53.

Harris noted, the Republican system is, "not to be confused with democracy."[21] In fact, no modern system of government can properly describe the Republic's complex system.

Rome lacked a written constitution. This allowed for the constant renegotiation of the "calibrated cooperation between Senate, People, and magistrates."[22] Through every stage of the Republic, the balance of power continually shifted. Rome's top magistrates were the two consuls, elected each year. The Senate, which was made up of the older elite, generally functioned as an advisory board to elected officials. At the beginning of the Republic, all political offices were held by wealthy aristocrats, including the dictatorship.[23] Religion was another key government function, also controlled by the elite.[24] Public religion focused on safeguarding the city's future through traditional rituals and ceremonies. To be pious was to respect these ancient customs, and in turn Rome won military success.[25] In the early Republic, the people had little power; they were only able to express opinions through limited and regimented participation in assemblies and elections.[26]

There were ostensibly two classes at the start of the Republic.[27] In basic terms, the patricians were the rich and powerful aristocrats, while the plebeians were the lower class common people. The plebeians' political role—and the dictatorship—began to change significantly during the height of what is called the Struggle of the Orders. Domestic unrest and

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[21] Harris, *Roman Power,* 68.
[22] Eder, "Augustus and the Power of Tradition," 15; Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic,* 15. This is essentially the thesis of Lintott's entire monograph.
[23] Oakley, "The Early Republic," 17; Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic,* 32.
[24] Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic,* 198; North, "Democratic Politics," 17.
[25] Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic,* 38; Harris, *Roman Power,* 49*;* Le Bohec, "Roman Wars and Armies in Livy," 117; Scheid, "Livy and Religion," 82-83; Rüpke, "Communicating with the Gods," 216.
[26] Mouritsen, *Politics in the Roman Republic,* 57; North, "Democratic Politics," 15.
[27] This is a complicated issue, as the actual divisions and differences between these classes are debated. There are no definite answers, but for discussions see Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic,"* 163-164; Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 251-265; Forsythe, "The Beginnings of the Republic from 509 to 390 BC," 317-318.

resulting reform characterized this period, which spanned from 494 to 287 BCE.[28] The ongoing class conflict involved the populace continually pushing for the ruling patricians to pass laws that allowed more plebeian rights and admission to offices. This process incrementally gave more privilege and political access to the lower class, which transformed Rome's aristocracy and its institutions.[29] The tumultuous politics of this conflict produced a new blended nobility.

Another significant moment in the Republic's history came during the third century BCE. In 218-201 BCE, Rome fought the Second Punic War against Carthage. This war operated at an unprecedented scale, challenging Rome's usual military success. Brennan fittingly called the war, "virtually one continuous state of emergency," which naturally led to changes in political practice.[30] Unsurprisingly, dictators were appointed regularly during these seventeen years of conflict. Rome was also experimenting with new forms of power during this time, as well as extensions of command.[31] Additionally, the Senate took a more influential and involved role in the third century BCE, likely in response to the traumatic war.[32] The last dictator (before Sulla) appeared in 201 BCE, the final year of the Second Punic War.[33] By this juncture, the Republic had changed considerably from its foundation. Even still, scholars routinely fail to acknowledge any variation in the dictatorship. Current research generally agrees that the Republic constantly evolved, yet dictators are often excluded from this model of perpetual transformation.

The dictatorship occupies an odd space within Roman historiography. It appears in nearly every piece of writing or record about the Republic, but complex discussions are limited. In part,

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[28] Oakley, "The Early Republic," 17-19.
[29] The extent of these conflicts is debated, see Forsythe, "The Beginnings of the Republic from 509 to 390 BC," 317; Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome*, 237-344; Raaflaub, "Between Myth and History," 141.
[30] Brennan, "Power and Process," 57.
[31] Rich, "Fear, Greed, and Glory," 50-51; Brennan, "Power and Process," 39-40; Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic,* 113.
[32] Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic,* 33.
[33] Livy 30. 39-40.

this is because, as Christian Gizewski in *Brill's New Pauly* aptly defined, the history of the Roman dictatorship is "shrouded in mystery."[34] When scholars present the office in greater detail, they often portray the dictatorship as antithetical to the Republican political system, which otherwise emphasized shared power and restrictions on magistrates.[35] The office is often presented as a deviation from Roman values. This traditional model of the dictatorship comes from Theodor Mommsen's *History of Rome*, his canonical work published in three volumes over 1854-1856 (in the original German). Mommsen stated that a dictator was meant to, "revive temporarily the regal authority," and had disdain for the institution's similarity to kingship.[36] He saw dictators as counter to the Rome's careful divisions of power. In his mind, the Republic's system of checks and balances led to the eventual abandonment of the "all-along unpopular institution" of the dictatorship.[37] Mommsen defined Roman politics in narrowly legalistic terms, frequently focused on class divisions.[38] He often reduced political action to elite ambition or class warfare. This lens is unsurprising, as Mommsen's work came less than a decade after Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto,* written in 1848. Mommsen saw the dictatorship as an oppressive tool of the elite. While he was correct that the office was tied to the aristocracy, his contempt for the dictator's individual power produced a simplistic viewpoint. Mommsen viewed Rome's political history as a linear march away from monarchy, which led him to inaccurately characterize the dictatorship as an anomaly from usual practice.[39]

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[34] Gizewski, "Dictator," 375. For discussion of the institution's history, see Chapter III-a "The Origins of the Institution."
[35] Cohen, "The Origin of the Roman Dictatorship," 303; Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 227; Mommsen, *History of Rome: Volume 1,* 251.
[36] Mommsen, *History of Rome: Volume 1,* 252.
[37] Mommsen, *History of Rome: Volume 3,* 56.
[38] Jehne, "Methods, Models, and Historiography," 33.
[39] Mommsen, *The History of Rome*: *Volume 1,* 252, 296, 335.

Mommsen's interpretation continues to permeate modern study. Any scholar who writes about the dictatorship unavoidably addresses Mommsen and must accept or reject certain specifics of his argument. While the dictatorship is still widely treated as irregular, nuance has been added to Mommsen's depiction of the office. The Roman dictatorship is no longer utterly villainized. Yet, it is still seen as abnormal because it was non-collegial and granted total power. T.J. Cornell called the office a "partial exception" to Rome's balance of power. He wrote that the dictator and his *magister equitum* were a "remarkable set of institutions." Cornell found that the dictator's role as an emergency response with a six-month term "had no parallel…in Italy or anywhere else in the Mediterranean."[40] Similarly, Gregory K. Golden called it a "most unusual Roman magistracy."[41] Just as Mommsen was colored by the politics of his time, newer interpretations often suffer from perpetuating what William Harris called, "Rome's imaginary democracy."[42] In the same vein, John A. North warned that democracy was "explosive terminology" which produces misinterpretations of the Republic.[43] Harris and North were principally reacting to Fergus Millar, who emphasized the democratic role of the people in the Republic.[44] While Rome certainly made strides towards popular sovereignty during the Republic, it was far from any modern conception of a democracy.[45] The dictatorship was not an aberration, but symptomatic of an aristocratic system. While scholars now acknowledge the ambiguous aspects of the office, there has been little redefinition of our understanding of dictators.

Many of the dictatorship's obscurities stem from absent source material. Unfortunately, the early history of Rome is challenging to study. The ancient sources are not only limited in

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[40] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 226-227.
[41] Golden, *Crisis Management,* 11.
[42] Harris, *Roman Power,* 10-11.
[43] North, "Democratic Politics," 15.
[44] Millar, *The Crowd in Rome in the Late Republic.*
[45] Harris, *Roman Power,* 68.

number, but also obscured by missing information and elements of myth.[46] Key records come from the *fasti*, lists of elected officials and public events, that formed a general outline of Roman political history.[47] A few narrative accounts have survived, but are also incomplete. The Greek historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus wrote *Roman Antiquities,* which covered the founding myth through 264 BCE. Unfortunately, we only have his full account through 443 BCE.[48] He wrote at roughly the same time as Livy, covering much of the same material, but with a different aim.[49] Besides the obvious gaps in information, scholars also find that Dionysus's account was clouded by an overt focus on the Greek role in Roman developments.[50] Other notable ancient historians, like Polybius, do not cover the early Republican period, which was a vital time for the development of the Roman dictatorship.[51]

A crucial account of this era comes from Roman historian Livy, who lived between 59 BCE–17 CE. Although only thirty-five of one hundred and forty-two volumes have survived, Livy's *Books from the Foundation of the City* (*Ab urbe condita libri)* offer one of the most comprehensive histories of early Rome.[52] Unlike many historians of the time, he "led a quiet and regular existence," and never served in political office or the army.[53] Livy seems to have spent a considerable amount of his life living and writing in Rome, essentially a career historian. [54] As a

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[46] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 57; Oakley, "The Early Republic, 15-16; Armstrong, *War and Society*, 1-8.
[47] See Appendix B for discussion of *fasti;* Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 13; Armstrong, *War and Society*, 26-27; Livy perhaps preferred *fasti* to other sources, see Syme, "Livy and Augustus," 69.
[48] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome*, 2.
[49] Forsythe, "The Beginnings of the Republic from 509 to 390 BC," 315; Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome*, 2.
[50] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome*, 37; Culham, "Women in the Roman Republic," 140.
[51] At least, the period is not covered in surviving work. For discussion of Polybius, see Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic*, 16-26.
[52] Livy's life is the subject of debate, see Levick, "Historical Context of the *Ab Urbe Condita*," 25; The number of volumes could also be as high as 150, see Bessone, "The Periochae," 435; Briscoe, "Livy," 376. As seen here, even in reference works Livy is cited as the standard for the era.
[53] Syme, "Livy and Augustus," 27. Despite the significance of his work, only the broad strokes of Livy's personal history are known. The limited sources indicate that he was born in Patavium, modern Padua in Italy.
[54] Syme, "Livy and Augustus," 27.

result, Livy's writing provides an extensive body of work, but lacks a grounding in practical experience, especially in military affairs. As P.G. Walsh described, "the wonder is that being neither Senator nor soldier nor avid traveller he got so much right."[55] This investigation of the dictatorship, however, is concerned with political evolutions, not the minutiae of combat. Subsequently, any of Livy's inaccurate portrayals of warfare bear little importance.

Thematically, Livy's primary concern was the decline of Roman morality. Leaning on his study of philosophy, he emphasized emotion and historical characters, and employed a variety of paraphrased speeches, which crafted moral lessons for readers.[56] Like any historian, his writing was undoubtedly influenced by the problems of his day. During Livy's time, the Republic was in almost complete disintegration.[57] In the aftermath of the civil wars that rocked the first century BCE, Livy was seeking to redefine a muddled "Roman national identity."[58] As he wrote, a period of disorder was capped by the rise of the emperor Augustus. Living under the new stability of a nascent imperial system, it is not unthinkable that Livy appreciated, or at least accepted, individual rule. Livy had a controversial (and much debated) association with Augustus, although the nature of their relationship is unclear, and perhaps even fraught.[59] A shared reverence for Republican values meant that Livy and Augustus both idealized early Rome, which was likely their main connection.[60] The problems Livy saw in his own time made him nostalgic

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[55] Walsh, "Livy," 115-142.
[56] Ogilvie, "Introduction," 12; Syme, "Livy and Augustus," 72; Walsh, "Livy," 121, 129.
[57] Levick, "Historical Context of the *Ab Urbe Condita*," 25.
[58] Pittenger, *Contested Triumphs*, 2.
[59] This connection may have allowed him access to more records, but also brings up issues of bias. There are many different discussions, see Ogilvie, "Introduction," 11. Syme, "Livy and Augustus," 64, 66; Le Bohec, "Roman Wars and Armies," 130; Levick, "Historical Context of the *Ab Urbe Condita*," 25-34; Walsh, "Livy," 120; Mineo, "Livy's Political and Moral Values and the Principate," 126-136. Mineo does not cast Livy as a fervent supporter, but "perfectly aware" of Augustus's "political exploitation."
[60] Gaertner "Livy's Camillus," 28; Levick, "Historical Context of the *Ab Urbe Condita*," 34; Pittenger, *Contested Triumphs*, 14-15; Walsh, "Livy," 120; For Augustus's use of the early Republic see Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.3**;** Harris, *Roman Power*, 100; Eder, "Augustus and the Power of Tradition," 15.

for the piety and ethics that he found (or created) in the stories about the early Republic.[61] Heroic leaders like Camillus showed immense restraint and commitment to the state despite their substantial power.

Despite his usefulness, scholars often criticize Livy for inconsistent use of sources. In some cases, he seemed to omit, alter, or perhaps misinterpret information.[62] Livy himself admitted that the events of his first five books (753-386 BCE) are "like objects dimly perceived in the far distance," based on "few written records."[63] He blamed the lack of solid information on a fire during the Gallic Sack of Rome in 386 BCE, which burned many documents.[64] In spite of such limitations, Livy's history is uniquely expansive, simply unmatched by contemporaries.[65] Even though his speeches and stories contain many creative liberties, they are meant to teach a lesson and therefore reveal a set of Roman ideals.[66] Livy's history is not definitive, but his access to records and viewpoint offer invaluable insight into how Romans viewed their political systems and its history, including the dictatorship. Livy's perspective as a Roman gave him value as a cultural resource, which offers a distinct view from Greek historians like Polybius or Dionysius of Halicarnassus.[67] Livy's surviving work included a dictator about every three years, providing an excellent window into the office's role within Rome's greater history.[68] Jaeger fittingly wrote

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[61] Walsh, "Livy," 119.
[62] Syme, "Livy and Augustus," 57; Gaertner, "Livy's Camillus," 43; Drummond, "The Dictator Years," 552; Levene, "Allusions and Intertextuality," 211.
[63] Livy 6. 1.
[64] Livy 6 .1. The same fire is blamed for the loss of many early Roman records, including additional fasti; Badian, "The Early Historians," 2; Armstrong, *War and Society,* 242-244. Armstrong used Plutarch to argue that better records post-Gallic sack are actually because of improved bureaucracy, not a fire.
[65] Walsh, "Livy," 129.
[66] Pittenger, *Contested Triumphs,* 20.
[67] It is also important to acknowledge the inherent difficulties of working with a translated text. This study works with an English translation of Livy's original Latin work. There is certainly debate within the field about appropriate translation of various passages or phrases. Consideration of semantics is not absent in this study, as the scholarly work I reference frequently examines the original Latin. When necessary, I implement Latin words or phrases, especially for key terminology. Additional explanation of these terms is provided in the footnotes when appropriate.
[68] See Appendix A. We have dictators in Livy from 501-302 BCE (199 years) plus 217-201 BCE (sixteen years), meaning sixty-seven dictators over 215 years, which averages to a dictator about every 3.2 years. Golden (*Crisis*

that Livy "creates and maintains a sense of crisis."[69] This attention to catastrophe lends itself to a study of an emergency position. In short, Livy's retrospective narrative of the dictatorship is suited to the task of examining important evolutions in the politics of the Roman Republic.

Management, 25) found a similar statistic, even though his study of the dictatorship is not centered on Livy, and at times omits certain categories of dictator.

[69] Jaeger, *Livy's Written Rome,* 8.

III. Livy's Dictators

In order to illuminate the dictatorship's role within the Republic, this study examines the peculiarities and debates surrounding the various facets of the position. This chapter deals with eight aspects of the dictatorship. Each section aims to reconsider canonical notions of the dictatorship with a close reading of Livy's history. By investigating the specifics of how and why the dictatorship was implemented, we can better understand the office's complexity, highlight openings for further research, and reveal features of the Republican system that are often overlooked.

a. The Origins of The Institution

Modern historians do not know the precise origin of the dictatorship.[70] It appears that many ancient historians were likewise in the dark. Livy's first dictator took office in 501 BCE, less than a decade after the fall of Rome's monarchy.[71] Although he recounted the story of this dictatorship, Livy admitted that the exact name and identity were disputed even among early historians.[72] The question of the dictatorship's early history is still unsolved. Mommsen definitively classified the office as a Republican creation, which set the standard for contemporary scholars.[73] Mommsen's work emphasized a "doubtless" link between dictatorial and consular powers, which suggested the offices were created concurrently at the start of the Republic (traditionally 509 BCE).[74] This viewpoint has undoubtedly colored subsequent discussions. Even so, newer research indicates that the dictatorship may predate the Republic. There are even indications of this in Livy, although he probably had little to no knowledge of

[70] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome*, 227-228.
[71] Livy 2. 18.
[72] Livy 2. 18; Ridley, "The Origin of the Roman Dictatorship," 303-304.
[73] Mommsen, *History of Rome: Volume 1*, 252.
[74] Mommsen, *History of Rome: Volume 1*, 252; Ridley, "The Origin of the Roman Dictatorship," 304. Ridley provides a discussion of Mommsen's influence on the arguments; see also de Wilde, "The Dictator's Trust," 560.

pre-Republican dictators (who came before both consuls and the *fasti)*.[75] In current scholarship, a variety of theories have emerged to explain the dictatorship's true origins. This debate is emblematic of issues in the discourse surrounding the dictatorship, and the Republic more broadly. Mommsen and his contemporaries offered valuable contributions to the field, but often resorted to simplified accounts that relied on Roman exceptionalism. The conversation surrounding the origins of the dictatorship demonstrates the value in questioning canonical explanations of the Republic.

Mommsen's view was built on the assumption that after the expulsion of the last king, Rome quickly replaced the monarchy with two annually-elected consuls.[76] Mommsen reasoned that the two consuls represented the division of the king's power (*imperium*) into two officials.[77] Consuls, however, were not kings. Consuls were not only restricted by yearly terms, but each also by their colleague.[78] Livy stressed that "positions of political eminence could not be limited in the scope of their jurisdiction, but they could be limited in duration," which is reflected in both the annual consulship and the six-month dictatorship.[79] Romans felt a theoretical safety in term limits, which helps to explain how the dictatorship could have existed in the aftermath of a fallen monarchy. Following Mommsen's logic, the *imperium* of a dictator was akin to a king, but this was permissible because his tenure was tightly restricted.[80] There is a substantial flaw in this

[75] Livy (6. 1) himself admitted his records for the regal period and early Republic are unreliable at best; Ridley, "The Origin of the Roman Dictatorship," 303; Livy's first dictator, in 501 BCE, was perhaps the first that appeared in his source material.
[76] Livy 1. 60. Livy does not acknowledge a transitional period.
[77] Mommsen, *History of Rome: Volume 1*, 246; Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic,* 95; North, "The Constitution of the Roman Republic*,"* 264; For opposition, see Drogula, *Commanders & Command*, 13.
[78] Brennan, "Power and Process," 37.
[79] Livy 4. 24; See also Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 226.
[80] Mommsen, *History of Rome*, 252; For more on term length, see Chapter III-h "Leaving Office."

logic. While Romans may have accepted the dictatorship at the start of the Republic, it seems highly dubious that a new form of individual rule was created in this era.

Following the traditional timeline, the Republic was born out of anti-regal insurrection. By most accounts, the Republic began after an aristocratic coup in 509 BCE.[81] In Livy, the Roman kings are largely depicted as oppressive. His history presented an ongoing disdain for royalty, with declarations like, "the poorest in Rome hated the very name of 'king' as bitterly as did the great."[82] It is additionally important to note that the Republic would have been established in the wake of the last king, Tarquinius Superbus. Tarquin was notorious for his exceptionally domineering regime.[83] If this is true, the Roman Republic was born in a time that deeply distrusted monarchical government. The dictatorship was a position which trusted a supreme individual ruler. It seems unlikely that an institution of this sort would not have been introduced directly after ousting an oppressive leader.[84] Consequently, it seems probable that the office, or some version of it, was in use before the overthrow.

Alternatively, the idea of a dramatic coup in 509 BCE may be misguided. While we have acknowledged that the Republic was perpetually shifting, it is necessary to consider that the regal era was just as dynamic. Modern scholars find that the Republic emerged more incrementally, with several stages between absolute monarchy and the first consuls.[85] Somewhere in this

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[81] Livy 1. 60. Livy states that the kingship lasted for 244 years from the founding, which would be 753-509 BCE; This date is confirmed in Flower, *The Roman Republic,* 365; Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 215; Rosenstein, *"*Republican Rome," 193; For further discussion of chronology for regal period see Mastrocinque, "Tarquin the Superb," 307-308.
[82] Livy also described more moderate or well-liked kings, see Livy 2. 9.
[83] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 120-121; Livy 1. 49.
[84] Cohen, "The Origin of the Roman Dictatorship," 318. Cohen argued that despite the dictator's similarity to a king, the dictatorship had religious connections that allowed it to continue from monarchy to Republic.
[85] Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic,* 31; Drogula, *Commanders & Command,* 18, 20; Flower, "Introduction," 14-15; Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 227-239. Cornell debated the issue but did not necessarily pick a side.

process, the dictatorship may have been created to bridge the gap between king and consuls.[86] The titles of *praetor maximus* and *magister populi* come from the regal era and may suggest dictator prototypes.[87] *Magister populi,* which can be translated as "master of the citizen army," (hence military commander) is also used to refer the dictatorship.[88] Before the Republic, a *magister populi* may have been appointed for life, meaning the dictatorship may be a modified version of this office.[89] It has also been postulated that a *praetor maximus* was an "annual official appointed by the king," who eventually took over.[90] The most compelling case for the dictator's development from *praetor maximus* appears in Livy. He wrote about a pre-Republic religious ritual, to be completed by a "chief magistrate," or *praetor maximus.*[91] This ceremonial duty was carried out by dictators during the Republic, perhaps linking the two positions.[92] If nothing else, Livy indicated a lineage between dictators and the old position of *praetor maximus.* Even if the *praetor maximus* and *magister populi* were not direct antecedents of the dictator, it is reasonable that the office evolved from one (or both) of these models. Basically, there may have been a transitional stage between kings and consuls, in which some early prototype of the dictatorship ruled over Rome.[93] From this practice, the dictator and his *magister equitum* may have served as a model for the collegiate consuls.[94]

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[86] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 227-228; supported by evidence of Latin influence, see Ridley, "The Origin of the Roman Dictatorship," 304; Keyes, "The Constitutional Position of the Roman Dictatorship," 303; Brennan, *The Praetorship in The Roman Republic,* 261.
[87] I necessarily only scratch the surface of these debates, for which Latinists have produced many compelling arguments, Cornell offers a thorough exploration of both terms, see Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 139-140, 220-237.
[88] Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic,* 110. Livy uses derivatives of dictator while other ancient sources use *magister populi*; Mommsen, *History of Rome: Volume 1,* 252.
[89] The term *magister populi* is a complex topic, for which there is not space to explicate fully here, see Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 139-140.
[90] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 227-228.
[91] Livy 7. 3. This odd law is discussed in longer form in Chapter III-d "Circumstances for Appointments."
[92] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 139-140, 237. It may also have originally referred to a different position from the regal era; Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic,* 110.
[93] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 227-228; Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic,* 22.
[94] Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic,* 22.

This interpretation also requires a more measured view of the kings. If Rome's kings were universally hated (as Mommsen told us), the dictatorship would not have been a favorable option. While later kings certainly seem ruthless, some early monarchs appear to have been well-regarded leaders.[95] Despite many statements against monarchy, Livy also credited the stability of the strong kingship for allowing Rome to become "a politically adult nation."[96] Without the guidance of a strong leader, he felt Rome would have succumbed to the "stormy sea of democratic politics."[97] In this way, the dictatorship may have been a natural evolution of Rome's leadership. The shared power of consuls, not the dictatorship, was a drastically new form of rule. Even amid the chaos of a new system, Rome may have used the familiar solitary power of a dictatorship as backup plan. So, perhaps Romans were not hatefully afraid of kings, but simply experimenting with new systems of governance

Current research also suggests that the dictatorship was not an entirely Roman creation. Cornell found that Rome's temporary dictatorship appears to be unique, but annual dictators were used in nearby communities.[98] Unlike in Rome, it seems that other Latin dictators were a normal function of government, not an emergency protocol.[99] Livy's text may confirm this influence from Latin and Greek political practices. Livy specifically mentioned an Alban dictator being used after their king's death in 760 BCE.[100] Ridley argued that Livy actually meant to

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[95] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 121, 149.
[96] Livy 2. 1.
[97] Livy 2. 1. Specifically, Livy used democracy in negative context, to say that without kingship Rome would have been destroyed by a sort of mob rule à la Athenian democracy.
[98] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 145-146, 227- 233.
[99] Cohen, "The Origin of the Roman Dictatorship," 300; Keyes, "The Constitutional Position of the Roman Dictatorship," 304.
[100] Livy 1. 23. Although, *"dictator"* in this context can also be translated as "supreme commander," which comes with its own set of implications; Livy 5. 19-23. There are also traces of Greek influence in Livy's writing, like the Battle of Veii, which seems to mirror the story of the Trojan War, see Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 312.

imply that the Roman dictatorship was taken from a Latin model.[101] Regardless, substituting a king for a dictator likely had precedent in the Latin world. It is difficult to argue that Rome was not influenced by nearby political practices. Undeniably, Rome borrowed and modified other state's political institutions and symbology, even in its the earliest days.[102] Consequently, the Roman dictatorship could have been conceived much before the existence of Republic.

By reconsidering the dictatorship's origins, we also challenge many canonical ideas about the Republic's creation. Dating the dictatorship to a messy period of political formation, or even prior, is a move away from Roman exceptionalism. Mommsen and early writers tended to think of Roman politics as self-contained, an argument which failed to address outside influences.[103] Ignoring external inspiration allows writers to perpetuate Rome's supremacy over neighboring states, despite evidence to the contrary. The Republic and its institutions were not created in a vacuum. The dictatorship seems to have a long history, perhaps even older than the Republic. Mommsen confined the dictatorship (and the Republic) to an event, rather than a process. While tidy, this logic generalizes a complicated period of development and limits our understanding of the Roman Republic. The traditional view tends to isolate the dictatorship from Rome's normal political evolution, which misses the fundamental fact that Rome did not suddenly become a democratic state after banishing the kings. The Romans also did not instantaneously create a fully-formed Republic, nor a refined dictatorship. By viewing the dictatorship as emergent,

[101] Ridley, "The Origin of the Roman Dictatorship," 308; Livy 2. 18. Livy may have been unaware of earlier dictators, but his narrative still offers indications of pre-Republican dictators. He wrote that the first dictator "alarmed" Rome's enemies. This indicates the Roman dictator already had a regional reputation, perhaps suggesting a pre-Republican origin.
[102] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 230-232; Flower, "Introduction," 7-8; North, "Democratic Politics," 13;
[103] For discussion of influences see Ridley, "The Origin of the Roman Dictatorship," 304; Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 227; Keyes, "The Constitutional Position of the Roman Dictatorship," 303; Livy also habitually fell into the same trap, see Jaeger, *Livy's Written Rome,* 6.

rather than exceptional, we can additionally reconsider conventional simplifications of the Republic.

b. The Men Who Became Dictator

The appointment of a dictator entrusted an individual with considerable power. The office's resemblance to kingship often leads it to be miscategorized as antithetical to Republican values. Mommsen, for example, portrayed the dictatorship as, "the palladium of the conservative party."[104] In the tradition of Mommsen, Drogula described the office as oppressively conservative, calling it "the equivalent of a declaration of martial law."[105] This severe depiction of the dictatorship may stem from misunderstanding the Republic as a democracy. Especially in the early Republic, Rome was closely controlled by a small cluster of elite. Dictators (and all politicians) were from this set of privileged patricians.[106] Even when power was technically shared between magistrates, authority remained in the same set of hands. In Livy's account, the dictatorship was the standard emergency response.[107] Much closer to Livy, Cornell referred to the office as a "partial exception" from normal distributions of power.[108] Contrary to many discussions, a temporary switch to individual power was not actually a risk or shift in the power structure.

Upon closer examination, the dictatorship was not a deviation from the ordinary course of Roman politics. The concept of *fides,* or trust, was essential to the general function of the Republic.[109] The ruling class trusted one another to act in the best interest of the state. The

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[104] Mommsen, *History of Rome: Volume 2*, 284.
[105] Drogula, *Commanders & Command,* 338.
[106] Oakley, "The Early Republic," 17; Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic,* 32.
[107] Livy 4. 18. "The usual practice in times of crisis."
[108] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 227.
[109] Trust is not a perfect translation, as *fides* also included unspoken expectations for behavior; de Wilde, "The Dictator's Trust," 557; Le Bohec, "Roman Wars and Armies," 118, 132.

expectations that accompanied this trust were especially important for the informal regulation of individuals who held power. Political offices rotated frequently, recycling what Pittenger called a set of "functionally interchangeable" elite men.[110] A typical career politician held a variety of offices. There are countless examples in Livy. He mentioned men such as Gaius Junius Bubulcus, who held office as consul, censor, and twice as dictator.[111] Even still, the nomination of a dictator was not taken lightly.

The dictatorship was a particularly revered appointment. Perhaps even more exclusive than the consulship, it was reserved for established politicians.[112] Livy told us that dictators were frequently former consuls, especially in later years.[113] He did not always specify that a dictator had previously been consul, perhaps because his audience would have found this information redundant.[114] Dictators had all served in some significant capacity, sometimes adjacent to the dictatorship as a previous *magister equitum*.[115] Particularly in the guarded aristocracy of the early Republic, dictators regularly took the office multiple times, and their sons often followed in their footsteps. In a prominent example, Camillus was made dictator five times, and his son later served twice.[116] Consistently, the office was held by seasoned politicians. Livy repeatedly indicated that dictators were respected and renowned. He often lauded appointees; he called one

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[110] Pittenger, *Contested Triumphs,* 297.
[111] Livy 10. 1-2.
[112] de Wilde, "The Dictator's Trust," 558; This protection was possible in part because dictators were not elected but appointed by consul. The actual fairness of elections is very questionable, but selecting dictators in this time had no illusion of popular choice.
[113] Livy 2. 18. Livy may indicate that dictators had to be former consuls, he stated that dictators had to be "of consular rank." This may simply mean that a man was required to have the same status as a consul, as it is especially unlikely in the early republic that the pool of former consuls was large enough to appoint many different dictators; Other former consuls appear in Livy 7 .38, 9. 29, 10. 1; In two cases, a current consul was made dictator: Livy 8. 12, 28. 10; also, potentially the first dictator, although Livy is unsure even of his name: Livy 2.18.
[114] Livy specifically mentioned six former (and one current) consuls at the time of appointment, see previous. Although, many others can be seen serving as consul before or after their dictatorships despite no acknowledgement.
[115] Examples appear in Livy 4. 26, 6. 28, 29. 10.
[116] Marcus Furius Camillus: Livy 5. 19-23, 5. 46-55, 6. 2-4, 6. 38, 6. 42; Lucius Furius Camillus: Livy 7. 24-25, 7. 28; de Wilde, "The Dictator's Trust," 559. de Wilde also noted Camillus's many dictatorships, but questions if all five are real.

a "true prophet," another was, "by the far the most distinguished soldier at the time," and another still was "regarded as foremost in military matters."[117] The men who served as dictator were not mysterious figures. Any man with high enough standing to reach the dictatorship was already vetted within the political community, either by blood or career (often both). While relatively uncommon, the dictatorship was an attainable goal in a powerful Roman's political career.

Accordingly, naming a dictator was not quite a leap of faith, at least during the early Republic. The early ruling class was an especially tight group, which made (temporary) individual power a safe option. The entire political community was small and homogenous; most offices were seemingly held by a few established wealthy families.[118] Consuls sometimes appointed political allies to the dictatorship, or even a family member.[119] The aristocracy was also relatively unified in the early Republic, both politically and socially.[120] The dictatorship's solitary power underlined this unity, providing a strong illustration of *fides*.[121] Appointing a dictator was also a means to manage substandard politicians. Admission into politics was predicated on heredity, not skill.[122] Thus, a dictatorship allowed the aristocracy to reinstate a proven politician when an incompetent consul was in office. The nomination of a dictator was a useful option in this climate; the elite were able to appoint a trusted man from within their ranks, easily streamlining the governmental response to emergency.

Nonetheless, there were a few exceptions. I found Livy to mention only three plebeian dictators, and all met considerable resistance from the aristocratic establishment.[123] In 357 BCE,

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[117] Livy 4. 46, 8. 29, 9. 38.
[118] Harris, *Roman Power,* 68; See above regarding Camillus and his son, also refer to Appendix A, a brief glance through the list of dictators reveals many shared family names.
[119] Livy 4. 26. A consul appointed his father-in-law.
[120] Armstrong, *War and Society*, 186; Mouritsen, *Politics in the Roman Republic,* 32, 166.
[121] Mouritsen, *Politics in the Roman Republic,* 32.
[122] Harris, *Roman Power,* 68; Flower, *Roman Republics,* 48-49.
[123] Livy 7. 17, 8. 12, 8. 23.

Livy described Rome's first plebeian dictator, who was slowed down substantially by patrician hostility.[124] One plebeian dictator was appointed during his own consulship. An odd situation, but also an illustration of how difficult it was for a plebeian to ascend to the dictatorship.[125] These exclusionary norms were not limited to the dictatorship, by any means. All other political positions were also notably aristocratic until the Struggle of the Orders.[126]

After the class reformations in the fourth century BCE, a new nobility was formed, distinct from the early Republic's strictly hereditary elite. In this system, individual power was not as straightforward. The *nobilitas* included many wealthy plebeians.[127] The new nobility was less homogenous, larger, and somewhat less harmonious.[128] Positions were open to a greater number of Roman men, increasing competition. While there were still advantages for established families within the *nobilitas,* the highest offices were no longer inherited.[129] Instead of relying on family legacy, competition ensured that Rome had quality magistrates. The Republic was still not a democracy but was nonetheless becoming more inclusive. Trust was a less significant factor, because officials needed to prove themselves in order to be elected. Livy's last dictator appeared in 201 BCE.[130] By this time, the new ruling class was firmly established.

Mommsen believed that the dictatorship was abandoned after the third century BCE because Romans loathed it,[131] but this is unlikely. The dictatorship was probably not rejected, but may have ceased to be a practical option. Rome was no longer controlled by a tight circle of elite families. The pool of potential nominees was much larger and political interests were more

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[124] Livy 7. 17.
[125] Livy 8. 12.
[126] The exception being plebeian tribunes, but this was not a particularly powerful office.
[127] Mouritsen, *Politics in the Roman Republic,* 95.
[128] Flower, *Roman Republics,* 24-25.
[129] Raaflaub, "Between Myth and History," 140-141.
[130] Livy 30. 39-40.
[131] Mommsen, *History of Rome: Volume 3*, 56.

varied. Appointing an individual commander was much more efficient and reliable within the previous cohesive ruling class. Selecting a dictator in the new nobility would have been much more complicated, and potentially controversial, as Rome was no longer controlled by a small community of aristocrats. Understandably, individual power was probably far less attractive.

Whereas some define the dictatorship's abandonment as a bold rejection of aristocracy, it was truly just a natural political evolution. In the early Republic's protected political ecosystem, individuals from the small political community could be routinely trusted with supreme power.[132] Livy illustrated that the dictatorship did not represent a deviation from the early aristocracy's power structure. After the *nobilitas* emerged, the political system was much more discordant. As a result, the politics of appointing a dictator were less clear cut. The dictatorship was not uniquely undemocratic or repressive, but rather reflected the deeply aristocratic and impenetrable political system of the early Republic. Furthermore, individual power did not represent a substantial change, as the patrician men who served as dictator were already "entrenched"[133] in the system.

c. Power and *Imperium*

Dictators held *imperium*, a highly debated concept. In the simplest of reference definitions, *imperium* was the "general military power of command."[134] This legal power of command was invested in Rome's highest offices, including the consuls, praetors, and the dictator. Military authority was implicit to *imperium*, but its other dimensions were more complex.[135] The precise nature of *imperium* is an immense topic, which has received extensive

[132] Mouritsen, *Politics in the Roman Republic*, 32.
[133] North, "Democratic Politics," 20.
[134] de Libero, "Imperium."
[135] de Libero, "Imperium."

scholarly discussion.[136] In particular, the dictator's *imperium* is incredibly unclear. Due to scarce information, scholars generally define the dictator's *imperium* via comparison to that of the consulship. This proves to be the most discussed area of the dictatorship; scholars have debated a dictator's *imperium* and his relationship to the consuls ad nauseum.[137] The inconsistences in discussions of *imperium* are probably not due to faulty information or interpretations, but because *imperium* was not a static concept.[138] Even if we could pin down the specifics of a dictator's *imperium,* it would only represent a specific moment in time. *Imperium* gave power to Rome's top political figures, meaning it needed to change alongside the political system. Livy described enactments of *imperium,* which allows us to consider the practical implications of the dictator's powers. A strict legalistic definition is not necessary, as Livy demonstrates that a dictator's effective power was ultimately supreme.

Scholars have created numerous arguments surrounding the dictator's *imperium*. There is particular controversy over Livy's use of the term *maius imperium,* or greater *imperium.*[139] Multiple scholars have taken Livy's usage of *maius imperium* to indicate that early dictators had a unique, uppermost grade of *imperium*.[140] By this logic, early dictators actually had a higher level of *imperium* than both consuls and third century BCE dictators.[141] Alternatively, Brennan argued that Livy's claims of greater *imperium* are a misunderstanding.[142] Brennan maintained that a dictator and the consuls had equal *imperium*. He suggested that a dictatorship may even

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[136] For a historiography of the term, see Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic,* 1-33. Brennan's introduction discussed the term's implications and place within the discourse; also see Armstrong, *War and Society,* 168-170.
[137] See Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic,* 22-45; Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic,* 18; Keyes, "The Constitutional Position of the Roman Dictatorship," 298- 305; Bonner, "Emergency Government," 145. Countless other discussions exist, but these examine many of the key issues.
[138] Brennan, "Power and Process," 35.
[139] Livy 4. 41.
[140] Kaplan, "Religious Dictators," 173; Cohen, "The Origin of the Roman Dictatorship," 308, 318.
[141] Keyes, "The Constitutional Position of the Roman Dictatorship," 298-299.
[142] Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic,* 39-40.

have suspended consular power, but both offices represented the equivalent levels of *imperium*.[143] Many scholars have reasoned that Livy (and other ancient historians) based the legal abilities of early dictators on Sulla and Caesar, as these later dictators may have indeed claimed higher *imperium*.[144] Investigations of the dictator's *imperium* are confused, contradictory, and based on incomplete evidence. No official classification of a dictator's *imperium* has survived, if one ever existed at all. Instead of searching Livy's narrative for allusions to an unknowable legal code, it is far more useful to observe the actual ramifications of the dictator's power.

A speech in Livy from 325 BCE plainly stated, "the power of a dictator is supreme and the consuls obey him, although theirs is the authority of kings, as do the praetors."[145] Clearly, Livy believed that a dictator outranked a consul.[146] Livy also mentioned at least two instances in which a current consul was made dictator.[147] This would have been entirely redundant if a consul and a dictator were essentially equal, and even a hinderance if a dictator held lesser power. In 203 BCE, Livy recounted a dictator who ordered a consul to return to Italy, "on the strength of his superior command."[148] It bears relevance that magistrates rarely "used *imperium* to check *imperium,*" as challenging someone of comparable rank was dishonorable.[149] Nonetheless, when

[143] Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic,* 39-40. Brennan reasoned that the full imperium of the king was passed to the consuls, thus it would be strange for a dictator to possess some new level of power.
[144] Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic,* 39-42; Keyes, "The Constitutional Position of the Roman Dictatorship," 303; Ridley, "The Origin of the Roman Dictatorship," 303; Gaertner, "Livy's Camillus," 32. Gaertner suggested parallels between Sulla and Livy's portrayal of Camillus.
[145] Livy 8. 32.
[146] For argument against see Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic,* 40; for "maius" in Livy, see Livy 8. 31.
[147] Livy 8. 12, 28. 10.
[148] Livy 30. 24.
[149] Brennan, "Power and Process," 42, 56.

necessary, a dictator could command the consuls. Livy's account indicated that, if nothing else, a dictator functionally outranked a consul.

Imperium also came with concrete trappings of power, which underscore the dictator's privileged position atop Rome's power structure. Magistrates with *imperium* were accompanied in public by lictors, who were guards that carried *fasces* ("bundles of rods with the executioner's axe").[150] Along with purple robes, lictors were recycled royal symbols that signified a king's full *imperium*.[151] Kings, and eventually consuls, had twelve lictors.[152] Dictators had either twelve or twenty-four lictors. The amount may have varied overtime, which reflects that the dictator's *imperium* perhaps fluctuated.[153] The dictator's lictors were his alone, unlike consuls, who shared the guards in turns.[154] The *fasces* were also decidedly symbolic, representing a magistrate's power to kill or use force against a citizen.[155] Within the city, a consul's *fasces* did not include the axe.[156] Distinguishing consular and regal *imperium*, this signified the people's right to appeal the judgement of a consul.[157] Significantly, Livy wrote that a dictator's *fasces* kept the executioner's axe in the city, which may signify that dictators were not subject to appeal.[158]

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[150] Gizewski, "Lictor"*;* see Livy 2. 29.
[151] Mommsen, *History of Rome: Volume 1*, 246; Brennan, "Power and Process," 37-39. *Imperium* was also expanded to more magistrates, especially praetors, as Rome grew; for symbols of imperium from the regal period, see Mommsen, *History of Rome: Volume 1,* 63. According to Mommsen, both originally symbolized the king's power to "exercise discipline and jurisdiction,"; Flower, "Spectacle and Political Culture." 324-325.
[152] Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic,* 42.
[153] Ancient sources do not agree, see Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic,* 42-43; Many scholars (especially in older works) list twenty-four, see Cohen, "The Origin of the Roman Dictatorship," 327; Niebuhr, *The History of Rome, Volume 1*, 24, 553-554; North, "The Constitution of the Roman Republic*,"* 264.
[154] In the early Republic, *fasces* were switched monthly, but daily exchanges were seen during the Second Punic War, see Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic*, 100; Livy 2. 1.
[155] Armstrong, *War and Society*, 94-95, 167. As Armstrong described, violence towards fellow Romans had limitations in the city, but *imperium* likely granted a commander the explicit "power of life or death over his soldiers"*;* Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic,* 96-97; Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 165-166. Cornell described how this symbology may have been borrowed from Etruscan tradition.
[156] This was not initially the case, but a very early consul passed a measure that removed the axe within the city, see Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 196.
[157] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 226; Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic,* 41.
[158] Livy 2. 18. This was the first dictator, however, so it difficult to speculate about later practices; Bonner, "Emergency Government," 146.

Additionally, when a dictator was in office, the consuls' lictors may have carried "dummy rods," suggesting consular power was inactive and subservient.[159] This alternative set of *fasces* may have been visibly different from those of the dictator, although the evidence surrounding dummy rods is uncertain.[160] Lictors were a tangible representation of *imperium*, so the use of dummy rods for the consuls would seem to suggest the dictator's supremacy. Therefore, both the dictator's actions and his symbology indicated that the office consistently overpowered the consulship.

Importantly, any actual definition of *imperium* is temporally-bound, as the nature of *imperium* was not fixed.[161] Although this does not allow a precise taxonomy of a dictator's power, it makes sense in the context of the Republic's perpetual changes. Power was constantly redistributed and reorganized as Rome developed.[162] In the early Republic, consuls may have lost their *imperium* during a dictator's term, which is reflected in Livy.[163] He wrote that in 339 BCE, the Senate "wished to terminate the consul's authority and ordered the appointment of a dictator," which implies that a dictatorship nullified consular *imperium*.[164] During later years, especially during the Second Punic War, it has been proposed that consuls may have remained in power alongside a dictator.[165] Rome had numerous armies fighting on multiple fronts, so this would have been a sensible shift. In Livy, there is no mention of this change, although there were

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[159] Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic,* 42.
[160] Nice, "'Dummy Rods'?" 22-28. Nice ultimately argued against the existence of dummy rods, but also outlined possible archeological depictions of alternative *fasces*.
[161] Armstrong, *War and Society,* 166-169; Brennan, "Power and Process," 35, 40; Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic,* 4-14*;* Keyes, "The Constitutional Position of the Roman Dictatorship," 299.
[162] Brennan, "Power and Process," 37-40. Brennan's entire chapter additionally illustrated this; Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic,* 38; Eder, "Augustus and the Power of Tradition," 15.
[163] Livy 22. 11. Approaching a dictator without lictors would seem to indicate this; for dummy rods, see Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic,* 42.
[164] Livy 8. 12.
[165] Keyes, "The Constitutional Position of the Roman Dictatorship," 299, 304.

many strange uses of command power during the war.[166] Nonetheless, Livy's account of the Second Punic War demonstrated dictators who held the top position.[167] Livy wrote that in the field, a consul had to "present himself to the dictator without his lictors" in 217 BCE.[168] While this does reveal any overt change in consular or dictatorial *imperium,* it may contradict the notion that dictators held lesser power by this time.[169] Although the dictator's *imperium* probably evolved overtime, Livy showed that the office still held substantial command power through the third century BCE.

All things considered, any variations in the dictator's *imperium* are hardly a revelation. If we consider that a dictator's superiority may have been functional rather than legal, any codified difference scarcely reflects any meaningful change. Additionally, dictatorial appointments were for a specific task. It is not a leap to assume that the dictator's *imperium* varied case to case, alongside changing informal expectations on the office. Even if a dictator did not technically have more power than a consul, Livy presented dictators who unfailingly acted as the top commander. Much of the scholarship tries to force the Republic into dogmatic legalistic terms, even though the constitution was highly adaptable. Due to its reactive nature, the dictatorship would have been especially subject to reinterpretation (or even experimentation).[170] Livy illustrated that dictators had considerable *imperium* and in practice outranked other magistrates.

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[166] See the particularly unique case in which, "the Senate decreed that all who had held the office of dictator, consul, or censor should be invested with full military authority until the enemy withdrew...many such outbreaks occurred and were successfully checked," Livy 26. 10.
[167] Dorey called distinctions between *imperium,* "a difference not in kind, but degree," which better reflects the functionality of the power than other arguments, Dorey, *The Dictatorship of Minucius,* 94; Keyes, "The Constitutional Position of the Roman Dictatorship," 299.
[168] Livy 22. 11.
[169] Keyes, "The Constitutional Position of the Roman Dictatorship," 298-299. Keyes found the dictatorship was more powerful during the early Republic, and during the Second Punic War the dictator was closer to a third consul.
[170] For the flexibility of the Roman constitution, see Eder, "Augustus and the Power of Tradition," 15; Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic,* 1-6, 15. Lintott's entire book conveys the constitution's malleability and developments, but these first few pages give a nice introduction.

Beyond these two useful details, any exact classification of a dictator's power is the result of a historiographic attempt to portray an overly legalistic Roman Republic.

d. Circumstances for Appointment

Dictators were always appointed to handle a particular emergency or *causa*.[171] Dictators are frequently described only as military commanders, but this is an oversimplification. While military appointments were the most common, especially in the early Republic, they only represent forty-three of Livy's sixty-seven dictators, or a little less than two-thirds of the total.[172] Efficiency made the office versatile, leading dictators to be appointed for a variety of reasons beyond waging war. While there was safety in the consulship's collegiality, the decisive power of an individual was often advantageous.[173] Dictators were implemented to calm internal rioting, hold elections, or to complete religious duties. The *fasti*, published lists of Rome's magistrates, noted a dictator's reason for appointment with a particular label.[174] These designations are often used as the basis of scholarly discussions.[175] This presents a problem, as the *fasti* do not give the full story. Livy's text narrates details that give a more comprehensive view of each appointment. In his account, Rome regularly dealt with multiple concurrent emergencies. The label of a single *causa* often fails to encapsulate the conditions that led to a dictator's appointment. Livy also described a wide variety of dictatorships, showing their importance outside the battlefield.

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[171] Task-specific appointments were an established concept in Roman politics, see the concept of *provincia,* Drogula, *Commands & Command,* 169. Drogula gives a discussion of the dictator's relationship to *provincial,* which has ramifications even after dictators disappeared; Gargola, "Mediterranean Empire," 155; North, "The Constitution of the Roman Republic," 270.

[172] The *fasti* lists forty-seven dictators *rei gerundae causa,* but I have subtracted four dictators *seditionis sedandae et rei gerundae causa,* see Degrassi, *Fasti Capitolini,* 180-186. Quintus Fabius Maximus could also be arguably added to this count, but his role is not straightforward, and he is uniquely labeled as *interregni causa,* also see Appendix B.

[173] Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic,* 38.

[174] See Appendix B for discussion of *fasti;* Cohen, "The Origin of the Roman Dictatorship," 312; Tacitus, *Annals,* 1. 1. Tacitus simply stated, "Dictators were assumed in emergencies."

[175] Which has certain value, but also limitations, see *causa*-based discussions in de Wilde, "The Dictator's Trust,"; Drogula, *Commands & Command,* 171-173; Cohen, "The Origin of the Roman Dictatorship." Cohen did so most effectively, exploring religious appointments.

Accordingly, our understanding of the dictatorship should look beyond famous military dictators. A more inclusive approach reveals that appointing a dictator was an effective and streamlined method for the state to handle a multitude of crises.[176] By ignoring the complex circumstances that surrounded appointments, the dictatorship's flexibility and transformations are overlooked.

The *fasti* listed the specific *causa* for each dictator, which produced neat but inadequate categories. The most common appointment was *rei gerundae causa* (which Marc de Wilde called "literally, the 'dictatorship for getting things done'").[177] This was a military dictatorship, usually in response to a foreign threat. Generally, these dictators were appointed to lead war efforts after a particularly devastating battle, rumors of enemies conspiring, or to complete an especially arduous campaign. These dictators are the standard seen in reference works and most prominent in Roman memory. Livy wrote about forty-seven dictators *rei gerundae causa*.[178] The *fasti* additionally labeled four of these dictators *seditionis sedandae,* which meant they were specifically intended to handle domestic problems (de Wilde translated this as the "'dictatorship for suppressing civil insurrection'").[179] Internal crises were usually related to class conflict, meaning this type of dictator was important during the Struggle of the Orders, (494 to 287 BCE).[180] Some even argue that the dictatorship was created to address domestic disputes.[181] Even if the office was not designed explicitly for rebellion, a dictator's particular brand of power

[176] Golden, *Crisis Management,* xiv. Golden's work focused on Rome's various formal states of emergency, which are too complex to unpack in this study, but are certainly relevant to further research.
[177] de Wilde, "The Dictator's Trust" 559; Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic,* 110.
[178] Degrassi, *Fasti Capitolini,* 180-186. That is, forty-eight of the dictators that appear in Livy are coded as such in the *fasti.*
[179] Livy 2. 30-31, 7. 38-42, 6. 39-42, 4. 13-16; Degrassi, *Fasti Capitolini,* 180-186. They specifically appear as *seditionis sedandae et rei gerundae causa*; de Wilde, "The Dictator's Trust," 559.
[180] Golden (*Crisis Management,* 22-23) emphasized the dictatorship's crisis role during class conflict.
[181] As discussed, the precise *imperium* of a dictator is contentious, but a dictator may have had considerably more power within the city walls than a consul, leading to this assumption, see Chapter III-c "Power and *Imperium*"; Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic,* 18, 32, 111; Drogula, *Commanders & Command,* 119, 169-170.

may have been suited to civil insurrections.[182] The dictator was not subject to appeal, and may have had the power to use force against citizens,[183] which made him more useful than a consul for domestic unrest.[184] Even so, these labels fail to express the complexity of appointments. Livy allows us to look at the actual situations in which a dictator was appointed, rather than just the assigned *causa*.

Although only four of Livy's dictators were formally appointed to handle insurrection (*seditionis sedandae*), I find at least ten instances when class warfare was a key factor, all notably falling before 330 BCE.[185] By this time, plebeians had attained admission to offices and various legal reform.[186] Also of note are the four successive dictators who were appointed (at least in part) because of class conflicts during the pivotal years of 385-368 BCE.[187] The impactful Licinio-Sextian laws (*lex Licinia Sextia*) were passed from 367-366 BCE. This set of reforms gave plebeians access to one of the consular positions, capped public land holdings (which was largely a restriction on the elite), and provided plebeian debt relief.[188] Naturally, the aristocracy attempted to maintain control through dictators.[189] In some cases, a dictator's official task appeared to act as a pretext. Livy described a scenario in 494 BCE, in which a dictator was technically meant to lead war, but "the commons were well aware that the appointment of a

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[182] Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic,* 18; Drogula, *Commanders & Command,* 119, 123, 338.
[183] See Chapter III-c "Power and *Imperium*."
[184] Drogula (*Commanders & Command,* 119, 123, 338) suggested that the appointment of a dictator may "have been the equivalent of a declaration of martial law in early Rome," which is perhaps overstated, but nonetheless underlined the dictator's special privileges within the city.
[185] Livy 2. 18, 2. 30-31, 4. 13-16, 4. 31-34, 6. 11-16, 6. 28-29, 6. 38, 6. 39-42, 7. 12-13, 8. 18. This count is very much subject to interpretation, other examinations could certainly include find an alternative number.
[186] Oakley, "The Early Republic," 17-18.
[187] See Appendix A.
[188] The laws were passed in 367 and 366 BCE, see Oakley, "The Early Republic," 18; The exact impact and purpose of these laws are naturally up for debate, see Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 338-341.
[189] Golden (*Crisis Management,* 22-23) discussed a dictator who was appointed in the midst of negotiations for the consulship.

dictator was directed against themselves."[190] Again in 385 BCE, a dictator was appointed for "serious foreign war and an even more serious internal resurrection."[191] Officially, this dictator was portrayed as a military response. Yet, Livy wrote that the appointment, "was not aimed at the Volscians, who were enemies only when it suited the patricians."[192] Both of these dictators are recorded exclusively as *rei gerundae causa* in the *fasti.*[193]

Livy also provided many illustrations of the complicated circumstances that surrounded appointments. In a representative example, Livy's first dictator appears in the *fasti* as *rei gerundae causa.* Despite being categorized as a military assignment, Titus Lartius was appointed in 501 BCE in response to a combination of threats.[194] In Livy's version of the story, "mounting anxiety and tension" were overwhelming Rome.[195] Conflict with the neighboring Sabines[196] looked imminent, and there was a threat of a league of Latin settlements banding together against Rome.[197] Internally, there was a skirmish between young Sabine men during the Games,[198] which escalated and drew a crowd.[199] There were also rumors of Roman officials discussing "sympathies" for the Tarquins.[200] In this increasingly tense climate, Titus Lartius was appointed dictator.[201] He proved to be effective at handling both varieties of conflict.

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[190] Livy 2. 30-31.
[191] Livy 6. 11.
[192] Livy 6. 15.
[193] Degrassi, *Fasti Capitolini*, 180-186.
[194] Livy 2. 18; Niebuhr (*The History of Rome, Volume 1,* 335) interestingly suggested that Titus Lartius was already consul; it is also worth noting that scholars are unsure if *imperium* varied between appointment types, and this perhaps changed overtime, see Drogula, *Commanders & Command,* 169, Keyes, "The Constitutional Position of the Roman Dictatorship," 304-305; Livy (23. 23) wrote about an odd case in which a dictator objected to "granting the full power of the dictatorship…for any purpose other than that of directing operations in the field."
[195] Livy 2. 18.
[196] An Italian tribe who lived north of Rome, which led to frequent war between the two groups.
[197] Livy 2. 18.
[198] The Roman Games were a large public event, highly religious, and generally meant to celebrate a military victory, see Rüpke, "Communicating with the Gods," 220, 225.
[199] Livy 2. 18.
[200] Livy 2. 18. The Tarquins were the last of Rome's monarchs. Traditionally, this was less than a decade after Rome expelled its kings, making this a serious threat.
[201] Livy 2. 18.

According to Livy, citizens had "a more docile frame of mind" simply from seeing the dictator in the city.[202] The Sabines were so alarmed by the appointment of a dictator that they immediately made efforts to avoid war.[203] This dictator did not even have to enter the battlefield to resolve a variety of issues. As Livy presented it, the mere act of appointing a dictator was enough to comfort Romans and frighten enemies.[204] Despite his military assignment, the dictator had considerable influence over domestic affairs. Strict labeling muddles the actual purpose of the dictatorship, which was to provide an efficient response to an emergency situation. Dictators were appointed when Rome was reaching a crisis point, often due to multiple internal and external concerns. Furthermore, dictators *rei gerundae* clearly handled many different tasks, both military and civil.

The remaining categories of dictator are less often discussed. Nonetheless, these dictators add to our understanding of the institution. Apart from acting as a military commander or suppressing unrest, the dictator also managed religious emergencies. Even a dictator *rei gerundae causa* was expected to complete religious responsibilities, which further underlines the challenge of categorizing dictators. Three appointments appear to be specifically for religious crises, although religious fears and ritual were a part of all dictatorships (and all Roman government).[205] One of these dictators was appointed to hold a public holiday (*feriarum constituendarum causa*), while the other two carried out a highly debated practice.[206] These two men were appointed to complete an obscure religious ceremony, in which a dictator (*clavi*

[202] Livy 2. 18.
[203] Livy 2. 18.
[204] Cohen, "The Origin of the Roman Dictatorship," 308.
[205] Livy 7. 3, 7. 28, 8. 18, and perhaps a fourth, Livy (8. 38) begrudgingly offers an alternate explanation for the dictator, to run chariot races.
[206] Livy 7. 28. Livy also discussed, but dismissed, the possibility of a third in Livy 9. 28; Drogula, *Commanders & Command,* 169.

figendi causa)[207] nailed a hammer into a board to prevent plague.[208] Even Livy's initial description of this ritual is peculiar.

In 363 BCE, Rome was being ravaged by plague, and it seemed the gods were ignoring pleas for mercy.[209] Apparently, older members of the community recalled, "at one time an outbreak of plague had been reduced by the dictator's hammering in a nail."[210] The Senate took to this idea, and Lucius Manlius Imperious was named to complete the ritual.[211] In a bizarre turn of events, Manlius failed to actually hammer the nail. He decided to ignore the reason for his appointment. Instead, Manlius "set his heart on war with the Hernici," but the Senate forced him to resign before he accomplished anything.[212] Manlius's dictatorship raises questions about the types of dictators. While it appears from his attempt that a dictator that was appointed for a different task still had the *imperium* to conduct war, the backlash to his actions imply some sort of restrictions on his power.

Despite Manlius's botched attempt, a dictator was appointed for the hammering ritual once again in 332 BCE. Livy wrote that the Romans remembered Manlius's ceremony, which inexplicably had helped restore "self-control" during a class conflict.[213] Despite Livy's contradictory information, this later dictator completed the ceremony.[214] Livy also mentioned a dictator carrying out this ritual in 313 BCE.[215] The dictators who completed this unusual

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[207] Degrassi, *Fasti Captiolini;* Kaplan, "Religious Dictators," 173.
[208] Livy may have misinterpreted this event, which may have been to mark years, see Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome*, 220; Cohen, "The Origin of the Roman Dictatorship," 305-306; Livy mentioned dictators appointed for this purpose, see Livy 7. 3, 8. 18.
[209] Livy 7. 3.
[210] Livy 7. 3.
[211] Livy 7. 3.
[212] Livy 7. 3; See also Chapter III-h "Leaving Office" for more on this and other forced resignations.
[213] Livy 7. 18.
[214] Livy 7. 18.
[215] Livy 9. 28. Though, Livy expressed doubts about this incident.

ceremony bear little resemblance to well-known military dictators, which demonstrates the need to expand discussions of the dictatorship. Moreover, the dictator commonly had religious obligations—often tangential to his military or other tasks—like holding Games, dedicating temples, or overseeing additional rituals.[216] Although dictators were seldom appointed explicitly for these rituals, completing religious duties was an important aspect of the position.[217]

Lastly, dictators were also appointed to conduct elections (*comitiorum habendorum causa)*.[218] These appointments are often ignored in discussions, likely because they were relatively mundane. Yet, electoral dictators prove the office's versatility. While not a catastrophic emergency, dictators held elections when a consul was unavailable. Dictators were a useful solution when consuls were ill, incapacitated, or else unable to return to Rome while leading combat.[219] This administrative role became more and more common overtime. Many earlier dictators were war heroes, but their third century BCE counterparts were frequently trusted civil servants.[220] Livy wrote about seventeen dictators appointed for elections.[221] This mode of dictatorship may have been comparatively dull, but the office was still filling a vital role. As Rome expanded, consuls were involved with wars that were much farther away, meaning it was increasingly problematic to recall them for elections.[222]

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[216] Games: Livy 6. 42, 7. 11, 8. 40, 22. 9, 27. 35; dedications: Livy 5. 20; 6. 29; 10.1, 22. 9; rituals: Livy 6. 12, 22. 9. There are more examples for each, but these show a variety throughout.
[217] Especially as dictators were often appointed amidst religious anxieties. Notably, Camillus's dictatorships often had an ethos of restoring piety, see especially, Livy 5. 19-23.
[218] Drogula, *Commanders & Command*, 169.
[219] Ill consuls: Livy 7. 24-7. 25; consuls in the field: Livy 7. 26, 8. 16, 8. 23 (although this dictator resigned before elections); new offices like the praetorship also helped to fill extra command positions, see Brennan, "Power and Process," 38-40.
[220] Drogula, *Commanders & Command*, 178.
[221] I am also including Marcus Fabius Buteo in this count, although he was not *comitiorum habendorum causa*, but *senatus legendi causa*, as he was uniquely appointed to elect senators during the Second Punic War, see Livy 23. 22-23.
[222] Livy 22. 8. See the example of Quintus Fabius in Chapter III-g "*Magister Equitum"*

Before the Second Punic War, Livy reported only eight of fifty-six dictators appointed for elections (one-seventh). During the war, this ratio changed dramatically. From 217 to 201 BCE, Livy listed only eleven dictators total. Again, eight of these dictators were meant to hold elections, but they represented nearly three-quarters of appointments during the Second Punic War (Table 1).[223] The timeline makes sense, as Rome and its consuls were engaged in larger conflicts during this time.[224] Appointing an electoral dictator allowed normal election cycles to continue even during longer campaigns. Rome no longer needed dictators to conduct war, but instead implemented the office to keep government running smoothly. The dictator had become more useful as a reserve administrator than a temporary general. These dictators were not directly leading war but were nonetheless essential to Rome's success.

Military dictators were admittedly the most common, and surely the most famous. Even so, the variety of dictators reflected the Republic's flexibility. The Romans continually adapted the dictatorship to suit a shifting assortment of emergencies, responsive to the Republic's constantly changing needs. As Livy's history indicated, the circumstances surrounding a dictator's appointment were rarely straightforward. By definition, dictators were appointed amid emergencies, which are inherently disordered. In order to truly understand the dictator's role, it is necessary not only to look at the full scope of dictators, but also how power was enacted outside their specific task. In short, the Roman dictatorship was a flexible office that filled an assortment of formal and informal roles, which led to (or least allowed for) the institution's continual evolution throughout the Republic's development.

[223] See also Appendix A.
[224] Rich, "Fear, Greed, and Glory," 50.

Table 1: Livy's Dictators by Type[225]	501-301 BCE	217-201 BCE (Second Punic War)
Total Dictators:	56	11
Elections: *(comitiorum habendorum causa, senatus legendi causa)*	8 (14 %)	8 (73 %)
Military: *(Rei gerundae causa)*	41 (73 %)	2 (18 %)
Other: *(clavi figendi causa, feriarum constituendarum causa, seditionis sedandae et rei gerundae causa, interregni causa)*	7 (13 %)	1 (9 %)

e. The Appointment Process

Despite the urgency of many dictatorships, the process of appointment was formalized and rarely deviated from convention. The general procedure appears fairly consistent throughout Livy. Only a consul could nominate a dictator.[226] Livy wrote that appointments by consul were, "a solemn tradition, backed by religious sanctions."[227] The Senate could not officially challenge a consul's choice of dictator. Yet even without legal authority, the Senate appeared to be involved in virtually all dictatorial appointments. The Senate frequently went to great lengths to compel an appointment, but the decision ultimately rested with a consul. In later dictatorships, there were a few notable exceptions. As with many aspects of the dictatorship, a closer investigation of the appointment process can demonstrate gaps in scholarly discourse. Although Livy reaffirmed—on multiple occasions—that only a consul could appoint a dictator, his narrative often showed the

[225] See Appendix A for specific names, *causa*, and citations for Livy.
[226] Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic*, 38; de Wilde, "The Dictator's Trust," 558; Harris, *Roman Power*, 75. Consular appointments are almost universally accepted, but these are a few examples.
[227] Livy 4. 31.

Senate's extensive influence.[228] Particularly in older scholarship, the dynamics of informal powers are largely disregarded, as they operated outside the known legal code.[229] The process of appointing dictators clearly demonstrated the key political roles of tradition, expectation, and power relationships, which were not adequately expressed in any official law.[230] As Lintott aptly described, Rome's "flexible conceptualization of the constitution" allowed the Republic to adapt by continually shifting the balance of power "between Senate, People, and magistrates."[231] Livy's text revealed informal pressures and peculiarities in appointment practices, which can exhibit these continual negotiations of control.

In 353 BCE, Livy wrote that the Senate "ordered" the consul Marcus Valerius Publicola out of the field to appoint a dictator. Valerius was in Tusculum, just over fifteen miles (a day's journey) from Rome.[232] Throughout Livy's account, this was normal practice. When the Senate wanted a dictator, consuls were obliged to return to Rome. Dictators also had to be appointed within Italy, which became progressively more inconvenient.[233] As Rome became engaged in more warfare, farther from the city, it was often difficult to contact consuls.[234] Yet, the Senate still summoned consuls from the field to appoint dictators. The process was honored even when inconvenient, showing adherence to tradition.[235] Even still, Livy plainly showed the Senate pulling the strings. The initial decision to name a dictator usually originated in the Senate. Phrases appear in Livy like, "the Senate lost no time in ordering the appointment of a dictator,"

[228] Livy 4. 26, 22. 8. Livy confirmed consular appointments in these instances.
[229] Mommsen and contemporaries are often criticized for this, see Mouritsen, *Politics in the Roman Republic*, 7.
[230] Flower, "Introduction," 2; Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic*, 4.
[231] Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic*, 15.
[232] Livy 7. 19.
[233] Livy 27. 5.
[234] Livy 22. 8. A prominent example, which is discussed in Chapter III-g "*Magister Equitum*."
[235] Barring the notable exception of Quintus Fabius Maximus, who is discussed below.

or "the Senate decided to appoint a dictator," which reaffirm senatorial influence.[236] In 310 BCE, the Senate selected a dictator with whom a consul had a "personal grudge."[237] The Senate arranged an envoy to convince the consul. He succumbed but was not pleased. The consul "kept his eyes on the ground and retired without a word," and continued to be insolently silent the next day in order to display his "strong resentment."[238] In practice, a consular appointment often seemed to be a formality.

Livy also wrote about instances in which a consul was actively against the nomination of a dictator, but was ostensibly forced by the Senate. In 431 BCE, multiple enemies were preparing for war, an aggressive epidemic was worsening, and tensions were high between the year's consuls. The tumultuous state of affairs alarmed the Senate and they accordingly called for a dictator.[239] Inopportunely, the argumentative consuls could only agree on one idea, "their opposition to the Senate over the appointment of a Dictator."[240] Despite the rare allegiance of the adversarial consuls, their decision was challenged. A group of consular tribunes saw this as "an opportunity of increasing their power," and decreed a "unanimous resolution," which threatened to imprison the consuls if they defied the Senate's will.[241] The consuls decided it was "less unpleasant" to succumb to the tribunes, and they disgruntledly appointed a dictator.[242] In this case, there was an interesting negotiation of political power. Consular tribunes certainly had an amount of influence over the consuls, but it appears that it took the intimidation of both the Senate and the tribunes to force the appointment. Also notable is that the consuls preferred to

[236] Livy 4. 57, 7. 28.
[237] Livy 9. 38.
[238] Livy 9. 38.
[239] Livy 4. 26.
[240] Livy 4. 26.
[241] Livy 4. 26. Tribunes with consular powers.
[242] Livy 4. 26.

obey the tribunes over the Senate, which underlines the interesting role of informal precedents and power dynamics.

The Senate did not only demand appointments, but they were also concerned with a consul's choice of dictator. The first plebeian dictator, Gaius Marcius Rutulus, was nominated in 357 BCE in response to a military threat.[243] While the circumstances of appointment were familiar, the choice of a plebeian was unprecedented. Livy remarked that the elite "thought it outrageous that even the dictatorship should now be open to all" and tried to block "any decision or preparation." The exact opposing patrician group is unclear, although Livy seemed to refer to the Senate. He wrote that "the people" rallied behind the dictator, "all the readier to vote for everything the dictator proposed."[244] Gaius was very successful in battle, and "was granted a triumph by the people…without Senate authorization."[245] In this case, it is evident that the Senate could not legally override a consul's choice of dictator. They could, however, resist appointments and make action difficult. Visibly, the Senate had substantial influence, even outside of their lawful authority.[246] Also important was the people's embrace of Gaius Marcius. The dictator still received enough support to be effective. He was even able to win an unofficial triumph, showing an assertion of the people's power. In just this one instance, Livy displayed the fluctuating relationship between the Senate, people, and the consuls. Clearly, appointments could involve an elaborate negotiation process outside the letter of the law.

[243] Livy 7. 17.
[244] Livy 7. 17.
[245] Livy 7. 17.
[246] Mouritsen, *Politics in the Roman Republic*, 143.

I find only three cases in Livy of dictators who were appointed without a consul.[247] All were especially unusual circumstances. In 426 BCE, consular tribunes chose a dictator. This was during the notoriously confusing period in which consular tribunes allegedly held office instead of consuls.[248] The appointment was sanctioned by both the people and augurs.[249] A consul did not appoint this dictator, but the consular power did.[250] There was a more notable exception to tradition in 217 BCE, during the thick of the Second Punic War. Both consuls were heavily engaged in hard battles, so deep in enemy territory that the Senate was not even able to send a letter.[251] Although Livy reiterated that a consul had the sole power to appoint a dictator, in an "unprecedented step" the people (with the strong consent of the Senate) appointed Quintus Fabius Maximus as "acting-dictator."[252]

In this strange incident, Livy suggested that a consul's appointment was used in all prior dictatorships.[253] Notably, this dictator was still branded as "acting," because he lacked the proper consular authorization. Fabius also dealt with unparalleled insurrection from his master of horse, which perhaps emphasized the importance of the sacred process.[254] Without proper adherence to tradition, Fabius was only "acting" and received considerably less respect.[255] In this context,

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[247] Livy 4. 31-32, 22. 8- 22. 32, 22. 57, 23. 14. There is the possibility of another case, though it is doubtful. In 345 BCE, Livy (7. 28) wrote that either the Senate "appointed" or "resolved to appoint a dictator for a public holiday." This does not seem to have garnered controversy, and there were consuls in office. Livy also indicates later in his text that all appointments were from consular power, as will be discussed. Syntax rather than an actual deviation from normal practice, probably explains the difference.

[248] Cornell gave a good explanation of the evidence surrounding consular tribunes, which is fraught to say the least: Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 333-340; Oakley, "The Early Republic," 18; Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome*, 334-339.

[249] Augurs were priests who handled the public auspices, see Rüpke, "Roman Religion," 180-181; Brennan, "Power and Process," 37.

[250] Livy 4. 31-32.

[251] Livy 22. 8

[252] Livy 22. 8.

[253] Livy 22. 8. Although this appears to contradict Livy's story about the consular tribunes, he probably means consular power and not the office of the consul.

[254] The full incident is explored in Chapter III-g "*Magister Equitum*."

[255] Brennan, "Power and Process," 57.

Fabius's appointment was representative of the Republic's larger developments. The people's will had more impact, enough that they were able to essentially mimic a consul's power. The Senate's influence had also grown, allowing them to respond to the Second Punic War's near-constant influx of disasters.[256] The next year, amid utter chaos and heavy casualties, Livy reported that a dictator was appointed "on the Senate's authority" to hold widespread conscription.[257] These discrepancies in the dictator's protected selection process clearly paralleled larger developments in the Republic's power structure.

While dictators were legally appointed by consul, Livy illustrated that this legality must be understood in the context of the Senate's extraordinary impact, the growing voice of citizens, and an array of other informal influences. The Republic was in an endless process of reshaping and amending its unwritten constitution. Tradition was important, but so was practicality and responsiveness. The case of the "acting-dictator" expressed this philosophy towards breaking custom.[258] If Rome had strictly adhered to its legal code, the state may have suffered a damaging military defeat. Instead, the Romans chose to adapt. By granting the dictator provisional status, they were able to respect tradition while still taking practical action. Although the appointment may have been theoretically illegal, there was an informal precedent for the Senate's appointment of dictators. The decision also reflected the political shifts which were progressively empowering both the Senate and the populace. As a result, Livy demonstrated the value of looking beyond official law code when examining both the dictatorship and the Republic.

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[256] Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic*, 33; Le Bohec, "Roman Wars and Armies in Livy," 118.
[257] Livy 22. 57.
[258] Livy 22. 8.

f. Ceremony and the Auspices

Once appointed, a dictator acquired *auspicium* through an obscure ceremony.[259] In essence, *auspicium* was the ability to commune with the gods and interpret their signals.[260] Dictators held *auspicia maxima*, the highest level of religious authority.[261] It was vital for magistrates to possess *auspicium*, as consulting the auspices was a key government function. For dictators (as well as other magistrates), errors or faults in the auspices occurred often, meaning the dictator was required to return to Rome and repeat the ceremony, or else resign. Scholars often write that the dictator's deep ties to *auspicium* lent the office its "sacral" qualities that may have helped preserve it overtime.[262] A guise of piety, however, was also an effective way to challenge a dictator. The interpretation of the auspices was highly sensitive, which made it easy to exploit. As a result, the dictator's auspices were a way to circumvent his untouchable status. Even if he did not resign, a dictator's progress could be stalled by a return to Rome. In the early Republic, patricians alone were able to possess *auspicium*, a major cause of class conflict.[263] Roman religion was controlled by the elite, even as political offices and other public functions became more inclusive.[264] The aristocracy carefully protected the auspices, which helped to stifle plebeian access to the most powerful offices. Livy described many incidents involving improper auspices, which allows us to observe aristocratic attempts to retain control of the dictatorship.

Auspication was the practice of watching birds, examining entrails, observing natural signs, or consulting other divine prophecies before a decision or event.[265] While auspices were

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[259] Cohen, "The Origin of the Roman Dictatorship," 315.
[260] Brennan, "Power and Process," 37; Flower, *Roman Republics,* 51.
[261] Brennan, "Power and Process," 40.
[262] Cohen, "The Origin of the Roman Dictatorship," 314.
[263] Brennan, "Power and Process, 37; Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic,* 17.
[264] Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic*, 198; North, "Democratic Politics," 17.
[265] The practice was tied to Romulus's legendary augury; Brennan, "Power and Process," 37; Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic,* 103; Rüpke, "Roman Religion," 181-183.

consulted as part of the political process, their true purpose was not prediction, but to calm religious fears with ancient tradition.[266] Interpreting proper auspices, or favorable omens, was essential for actions like the confirmation of magistrates and beginning battles.[267] Although Livy mentioned the dictator's auspices often, he gave little detail about the appointment ceremony. The ritual was sacred, secretive, and exceedingly sensitive. According to Livy, the ceremony involved a consul, who appointed the dictator, "in the silence of night, as custom is."[268] Then, the consul would listen, in silence, for a sound of disapproval from the gods. Quiet was taken as divine approval for the dictator to take the auspices.[269] This appears to be the standard process, as in another case, Livy wrote that a "consul had risen in the night and made the appointment in silence."[270] The dictatorship's enigmatic ceremony was uniquely strange, as other appointments were not handled this way.[271] Livy's descriptions were sporadic and vague, but this secrecy protected the ceremony and *auspicium*. The details of the odd ritual are obscure to us, but this may be because it was also mysterious to most Romans, even within politics.

The ceremony's elusiveness and fragility were likely deliberate. The sensitivity of the ritual was perhaps the only formal method to undermine a dictator's power. Livy wrote about nearly constant issues with the auspices, including six cases that led to a dictator's resignation.[272] Superficially, detecting a fault in the auspices was an act of piety. The ceremony was redone for various ambiguous reasons, such as a "sinister omen," or "religious doubts."[273] More

[266] Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic*, 103-104; Rüpke, "Roman Religion," 180-182.
[267] Rüpke, "Communicating with the God," 229; Lintott *The Constitution of the Roman Republic*, 103
[268] Livy 9. 38.
[269] Cohen, "The Origin of the Roman Dictatorship," 316.
[270] Livy 8. 23.
[271] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome*, 226; Cohen, "The Origin of the Roman Dictatorship," 315; Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic*, 40.
[272] Livy 6. 38, 8. 15, 8. 17, 8. 23, 9. 7, 22. 33; See also Chapter III-h "Leaving Office."
[273] Livy 9. 38-39, 8. 17.

realistically, most accusations of improper auspices were politically motivated.[274] Any mistakes in the auspices were taken very seriously, and thus challenging a dictator's *auspicium* was an effective tactic. In 302 BCE, the dictator Marcus Valerius Maximus returned to the city to retake the auspices, which left his *magister equitum* to be "ambushed" and lose several men.[275] A similar situation occurred during the Second Punic War, when dictators were operating much farther from Rome.[276] Plainly, an accusation against the dictator's auspices required a return to Rome, even when it exposed his army to considerable risk.

Secretive practices made the auspices esoteric, and thus the ritual could be exploited by the aristocracy. Even as plebeians gained access to power, the patricians were still able to manipulate the dictator's appointment process. As the highest offices were expected to have *auspicium*, this allowed the elite to exert control over the top religious roles and political positions.[277] Livy included multiple examples of the aristocracy's attempts to guard the auspices. After a plebeian consul was killed in a disastrous battle, patricians cried that it was divine punishment for giving the "auspices to those for whom it was a sin to take them!"[278] A patrician from the old-elite Claudius family was made dictator to remedy this religious problem, underlining the aristocratic protection of the auspices. As dictators held the maximum level of *auspicium,*[279] the elite's religious supremacy also helps to explain why the office was dominated by aristocratic men.

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[274] Errors in the auspices were usually noticed by the Senate, but other politicians also voiced concerns.
[275] Livy 10. 3.
[276] See Chapter III-g "Magister Equitum", Livy 22. 8- 32.
[277] North, "Democratic Politics," 17; Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic*, 198.
[278] Livy 7. 6.
[279] Brennan, "Power and Process, 44. As did consuls and praetors.

Even when the top offices opened to plebeians, the auspices were used to repress plebeian progress. In 327 BCE, Marcus Claudius Marcellus, a plebeian, was appointed dictator for the purpose of holding elections.[280] Soon after, an inquiry was held into his *auspicium* and appointment, which were deemed "irregular."[281] Livy did not reveal the specific source of the concerns. It can, however, be assumed the question originated in the Senate or established aristocracy, as plebeian tribunes fought the accusation. They argued that a "flaw could not have been easily detected," due to the secrecy of the ceremony, meaning it was truly an excuse to oust a plebeian dictator.[282] These allegations were not unrealistic, as Marcellus was only the third plebeian to take the position. The accusations were upheld, and the dictator resigned. As a result, elections were not held. Rather than repeating the auspices or appointing a new dictator, Rome went into an *interregnum.*[283] An *interregnum* was a pause in the normal functioning of government. It was instated when no magistrates were in office, due to the expiration of their term, or a resignation.

In Livy, only seven dictators were compelled to resign before completing their term or task.[284] Six out of these seven dictators were pushed out due to religious concerns or flaws in their elections.[285] Conspicuously, four of these dictatorships resulted in an *interregnum*.[286] During an *interregnum*, a string of single patrician senators would serve as *interrex* for five days, passing *imperium* and *auspicium* until normal functioning was restored.[287] Reverting to an

[280] Livy 8. 23.
[281] Livy 8. 23.
[282] Livy 8. 23.
[283] Livy 8. 23.
[284] Livy 6. 38, 7. 3-4, 8. 15, 8. 17, 8. 23, 9. 7, 22. 33; See also Chapter III-h "Leaving Office."
[285] Livy 6. 38 (although Livy also offered an alternate explanation), 8. 15, 8. 17, 8. 23, 9.7, 22. 33.
[286] Livy 8. 17, 8. 23, 9. 7 (This was an odd situation in which a dictator was made to resign and then replaced, but that dictator did not hold elections either for an unspecified reason, resulting in an *interregnum*), 22. 33.
[287] Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic*, 164; The *interregnum* is a complex issue in and of itself, I provide only a superficial discussion.

interregnum was a way for the aristocrats to temporarily take control of Rome, although an *interrex* was not as powerful as a dictator or consul.[288] While *interregnums* were purportedly to maintain government between elections, Livy's narrative showed them to be much closer to aristocratic power grabs. Naturally, *interregnums* were common during the height of the Struggle of the Orders. Between 338 and 321 BCE, there were three cases in which Rome fell to an *interregnum* after the resignation of a dictator.[289] In 321 BCE, two dictators in a row were ousted due to issues with the auspices.[290] This surely represented the aristocracy attempting to maintain control of Rome, especially as the period between 356 and 300 BCE saw the opening of virtually all offices to plebeians.[291]

So, the obscure details of the dictator's appointment process are less important than the ritual's role in Republican politics. The ceremony was a relic of old aristocracy and ancient religion, and therefore mysterious. While the dictatorship was flexible, the procedure was not. Religion was deeply tied to the dictatorship, as Livy underlined with statements such as, "the order of a dictator, which has always been revered as the gods' will."[292] Consequently, *auspicium* was essential to the dictatorship's power, making adherence to the process crucial. As plebeians encroached on elite supremacy, the fragility and necessity of the ceremony was weaponized. By regulating knowledge and control of religion, the aristocracy was able to exploit ritual in order to maintain control of the dictatorship.

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[288] Brennan, "Power and Process," 64;
[289] Livy 8. 17, 8. 23, 9. 7. Again, a string of two resigning dictators in 321 BCE. In this instance, I am treating them as one "case," although they were separate dictatorships.
[290] Livy 9. 7.
[291] Oakley, "The Early Republic," 18.
[292] Livy 8. 34.

g. Magister Equitum

After being appointed, the dictator chose a master of horse, or *magister equitum,* to serve as his second-in-command.[293] Information about the dictatorship is inconsistent, and details about his *magister equitum* are even scarcer. It is largely accepted that the position stemmed from an ancient rule that forbid a dictator to ride on horseback.[294] So, masters of horse were customarily in charge of the cavalry, while the dictator lead the infantry.[295] Livy stated that a master of horse's "power is equivalent to a consul's."[296] This may have been true at some point, but the powers of the *magister equitum* may have changed alongside the dictatorship.[297] Perhaps more notably, the dynamic between dictator and master of horse changed from the early Republic. Almost universally, early masters of horse seem to have acted as obedient second commanders. Some pairs exhibited extraordinary loyalty, like Cincinnatus's master of horse, who killed an accused conspirator because he declined to appear in front of the dictator.[298] Cincinnatus then fervently defended his *magister equitum* from angered citizens.[299] Later in the Republic, masters of horse were less subservient. While it is easy to observe variations in the frequency of dictatorships or their *causa,* the subtleties of this relationship can only be seen in a narrative text like Livy. He often recounted interactions between the dictator and the master of horse, especially in the field. The shifting dynamic between the two commanders may be representative of the dictator's changed role during the Second Punic War. The dictator's official

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[293] Livy mentioned this as soon as the first dictatorship, Livy 2. 18; Countless academics confirm this, see two discussions in Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome*, 227; Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic*, 38.
[294] Mommsen, *The History of Rome: Volume 1*, 252; Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic*, 110; Cohen, "The Origin of the Roman Dictatorship," 315. This law may be related to a superstition surrounding horses.
[295] Livy (23. 24) described that a dictator "obtained from the commons the customary bill authorizing him (for by tradition the dictator commanded the infantry) to appear on horseback."
[296] Livy 23. 11.
[297] Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic*, 43-49.
[298] Livy 4. 14-15.
[299] Livy 4. 14-15. Although, Cincinnatus's argument was also to reaffirm the dictator's power.

imperium may have been consistent, but diminished respect from his second-in-command can nonetheless reveal the dictator's altered role within the Republic.

The harmony between early dictators and masters of horse may simply be attributed to choice. Before 358 BCE, Livy said (or implied) that a dictator chose his master of horse.[300] The dictator generally selected an obvious ally, or even a son.[301] Beginning in 358 BCE, many masters of horse were "given" to a dictator, usually by the Senate.[302] Unfortunately, Livy gave no explanation for this change. The shift may mark a modification of the dictator's power, the Senate's influence, or else a redefinition of the master of horse. Ten years prior, Publius Manlius was the first dictator to choose a plebeian as his *magister equitum*. This openly "annoyed the patricians" but Publius claimed a "close relationship" with his appointee.[303] The dictator's choice escalated to a full-blown class conflict, which resulted in heated debates that completely overshadowed any of Publius's actions while in power.[304] Only two years later, in 356 BCE, the first plebeian dictator took office. The timeline is damning, as during the class conflicts in 352 to 345 BCE there were six dictators, four of whom Livy explicitly stated were "given" their master of horse.[305] About a decade after the start of the Licinio-Sextian laws,[306] this was a pivotal time for the Struggle of the Orders. For the first time, it seemed all offices were opening to plebeians. So, it is imaginable that the transition to a "given" master of horse was an attempt to protect the

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[300] Some examples of dictators choosing: Livy 3. 27, 6. 2, 8. 29, 9. 26. In one odd exception in 408 BCE, a tribune managed to appoint himself as *magister equitum*, which upset the community, Livy 4. 57.
[301] Livy 4. 46-47.
[302] Livy 7. 12-15, 7. 20-21, 7. 22, 7. 24-25, 7.28. These are the examples which explicitly state that a master of horse was "given," found in my translation of the text.
[303] Livy 6. 39.
[304] Livy 6. 39-40.
[305] Livy 7. 20, 7. 22, 7. 24-25, 7. 28; One dictator was appointed in 353 BCE, who chose his own *magister equitum*. However, he was patrician and vocally against allowing plebeians into the consulship. Livy also uses ambiguous language such as "named as" for one of the dictators which does not indicate who chose the *magister equitum*, Livy 7. 8.
[306] Most significantly, these laws allowed plebeians to hold the consulship, see footnote 176 for more, also see Oakley, "The Early Republic," 18; Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome*, 338-341.

elite hold on the entire institution of the dictatorship. The theory is not watertight, as many of these dictators were still (to some extent) aligned with the aristocracy. Nonetheless, the change displayed that the dictator's role was fluctuating.

In addition, the master of horse's role may have evolved. A *magister equitum* never won a triumph, which may indicate they could not possess *imperium* or *auspicium*.[307] Some sources seem to indicate that a *magister equitum* was attended by six lictors, half of a dictator's, but a *magister equitum* is not reported with lictors until the late Republic.[308] The late appearance of lictors aligns with the theory that masters of horse were granted *imperium* at some point. It is also noteworthy that command power was expanded to more men during the difficult years of the Second Punic War.[309] By this time, masters of horse may have possessed *imperium minus*, a lesser degree of power.[310] It makes sense that in the era of increased warfare, having an extra commander with *imperium* would have been prudent. Perhaps this also helps to explain why masters of horse were assigned to dictators.[311] If masters of horse came to possess *imperium* (or were even equal to a consul, as Livy suggested) this meant the *magister equitum* would have been a more protected office. Perhaps allowing a dictator to choose an assistant with *imperium* was too risky, or else assigning a *magister equitum* was a new check to a dictator's power.

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[307] Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic*, 43-45.
[308] Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic*, 46.
[309] Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic*, 113; Rich, "Fear, Greed, and Glory," 50-51.
[310] Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic*, 44; Livy (23. 11) claimed that in 216 BCE a master of horse was equivalent to a consul.
[311] Livy also wrote about a dictator appointed without a master of horse in 216 BCE. This was a messy dictatorship. Marcus Fabius Buteo was appointed at the same time as another dictator. Buteo objected to this violation of the institution, along with being deprived of a master of horse, and most significantly, "granting the full power of the dictatorship…for any purpose other than that of directing operations in the field." This statement perhaps suggests that a dictator *rei gerundae causa* held more power than other forms. Although, Buteo was not appointed for military matters, making his statement confounding, see Livy 23. 23.

As time went on, not all masters of horse were content to act as lieutenant. If masters of horse were indeed given *imperium,* the evolution is reasonable. A more powerful master of horse would have been less likely to yield to a dictator. Regardless of the cause, Livy exhibited a demonstrable change in the master of horse's behavior. In 325 BCE, Rome was engaged in war against the Samnites. The consul overseeing the conflict fell ill, which led to the appointment of the dictator Lucius Papirius Cursor.[312] Papirius picked his own *magister equitum*, Quintus Fabius Maximus Rullianus. As the men were nearing Samnium, a flaw in the auspices was found by "the keeper of the sacred chickens."[313] As was customary, this was taken very seriously. Papirius quickly returned to Rome to properly retake the auspices. The dictator forbade the army and Quintus Fabius to take any action until he returned.[314] While Papirius was in Rome, scouts reported that the Samnites were unprepared for attack.[315] The young master of horse decided to defy the dictator's orders and seized the opportunity to strike. Livy described Quintus Fabius as either hungry for glory or "fired with indignation that all initiative should apparently be in the hands of the dictator."[316] Despite his disobedience, Fabius's ambush led to a successful battle, which—according to Livy—cost the Samnites some twenty-thousand casualties.[317]

Successes aside, the master of horse had defied Rome's supreme commander. Papirius further tried to safeguard his win by sending word of the success directly to the Senate (and not his commander). Papirius was furious with the insurrection. He even called for Quintus Fabius's execution, which seems to have been within the dictator's rights.[318] Papirius declared that the

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[312] Livy 8. 29.
[313] Livy 8. 30.
[314] Livy 8. 30.
[315] Livy 8. 30.
[316] Livy 8. 30.
[317] Livy 8. 30. This grandiose number is certainly inflated but is meant to emphasize Fabius's success.
[318] Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic,* 47.

defiance had undermined the sacred power of the dictator.[319] He felt the precedent would be harmful to the institution. The two men engaged in a ferociously jealous fight for credit. Quintus Fabius seemed to be afraid of the dictator's wrath. He assembled soldiers to support his assertion that he "had conducted himself as master of Horse and not as the dictator's orderly!"[320] Nonetheless, the incident was used as an opportunity to reinforce the dictator's power. Papirius gave a speech emphasizing that he left for religious reasons, meaning Quintus Fabius had violated both "our fathers' teaching and the gods' divine power."[321] Papirius inflated the entire incident, declaring that in blocking his punishment of Quintus Fabius, the tribunes would "destroy the lawful effectiveness of the dictatorship."[322] The conflict ended unspectacularly, as Papirius granted mercy because the people begged for it.[323]

In the end, Papirius may have been correct about the incident's adverse precedent. During the Second Punic War, a defiant *magister equitum* managed to be promoted to co-dictator for a short time.[324] The "acting-dictator" Quintus Fabius Maximus was strategically delaying the army's approach to Hannibal's men. Master of horse Minucius grew tired of Fabius's stalling and tried to turn the troops against him. The master of horse invoked "Camillus, that true Roman," as an example of decisive action.[325] Inopportunely, Fabius was summoned back to the city "to attend to certain religious matters" and urged Minucius to proceed cautiously and to continue the tactical delays.[326] The *magister equitum* did not listen and led a battle in the dictator's absence with "some success." Minucius sent "a letter full of braggadocio" back to

[319] Livy 8. 30.
[320] Livy 8. 31.
[321] Livy 8. 32.
[322] Livy 8. 34
[323] Livy 8. 35. Perhaps notable, as dictators did not customarily submit to the will of the masses.
[324] Livy 22. 25-26.
[325] Livy 22. 14.
[326] Livy 22. 18.

Rome after the modest victory.[327] Then, the government also began to turn on Fabius. A plebeian tribune declared that Fabius had delayed in the field in order to extend his dictatorship.[328] Enraged, the tribune asked "that power be shared equally between the dictator and the master of Horse."[329] Despite Fabius's protests that Minucius had acted recklessly, the decree was accepted.[330] The contention became even more apparent as the two co-dictators worked together in the field. Minucius was thrilled by the "equalization," feeling encouraged that he had broken the pattern "where mere masters of Horse had been in the habit of cringing like curs before the dictator's terrible rods and axes."[331]

Increased power for the master of horse or decreased reverence for the dictatorship may have instigated the newfound defiance. Granted, cases of insubordination come from Livy's later work, which contains generally more accurate information (or else it was harder for Livy to fabricate stories).[332] The early Republic was highly romanticized in the record, meaning insubordinate masters of horse may have been glossed over. Nonetheless, increasingly insolent masters of horse may have reflected shifts in power. Precedents like Quintus Fabius showed that as the Republic progressed, dictators were not as untouchable as they once were. The office's adaptability made it useful, but perhaps not all changes strengthened the position. The

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[327] Livy 22. 24.
[328] Livy 22. 23. Hannibal concurrently damaged the dictator's reputation by sparing Fabius's property while sacking and burning an area, and thus creating rumors of a treacherous alliance.
[329] Livy 22. 25.
[330] Livy 22. 25; Due to the ambiguities surrounding this case, I count Fabius and Minucius as a single dictatorship in this study; Dorey, "The Dictatorship of Minucius," 92. As Dorey described, Minucius appears in *the Fasti Capitolini* as the *magister equitum*, not a dictator of any kind. Perhaps because of this detail, Livy seemed to avoid calling Minucius a dictator. Instead, he just refers to Fabius and Minucius as sharing power. Minucius is said to be given *imperium aequum*, basically meaning equal power. Although a subtle distinction, this would mean Minucius was not formally made a dictator, but rather his *imperium* was made equivalent to that of Fabius's dictatorship; Livy also indicated he did not consider Minucius a dictator in the next year, as he wrote "two dictators holding office simultaneously was an unprecedented thing," in Livy 23. 23.
[331] Livy 22. 26-27. In the end, Minucius was attacked by Hannibal and asked to be relegated to his old position.
[332] Walsh, "Livy," 133. There are more sources to cross-reference with Livy's later work, which proves to be relatively reliable.

aristocracy and top magistrates were increasingly subject to both the will of the Senate and the people. Despite the dictatorship's privileged status, the institution was not immune to the growing impact of popular sovereignty.

h. Leaving Office

After completing his service, a dictator was meant to step down immediately and relinquish his power. Scholars almost unanimously agree that a dictatorship was limited to six months.[333] This was the typical length of a campaigning season, at least in the early Republic.[334] In general, six months was not a term length as much as a maximum limit. Once he had accomplished his task, an honorable dictator would resign. Almost every dictator obeyed the six-month term, if they did not step down even sooner.[335] Livy confirmed a six-month term,[336] although he wrote that many glorified early dictators resigned after only days or weeks. Debates surrounding the term limit usually discuss whether a dictator's term was tied to the consul who appointed him, or else the possibility of sporadic year-long terms.[337] In the end, these inquiries were not only inconclusive, but are also largely inconsequential. The term limit itself was not as revealing as the intricacies of resignations. Harris argued that term limits were a way for Rome to continue its delusion of democracy.[338] In turn, perhaps resigning was a means for the ruling classes to create the allusion of yielding to the people or the Senate. Relinquishing your office exhibited restraint,

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[333] Harris, *Roman Power*, 75; Mommsen, *History of Rome: Volume 1*, 252; Bonner, "Emergency Government," 146; Gizewski, "Dictator,"; Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome*, 227.
[334] Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic*, 38; Harris, *Roman Power*, 75; Mommsen, *History of Rome: Volume 1*, 252, Bonner, "Emergency Government," 146; Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome*, 227.
[335] de Wilde, "The Dictator's Trust," 556; There are several dictators who appear to serve for one-year in the *Fasti Capitolini*, Livy does not discuss this at any point, see Appendix B and Drummond *The Dictator Years*. Drummond generally concluded that there probably were not any dictators who served for a full year during the Republic.
[336] Livy 23. 23, 9. 34.
[337] de Wilde, "The Dictator's Trust," 555.
[338] Harris, *Roman Power*, 10-11.

which was an essential component of *fides*.[339] In order to maintain Rome's political system, magistrates had to (or at least appear to) check their individual ambition. Restraint is particularly pertinent to the dictatorship, which was effectively the most power a single Roman could hold. The "self-restraint of the ancients" is one of Livy's key lessons to readers.[340] He wrote often about resignations, both enthusiastic and forced. As a result, we are able to track a variety of resignation scenarios, which in turn demonstrated the dictatorship's fluctuating relationship to the people and the Senate.

In the early Republic, most of Livy's dictators accomplished their tasks quickly and decisively. A famous example is Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus, who resigned after just fifteen days in 458 BCE. He was appointed in response to the Aequian's brazen violation of a recent peace treaty. They had sacked several Roman towns and a consul's military encampment.[341] News of the attacks caused widespread panic in Rome. In the words of Livy, "the situation evidently called for a dictator,"[342] Cincinnatus was in exile on the outskirts of Rome, working diligently on his farm, "digging a ditch, maybe, or ploughing."[343] Soon, an envoy reached the farm and asked him to take supreme command. Cincinnatus simply brushed the sweat from his brow and asked his wife to bring his toga.[344] The newly-appointed dictator arrived in the city by morning. Cincinnatus promptly took command and prepared the populace for war. Within days, he led his soldiers into combat.[345] Just over two weeks after being summoned from his farm,

[339] Brennan, "Power and Process," 36; de Wilde, "The Dictator's Trust," 555-557; Le Bohec, "Roman Wars and Armies," 119.
[340] Livy 8. 33.
[341] Livy 3. 26.
[342] Livy 3. 26.
[343] Livy 3. 26.
[344] Livy 3. 26.
[345] Livy 3. 27.

Cincinnatus achieved victory, took the spoils, and resigned his dictatorship.[346] While this story is closer to myth than historical reality, Cincinnatus nonetheless serves as a fair archetype for the expectations of a Roman dictator.[347] An ideal appointee was meant to wield their power in service of the state, and surrender their office as soon as possible.

Livy told a myriad of similar stories in order to emphasize dictators' restraint. In 418 BCE, Livy wrote that Quintus Servilius Priscus achieved a great military victory and resigned after a term of one week.[348] Later, there was Titus Quintus Cincinnatus, who resigned after just twenty days in 380 BCE. The simple news of his appointment was enough to unite Rome's distraught plebeians and terrify the enemy.[349] Livy told us that Mamercus Aemilius's third dictatorship lasted just sixteen days, also providing him a military triumph.[350] These stories were likely exaggerated but stressed the symbolic weight of the term limit. A dictator who quickly relinquished his power showed respect for the Republic and the institution. Republican politics were built on the idea that officials had an obligation to practice self-control and behave moderately.[351] Especially in the early Republic, this helped the aristocracy to protect its supremacy. Honorable dictators continually expressed moderation, which made their substantial power easier to swallow. There are echoes of this in Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus's famous story. When the dictator first entered the city, Livy described ordinary citizens, who gathered in wary crowds, "by no means so pleased to see the new dictator, as they thought his power excessive

[346] Livy 3. 29. He may have resigned even sooner, but a trial extended his obligations.
[347] Forsythe, "The Beginnings of the Republic from 509 to 390 BC," 318-319. His second dictatorship is perhaps more fraught but similarly hyperbolic, see Livy 4. 13-15; Golden (*Crisis Management*, 11-41) opened his chapter on dictators with Cincinnatus's famous story and gave a detailed discussion of how he served as a dictator archetype.
[348] Livy 4. 46-47.
[349] Livy 6. 28-29.
[350] Livy 4. 31-34.
[351] Brennan, "Power and Process," 36.

and dreaded the way in which he was likely to use it."[352] By the end of his dictatorship, Livy portrayed Cincinnatus as unanimously adored.[353] Emblematic exhibitions of restraint manipulated plebeians to accept the aristocratic status quo, at least temporarily.

Resigning in protest served a similar function.[354] In 434 BCE, Livy described Mamercus Aemilius's second dictatorship. After an unproductive military effort, Mamercus decided to use his remaining term for domestic improvements.[355] Reinforcing the dictator's commitment to restraint, he rallied against the five-year term of censors.[356] The dictator found the long term to be unjust, as "the greatest safeguard" of the Republic, was "that great powers should never remain long in the same hands."[357] His proposal to shrink the term to a year and a half was extremely popular with the populace and easily passed. Upon completion of the vote, Mamercus immediately resigned as a mark of his "'disapproval of the extended tenure of power.'"[358] Livy clearly showed a dictator who used his power to reaffirm Republican principles. Similarly, in 494 BCE, a dictator resigned after the Senate refused to amend its policy on plebeian debt, which naturally won the dictator approval from the commons.[359] Resignations were a convenient technique to bolster the dictatorship's reputation among the people. In the case of these protest resignations, the dictators may have ironically strengthened their individual reputation, even at the expense of the Senate.

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[352] Livy 3. 27.
[353] Livy 3. 29.
[354] I only find two examples, which makes this type of resignation uncommon but emblematic (see below).
[355] Livy 4. 24.
[356] Brennan, "Power and Process," 65; Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic*, 116. Censors were usually former consuls with *auspicia*, they held the census of both property and citizen, as well as a subsequent ritual.
[357] Livy 4. 34.
[358] Livy 4. 23-24. Censors were understandably upset about this, but Mamercus handled the ridicule calmly.
[359] Livy 2. 30-31.

Nonetheless, not all dictators eagerly laid down their office. Livy included seven dictators who were forced to resign.[360] It seems that a dictator could not be legally fired or truly obligated to leave office. He could, however, be strongly compelled to do so, especially by the Senate. As discussed, Livy wrote of six resignations due to faults in the auspices.[361] These can be interpreted as either voluntary or compulsory. The remaining resignation was much closer to a dismissal. An odd appointment from the start, this dictator was Lucius Manlius, the disgraced dictator who was appointed for the nail ceremony in 363 BCE. He ignored his assigned religious task to seek war, causing backlash from the plebeian tribunes. Livy told us that he "either yielded to force or to a sense of shame and resigned the dictatorship."[362] Even after his resignation, the former dictator was put on trial. It is unclear why Lucius Manlius was selected for the dictatorship in the first place, as his reputation was poor. Besides his initial indiscretion, he imposed a detested levy, "was loathed for his violent temper," and mistreated his son.[363] Needless to say, he was unpopular. Lucius Manlius was not punished, but only because his blindly loyal son threatened suicide in retaliation for any charge against his father.[364]

The entire case was extreme and underlined the strangeness of a dictator being obliged to resign. Livy may have also villainized Lucius Manlius to underline his dishonorable actions. Although Lucius Manlius probably had the *imperium* to conduct war, he defied the unofficial constraints and expectations of his appointment. Seeking military glory was selfish, not for the good of Rome. Notably, Livy depicted Manlius's power being checked by the plebeian tribunes, who were tasked with defending the rights of the people. This dictatorship occurred after all

[360] Livy 6. 38, 7. 3-4, 8. 15, 8. 17, 8. 23, 9. 7 (two dictators in a row may have ousted here, but Livy was unclear), 22. 33.
[361] Livy 6. 38, 8. 15, 8. 17, 8. 23, 9. 7, 22. 33. See Chapter III-f "Ceremony and the Auspices."
[362] Livy 7. 3-4.
[363] Livy 7. 4.
[364] Livy 7. 5.

previously discussed resignations. So, Manlius's indictment was representative of the people's rising power. Plebeians still experienced significant oppression during this time. Yet, the people were able to impact "the thunderbolt of the dictatorship," which revealed that changes were slowly beginning.[365] In earlier years, dictators generally had full agency, as they resigned on their own terms. Manlius was essentially forced out of his office, which reflected subtle decreases in the aristocracy's dominance.

[365] Livy 6. 39.

IV. Conclusion

By understanding the Roman dictatorship as a dynamic and practical component of the Republican political system, the office is demystified. While we remain unsure of many legalities and specifics, the dictatorship's role is still traceable. As Livy succinctly described, it was "the usual practice in times of crisis."[366] Importantly, crises were not always military matters. As Rome's emergencies changed, so did dictatorship. The early Roman Republic was an aristocracy, run by a largely "closed" system of wealthy families.[367] Appointing a dictator was not a deviation from the existing power structure, but rather a vital emergency protocol. The appointment of a dictator was an effective solution for the specific crises of the time. A dictator calmed domestic riots, intimidated enemies, and streamlined military efforts, which at the same time reinforced aristocratic dominance.

Significantly, the Republic began as a small agrarian city-state. Near the founding of the Republic, 25,000 to 40,000 Romans were living in a territory of less than 1,000 square kilometers, about three-quarters the size of modern-day Rome.[368] Conflicts were also close to home, meaning the military was focused on fighting near-by battles. This meant a dictator could reach the field quickly. Dictators were appointed for largely local emergencies from a small and restrictive governing class. Early Republican officials largely earned their entry into politics by birthright. Subsequently, the dictatorship was also able to act as a stopgap for the amateurish politics of any underqualified magistrates. If the consuls of the year were performing poorly, a

[366] Livy 4. 18.
[367] Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic,"* 164. Lintott additionally explains the limited influence of non-elite.
[368] Rosenstein, "Republican Rome," 193, 196. These are free population numbers.

dictator allowed the Republic to reinstate a trusted politician. This evolved as the ranks of the elite opened slightly.

The shift away from a small patrician aristocracy may have increased the overall quality of Rome's politicians and created a system that was less cohesive, but ultimately more stable (for a period of time).[369] Not only was there a greater variety of offices, but there was also fiercer competition to obtain them.[370] In reference to Camillus, Livy wrote, "Rome would never have need of a dictator if she had such men in office, men so united in heart, as ready to obey command, and contributing glory to the common stock rather than drawing it from their own interests."[371] Although political motivations are never so purely patriotic, perhaps such a change began to occur.

Over the next few centuries, Rome expanded tremendously. Growing to the size of Delaware, Rome held over 5,000 kilometers and almost 350,000 citizens by 338 BCE.[372] Inopportunely, we have lost Livy's narrative for most of the third century BCE (about 291-222 BCE). Before the interruption, Livy ominously wrote that a 292 BCE plague, "was thought to be an evil omen."[373] When his history resumed in 222 BCE, the Second Punic War was brewing just as both Rome and Carthage were "at the peak of their prosperity and power."[374] Livy implied that dictators had not been used for many years, although recent appointments were listed in certain *fasti*.[375] By this time, Rome had swelled to about the size of Massachusetts, with 26,805 square kilometers

[369] Flower, *Roman Republics,* 24-25.
[370] Flower, *Roman Republics,* 52; Rich, "Fear, Greed, and Glory," 62.
[371] Livy 6. 6.
[372] Rosenstein, "Republican Rome," 195.
[373] Livy 10. 47.
[374] Livy 21. 1.
[375] See Appendix B; Kaplan, "Religious Dictators," 172-175; Livy 22. 8. Livy wrote of 217 BCE, "the government accordingly had recourse to the appointment of a dictator, a remedy which for many years had been neither wanted nor applied."

and 900,000 citizens. [376] During this "most memorable war in history," Livy reported many peculiar uses of the dictatorship, including two simultaneous dictators and an "acting-dictator" appointed by the people.[377] Rome was fighting stronger enemies, further from home, with more complex military operations.[378] It follows that one of Rome's oldest political institutions underwent modifications to suit an entirely different political landscape.

The remaining question is why this adaptable institution eventually disappeared. While the Roman dictatorship offered exceptional flexibility, it was ultimately created for a bygone political system. The dictatorship's irregular uses during the Second Punic War showed the furthest evolutionary limits of the dictatorship. By the end of the war, the Republic was operating under new offices and new systems that superseded the dictator. While Mommsen believed that dictatorships were discontinued because of public hatred, it is more likely that office was not needed.[379] Rome's emergencies were now large-scale wars, not nearby battles or domestic rioting. Opportunities for nondictatorial command positions also increased throughout the Republic. In many cases, longer term, less powerful commanders were more suited to the current conflicts.[380] Praetorships and prorogations (extensions of command) may have also helped to replace dictatorships.[381] Scipio Africanus's famous campaigns in his namesake continent allowed him to hold power (as general or consul) for over a decade.[382] Unlike a dictator, Scipio's third century BCE mission was "not limited by a definite date."[383] Scipio was the hero of the Second Punic War, so a lengthier period proved to be useful.

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[376] Rosenstein, "Republican Rome," 195.
[377] Livy 21. 1, 22. 8, 23. 23-25.
[378] Rosenstein, "Republican Rome," 200-205.
[379] Mommsen, *History of Rome: Volume 3*, 56. He called it an "all-along unpopular institution."
[380] Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic*, 112.
[381] Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic*, 4; Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome*, 372-373.
[382] Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic*, 194.
[383] Livy 30. 1.

The dictatorship was suited to increase efficiency for the small city-state of Rome, not the full-fledged Republic. By the third century BCE, the domination of one man was less practical. The Second Punic War also saw clearer laws and expectations on officials in the field, as they were greater in number and further from home.[384] A dictator was far less manageable than magistrates with inferior power, which may have also contributed. The dictatorial appointments of the Second Punic War diverged from custom and appear anomalous, but perhaps only because we are missing a century of Rome's progress in Livy. By understanding the greater arc of change, it is still evident that Rome had suitably altered the dictatorship, as well as their whole political framework. These various alterations in the Republic may have made dictators unnecessary, perhaps explaining why the position went out of use after 201 BCE.

In other words, the dictatorship vanished for the same reasons it was trusted for multiple centuries. As Livy's detailed narrative reflected, the Republic was a time of massive development and political innovation. As the sovereignty of the people was amplified and Rome itself grew, even fundamental concepts like *imperium* changed. Rome was able to expand and succeed because of its willingness to adjust old traditions to the constant evolutions of the state. The dictatorship had to be altered because Rome's political structure had fundamentally changed, meaning the office ultimately outlived its usefulness.

Consequently, there is also room to reconsider the divergent dictatorships of Sulla and Caesar. In 82 BCE, Lucius Cornelius Sulla was essentially granted a permanent dictatorship.[385]

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[384] Brennan, "Power and Process," 57; Drogula, *Commanders & Command*, 292-293; Rome continued the process of formalizing informal expectations, see Flower, *Roman Republics*, 65-66. Flower discussed 180 BCE's *lex Villa annalis*, which put age restrictions on magistrates, it may have been used to "enshrine accepted political custom," rather than to create change.

[385] Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic*, 113. Although Sulla only held the office for a year; Drummond, *The Dictator Years*, 570-571. Drummond argued that Sulla somewhat followed convention, in that he used dictatorship to compete a certain mission.

From 49 to 44 BCE, Gaius Julius Caesar held four consecutive dictatorships, before officially becoming *dictator perpetuo*.[386] Rome was no longer controlled by a small elite, which meant both late dictators were able to use mass support to enable individualistic power grabs. [387] Whereas traditional dictators were trusted to act in the best interest of the state, Sulla and Caesar used popular sovereignty to reinstate kinglike rule.[388]

Both of their dictatorships represented the kind of mob-rule that Livy disparaged. He spoke with contempt of Athenian democracy, critiquing that, "there is never any lack at Athens of tongues ready and willing to stir up the passions of the common people; this kind of oratory is nurtured by the applause of the mob in all free communities." [389] Caesar and Sulla resembled Greek tyrants or even Roman kings,[390] but not the traditional Republican dictatorship. Flower wrote that Romans saw tyranny as equivalent to "lawlessness,"[391] which arguably characterized the largely extralegal rises of Sulla and Caesar. Emergency dictators were not meant to upset the balance of power, but to preserve the Republic amidst dire circumstances. Conversely, the later dictators sought to win all control for themselves. Nonetheless, these new formations of the dictatorship still reflected a changed political system; the old aristocracy of the Republic was utterly deteriorated, and true supreme rule could be seized with popular support. As a result, perhaps the convention of isolating these two dictators is flawed. I still find Sulla and Caesar to be distinct from the dictatorships considered in this investigation. Yet, Sulla and Caesar clearly

[386] Degrassi, *Fasti Capitolini*, 186; Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic*, 113.
[387] Sulla used the support of troops to lead a series of bloody campaigns that successfully put him in power in 82 BCE. He was made dictator with virtually unlimited powers and term, see Konrad, "From the Gracchi to the First Civil War," 182-183; Mouritsen, *Politics in the Roman Republic*, 171. Caesar was very popular and able to get a decree passed that allowed a praetor to appoint him dictator, see Mouritsen, *Politics in the Roman Republic*, 1; Tatum, "The Final Crisis," 208.
[388] Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic*, 113.
[389] Livy 31. 44.
[390] Greek tyrants were aristocrats who used popular support to take power illegally; Cornell, *The Beginnings of the Republic*, 145-147. Cornell suggested similarities between Roman kings and Greek tyrants.
[391] Flower, *Roman Republics*, 11.

have a place in the lineage of the dictatorship. The implications of these abnormal dictatorships require further examination. Just as Livy's dictators mirror the evolution of the early Republic's aristocracy, Sulla and Caesar surely reflect the transformation and collapse of late Republican politics.

I do not intend this study to offer a conclusive portrait of the dictatorship. Regrettably, many facts about dictators have been lost to time. Instead, I hope to offer a methodology for continuing our examination of the dictatorship. Many aspects of the office's history are not challenged, often because the discipline is inclined to trust Mommsen's word. The work of Lintott and Flower, cited often in this study, attempted to revise standard narratives of the Republic. I offer a modest imitation of this method, which is meant to illuminate gaps in research and point to topics that deserve further investigation. Livy's narrative approach offers a unique window into the nuances of each dictatorship. While I have chosen Livy as a useful basis for this study, a similar methodology could be applied to any ancient historian, offering a different perspective on the dictatorship or any other political institution.

Arguments that delve into the minutiae of the dictatorship often become prescriptive, a mistake which often disregards the remarkable adaptability of Roman politics. Scholars that see the dictatorship as exceptionally monarchial or undemocratic have often lost sight of the wider scope of Republican politics. The dictatorship must be considered in the context of Rome's evolution from a small aristocratic state to a burgeoning world power which experimented with more inclusive politics. Close examination demonstrates that the dictatorship was not a political anomaly, but an effective tool of Roman government. Furthermore, this investigation highlights the problematic nature of representing Rome as anything near democratic. The Republic took

small steps towards popular sovereignty, yet the dictatorship persisted due to some glaringly aristocratic aspects of Rome's Republican political structure.

Despite conventional thought, the use of dictators was not remarkable or uniquely undemocratic, but consistent with Roman political practices.[392] The Republic was able to persist for many centuries because it was responsive and constantly adjusted to changing circumstances. The dictatorship, an ancient and esteemed office, is a perfect representation of Rome's ability to adapt while honoring their history. The Republic's political development—especially Livy's retelling of it—is characterized by tension between tradition and practical modifications.[393] Rigidly legalistic discussions of the dictatorship often fall short, because they attempt to condense centuries of innovation into neat official rules that simply did not exist. In the end, Livy's dictators act as an ideal microcosm of the continual adaptation and complexity of the Republic's constitution.

[392] For a critique of modern scholarship's interest in labelling Rome a democracy, see North, "Democratic Politics," 15; Harris, *Roman Power,* 10-11.
[393] Flower, "Introduction," 2; Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic,* 2; Pittenger, *Contested Triumphs,* 30.

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Appendix

a. Dictators in Livy

Approximate Date	Appearance in Livy	Name	Note
501 BCE	2. 18	Titus Lartius	or other, like Manlius Valerius, Livy found his identity to be uncertain.
496 BCE	2. 19-20	Aulus Postumius	
494 BCE	2. 30-31	Manlius Valerius	
458 BCE	3. 26-29	Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus	First dictatorship (see also 439 BCE)
439 BCE	4. 13-16	Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus	Second dictatorship (see also 458 BCE)
437 BCE	4. 17-20	Mamercus Aemilius	First dictatorship (see also 434, 426 BCE)
435 BCE	4. 21-22	Aulus Servilis	Surname is either Priscus or Structus, Livy is unsure.
434 BCE	4. 23-4. 24	Mamercus Aemilius	Second dictatorship (see also 437, 426 BCE)
431 BCE	4. 26-29	Aulus Postumius Tubertus	
426 BCE	4. 31-.34	Mamercus Aemilius	Third dictatorship (see also 437, 434 BCE)
418 BCE	4. 46-47	Quintus Servilius Priscus	
408 BCE	4. 57	Publius Cornelius	
396 BCE	5. 19-23	Marcus Furius Camillus	First dictatorship (see also 390, 389, 368, 367 BCE)
390 BCE	5. 46-55	Marcus Furius Camillus	Second dictatorship (see also 396, 389, 368, 367 BCE)
389 BCE	6. 2-4	Marcus Furius Camillus	Third dictatorship (see also 396, 390, 368, 367 BCE)
385 BCE	6. 11-16	Aulus Cornelius Cossus	
380 BCE	6. 28-29	Titus Quinctius Cincinnatus	
368 BCE	6. 38	Marcus Furius Camillus	Fourth dictatorship (see also 396, 390, 389, 367 BCE)
368 BCE	6. 39-42	Publius Manlius	
367 BCE	6. 42	Marcus Furius Camillus	Fifth dictatorship (see also 396, 390, 389, 368 BCE)
363 BCE	7. 3-4	Lucius Manlius Imperiosus	

362 BCE	7 .6-8	Appius Claudius	
361 BCE	7. 9-.10	Titus Quinctius Poenus	
360 BCE	7. 11	Quintus Servilius Ahala	
358 BCE	7. 12-15	Gaius Sulpicius	
356-357 BCE	7. 17	Gaius Marcius Rutulus	
353 BCE	7. 19-21	Titus Manlius (Torquatus)	First dictatorship (see also 348 BCE)
352 BCE	7. 20-22	Gaius Julius	
351 BCE	7. 22	Marcus Fabius	
350 BCE	7. 24-25	Lucius Furius Camillus	First dictatorship (see also 347-345 BCE)
348 BCE	7. 26	Titus Manlius Torquatus	Second dictatorship (see also 353 BCE)
347-345 BCE	7. 28	Lucius Furius Camillus	Second dictatorship (see also 350 BCE)
347-345 BCE	7. 28	Publius Valerius Publicola	
342 BCE	7. 38-42	Marcus Valerius Corvus	
340 BCE	8. 12	Lucius Papirius Crassus	
339 BCE	8. 12	Quintus Publilius Philo	
338-337 BCE	8. 15	Gaius Claudius Inregillensis	
336-332 BCE	8. 16	Lucius Aemilius Mamercinus	
336-332 BCE	8. 17	Publius Cornelius Rufinus	
332 BCE	8. 17	Marcus Papirius Crassus	
332-331 BCE	8. 18	Gnaeus Quinctilius	
327 BCE	8. 23	Marcus Claudius Marcellus	
325 BCE	8. 29-37	Lucius Papirius Cursor	First dictatorship (see also 310 BCE)
323-322 BCE	8. 38-40	Aulus Cornelius Arvina	
321 BCE	9. 7	Quintus Fabius Ambustus	

321 BCE	9. 7	Marcus Aemilius Papus	
320-319 BCE	9. 15-16	Lucius Cornelius	
317-315 BCE	9. 21	Lucius Aemilius	
316-315 BCE	9. 22-24	Quintus Fabius	
314 BCE	9. 26	Gaius Maenius	
313-312 BCE	9. 28	Gaius Poetelius	
313-312 BCE	9. 29	Gaius Junius Babulcus	First dictatorship (see also 302 BCE)
310 BCE	9. 38-40	Lucius Papirius Cursor	Second dictatorship (see also 325 BCE)
306 BCE	9. 44	Publius Cornelius Scipio	
302 BCE	10. 1-2	Gaius Junius Babulcus	Second dictatorship (see also 313-312 BCE)
302 BCE	10. 3-5	Marcus Valerius Maximus	
Break in Livy's History			
217-216 BCE	22. 8- 32	Quintus Fabius Maximus	Second dictatorship (as stated in Livy), "acting-dictator," *interregni causa*
216 BCE	22. 33	Lucius Venturius Philo	
216 BCE	22. 57-23. 31	Marcus Junius Pera	
216 BCE	23. 22-23	Marcus Fabius Buteo	
215 BCE	25. 2	Gaius Claudius Centho	
210 BCE	27. 5-6	Quintus Fulvius Flaccus	
207 BCE	27. 29-35	Titus Manlius Torquatus	
206 BCE	28. 1	Marcus Livius	
204 BCE	29. 10-11	Quintus Caecilius Metellus	
203 BCE	30. 24-26	Publius Sulpicius	
201 BCE	30. 39-40	Gaius Servilius Geminus	

b. The *Fasti*

Fasti were annalistic lists of elected officials, military triumphs, and other public events. Several of these records have survived, called the *fasti annales*. They were a key source and formed an outline of Roman politics for annalistic historians like Livy.[394] *Fasti* were often engraved on monuments and arches. The *Fasti Capitolini*, one of the most significant records for Roman history (and dictators in particular), is thought to have been originally displayed in the Forum.[395] It was rebuilt from fragments during the Renaissance, and now resides in Rome's Capitoline Museum. The *Fasti Capitolini* has its own set of limitations, which exemplify the issues with relying on *fasti* (especially in studying the dictatorship). Despite providing a simple list of names and dates, *fasti* were likely created with specific political motivations, making this information undependable.[396] The *Fasti Capitolini* was commissioned by Augustus during his reign for the purpose of public display, rewritten from old records.[397] The list was reconstructed and intended as a monument, which certainly created considerable incentive for exaggeration or falsification. Most *fasti* were likely incomplete and compiled centuries after the fact, which means that they must be used carefully when trying to recreate the dictatorship's earliest history.[398]

Unfortunately, we know little about dictators during the gap in Livy from 291 to 219 BCE. Details about this time are largely uncertain, in part because Livy is a crucial source for early Roman history. Although the *Fasti Capitolini* lists just under twenty appointments, not all entries

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[394] Livy relied heavily on the *fasti,* so any faults in the annals may also be replicated in his work, see Forsythe, "The Beginnings of the Republic from 509 to 390 BC," 316; Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 13; Armstrong, *War and Society,* 26-27; Livy perhaps preferred them to other sources, see Syme, "Livy and Augustus," 69.
[395] Beard, *The Roman Triumph,* 61-62.
[396] Simpson, "The Original Site of the 'Fasti Capitolini'," 61; Drogula, *Commanders & Command,* 8-10, 16; Raaflaub, "Between Myth and History," 134; Cohen, "The Origin of the Roman Dictatorship," 302.
[397] Forsythe, "The Beginning of the Roman Republic," 154.
[398] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome,* 13, 218; Beard, *The Roman Triumph,* 61-62.

are reliable. It is uncertain how many dictatorships occurred during this break, although appointments almost certainly decreased. Several dictators from this period appear exclusively in the *Fasti Capitolini,* which has provoked questions about their authenticity.[399] If we trust Livy, when his narrative resumed (just prior to the Second Punic War,) a long time had elapsed since the last dictator.[400]

In 217 BCE, Livy wrote that "the government accordingly had recourse to the appointment of a dictator, a remedy which for many years had been neither wanted nor applied."[401] For several reasons, this is puzzling. For one, Livy implied that a long time has passed since the last dictatorship. Even more significantly, he wrote that "the length of time had almost blotted the meaning of the dictatorship from the minds of citizens and allies alike."[402] This contradicts the *Fasti Capitolini*, as it lists dictatorships in 224, 231, and 264 BCE.[403] Livy certainly believed much longer than seven years had elapsed. If we trust the *Fasti Capitolini,* the last dictator was appointed less than ten years prior. Although this was to hold elections, so perhaps Livy meant a dictator *rei gerundae causa*.[404] Broughton made a general argument that we should trust Livy over the politically-guided *fasti*, although Livy certainly had his own objectives. Nonetheless, even within the *Fasti Capitolini,* dictators had become infrequent. So, perhaps we can conclude that the dictatorship was—to some extent—less prevalent.

The *fasti* list many dictators throughout the Republic that Livy does not include, as well as differing names and dates. Primarily, I use the *Fasti Capitolini* to determine the official

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[399] Kaplan, "Religious Dictators," 172-175.
[400] Livy 22. 8.
[401] Livy 22. 8.
[402] Livy 22. 11. Upon approaching the consul, Fabius "sent an officer to remind" the consul that "he much present himself to the dictator without lictors." This reaffirms Livy's assertion that there had not been a dictator in recent memory.
[403] Degrassi, *Fasti Capitolini,* 58-60.
[404] Degrassi, *Fasti Capitolini,* 58.

reasons for a dictator's appointment, as Livy is often unclear.[405] When it bears relevance, I discuss multiple instances in which Livy's text contradicted the *Fasti Capitolini*. An in-depth comparison of Livy's text to any *fasti* would undoubtedly produce findings worthy of a monograph. For the purposes of this study, I implement the *fasti* with caution and skepticism, and only as they apply to Livy's narrative.[406]

[405] Most relevant for Chapter III-d "Circumstances for Appointment."
[406] This is good practice for all early Roman sources.