

## RICH RULERS

During the Republic, Rome was ruled by the Senate - a group of 300 men drawn from important patrician families. To qualify for the Senate, a man had to own a vast amount of land, but once appointed he held the job for life. It was considered a great honour to be chosen. Senators were expected to spend lots of money on entertaining, providing for their supporters and paying for public buildings, and some senators ended up bankrupt.

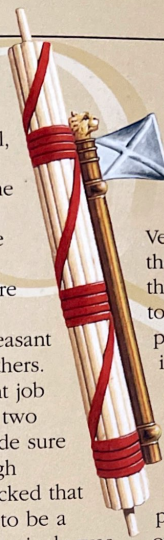
A coin showing the Senate House in Rome



## TOP JOBS

After being consul, it was possible a man could become a proconsul and govern one of the Roman provinces abroad. Some were considered more important and pleasant to govern than others. Another important job was done by the two censors, who made sure there were enough senators and checked that anyone claiming to be a Roman citizen genuinely was one. In dire emergencies, the Senate sometimes appointed one man to be dictator for a time. He had absolute authority over everyone else.

The fasces - an axe tied to a bundle of rods - was the symbol of a consul's power.



## POWER TO THE PLEBS

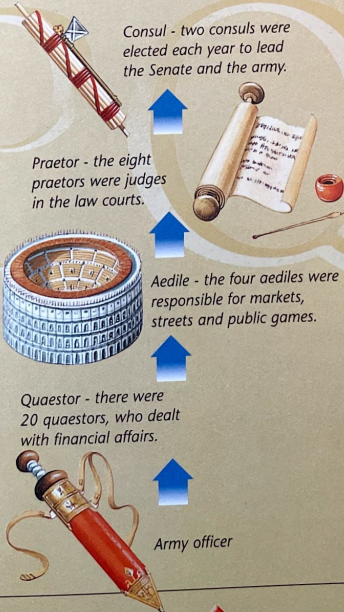
Very early in Rome's history, the plebeians - especially the wealthy ones - began to resent the patricians' power and wanted a share in governing the city. In 494BC, the plebeians actually threatened to leave Rome and start a city of their own. So the Senate agreed that the plebeians could set up their own council, and elect officials - called tribunes - to protect their interests.

In 450BC, after riots by the plebeians, a list of laws known as the Twelve Tables was drawn up and displayed in the Forum. This meant that everyone knew what the laws were and could check if the judges were following them.

Over the years, plebeians won the right to become senators and stand for government positions themselves. The first plebeian consul was elected in 366BC, and after 287BC all decisions of the Plebeian Council had to become law - even if the Senate didn't agree with them.

## THE CAREER LADDER

For a young Roman who wanted a career in politics, the road to the top was long, difficult and very expensive. After spending a few years in the army, the budding politician had to get himself elected to a series of government positions. The most senior position was that of consul. The pictures on the right show the usual career path for an ambitious Roman.



# SPQR

These letters stand for Senatus Populusque Romanus (the Senate and people of Rome). They are often found on Roman carvings.