

Henry J. Walker. "The Old Roman Senate and the Young Tyrant Nero."  
CAMWS Meeting, Lincoln, NE.  
1:00 pm, Saturday, April 6, 2019.

**[1] Seneca's Legacy**

quod unum iam et tamen pulcherrimum habeat, imaginem vitae suae relinquere testatur.

He [Seneca] bequeaths to them the only thing he still possesses, but the most beautiful thing he possesses, the image of his life.

Tacitus, *Annals* 15.62

**[2] The Disappearing Republic**

quotus quisque reliquus qui rem publicam vidisset.

How few were left who had seen the republic.

Tacitus, *Annals* 1.3

**[3] The End of Roman Elections**

Tum primum e campo comitia ad patres translata sunt: nam ad eam diem, etsi potissima arbitrio principis, quaedam tamen studiis tribuum fiebant. neque populus ademptum ius questus est nisi inani rumore, et senatus largitionibus ac precibus sordidis exsolutus libens tenuit.

It was then for the first time that the elections were transferred from the Campus Martius to the Senate. For up to that day, though the most important rested with the emperor's choice, some were settled by the partialities of the tribes. Nor did the people complain of having the right taken from them, except in mere idle talk, and the Senate, being now released from the necessity of bribery and of degrading solicitations, gladly upheld the change

Tacitus, *Annals* 1.15

**[4] The Iron Law of Oligarchy**

For unlike the nobles, they had not exchanged liberty for slavery. They had passed from the domination of an oligarchy to the domination of a monarch.

Lily Ross Taylor, *Party Politics In The Age Of Caesar*, 1949, p. 182.

[5] In all ages, whatever the form and name of government, be it monarchy, republic, or democracy, an oligarchy lurks behind the façade; and Roman history, Republican or Imperial, is the history of the governing class.

Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution*, 1939, p. 7.

[6] Who says organization, says oligarchy.

Robert Michels, *Political Parties*, 1915, p. 401.

**[7] Sallust on Oligarchy**

nam postquam res publica in paucorum potentium ius atque dicionem concessit, semper illis reges, tetrarchae vectigales esse, populi, nationes stipendia pendere; ceteri omnes, strenui boni, nobiles atque ignobiles, volgus fuimus sine gratia, sine auctoritate, iis obnoxii, quibus, si res publica valeret, formidini essemus.

After the republic fell under the dominion and control of a few powerful men, kings and rulers have constantly been paying tribute to them, people and nations have been paying taxes to them. But all the rest of us, good hard-working people, noble or not, we have been a mob without favor, without influence, dependent on those men; if this were a real Republic, they would be terrified of us.

Sallust, *Conspiracy of Catiline* 20.7

#### [8] Herodotus on Oligarchy

ἡμεῖς δὲ ἀνδρῶν τῶν ἀρίστων ἐπιλέξαντες ὁμιλίην τούτοισι περιθέωμεν τὸ κράτος· ἐν γὰρ δὴ τούτοισι καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐνεσόμεθα.

We should choose a group of excellent men and endow them with full power: for of course, we ourselves will be among them.

Herodotus 3.81

#### [9] Kylon's Conspiracy, 632 BC

οἱ δὲ Ἀθηναῖοι αἰσθόμενοι ἐβοήθησάν τε πανδημει ἐκ τῶν ἀγρῶν ἐπ' αὐτοὺς καὶ προσκαθεζόμενοι ἐπολιόρκουν. χρόνου δὲ ἐγγιγνομένου οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι τρυχόμενοι τῇ προσεδρία ἀπῆλθον οἱ πολλοί, ἐπιτρέψαντες τοῖς ἐννέα ἄρχουσι τήν τε φυλακὴν καὶ τὸ πᾶν αὐτοκράτορσι διαθεῖναι ἢ ἂν ἄριστα διαγιγνώσκωσιν: τότε δὲ τὰ πολλὰ τῶν πολιτικῶν οἱ ἐννέα ἄρχοντες ἔπρασσον.

When the Athenians saw this, the entire People ran from the fields and came to the rescue against these men [Kylon's men], sat down, and besieged them. As time went by, the Athenians were worn out by the siege, so most of them went away. They trusted the nine archons to keep watch, and the archons had absolute power to arrange everything as best they could according to their own judgement. At that time, the nine archons carried out most of the political activities.

Thucydides 1.126.7-8

#### [10] Anti-Tyranny Law (between 632 and 594 BC)

θέσμια τάδε Ἀθηναίων καὶ πάτρια: ἐάν τις ἐτυραννεῖν ἐπανιστῶνται ἢ συγκαθιστῇ τὴν τυραννίδα, ἄτιμον εἶναι καὶ αὐτὸν καὶ γένος.

These are the ancestral rules (θέσμια) of the Athenians: If anyone rebels in order to rule as a tyrant, or helps to set up a tyranny, he and his family will be outlawed.

*Constitution of Athens* 16.10

#### [11] Solon's Anti-Tyranny Law 594/3 BC

καὶ τοὺς ἐπὶ καταλύσει τοῦ δήμου συνισταμένους ἔκρινεν, Σόλωνος θέντος νόμον εἰσαγγελίας περὶ αὐτῶν.

And it (the Areopagus) tried men who had joined together to overthrow the People, since Solon had made an impeachment law about such men.

*Constitution of Athens* 8.4

#### [12] Oligarchy and Monarchy

ἐν δὲ ὀλιγαρχίᾳ πολλοῖσι ἀρετὴν ἐπασκέουσι ἐς τὸ κοινὸν ἔχθεα ἴδια ἰσχυρὰ φιλεῖ ἐγγίνεσθαι· αὐτὸς γὰρ ἕκαστος βουλόμενος κορυφαῖος εἶναι γνώμησιν τε νικᾶν ἐς ἔχθεα μεγάλα ἀλλήλοισι ἀπικνέονται, ἐξ ὧν στάσιες ἐγγίνονται, ἐκ δὲ τῶν στασιῶν φόνος: ἐκ δὲ τοῦ φόνου ἀπέβη ἐς μοναρχίην.

In an oligarchy, a lot of men are pursuing success in the state, and they tend to develop strong personal hatreds. Each man wants himself to be the leader and his ideas to prevail, so they end up with great hatred against each other. This hatred results in civil strife, and civil strife results in killing, and from this killing the rule of one man emerges.

Herodotus 3.82.3

### [13] The Athenian Oligarchy and the Peisistratids

τὰ δὲ ἄλλα αὐτῆ ἢ πόλις τοῖς πρὶν κειμένοις νόμοις ἐχρῆτο, πλὴν καθ' ὅσον αἰεὶ τινα ἐπεμέλοντο σφῶν αὐτῶν ἐν ταῖς ἀρχαῖς εἶναι.

In every other way, the city itself continued to use its existing laws, except to the extent that they [the Peisistratids] took care that one of their own held political office.

Thucydides 6.54.6

### [14] Kleisthenes and the Peisistratids

To find here the name of Kleisthenes is a discovery of some importance, for it has been believed that the Alkmeonidai were in exile from the time of their expulsion by Peisistratos until the overthrow of the tyranny of Hippias.

Meritt, *Hesperia* 8 (1939) 61.

### [15] The End of Athenian Oligarchy

κατασχόντος δὲ τοῦ δήμου τὰ πράγματα

The People had taken control of the government.

*Constitution of Athens* 20.3

### [16] Democracy as the Default

οὐδέποτε ἐν δημοκρατίᾳ κάκιον ἐπολιτεύθημεν.

We have never had a worse government under a democracy.

Isocrates 7 *Areopagiticus* 15

### [17] Well-behaved Athenians 358 BC

ἐν δὲ τῷ προκρίνειν τοὺς ἐπιεικεστάτους τὸν δῆμον ἔσεσθαι κύριον ἐλέσθαι τοὺς ἀγαπῶντας μάλιστα τὴν καθεστῶσαν πολιτείαν. αἴτιον δ' ἦν τοῦ ταῦτα τοῖς πολλοῖς ἀρέσκειν καὶ μὴ περιμαχῆτους εἶναι τὰς ἀρχάς, ὅτι μεμαθηκότες ἦσαν ἐργάζεσθαι καὶ φεΐδεσθαι.

By electing the most suitable candidates, the People would have the power to choose men who loved the existing constitution. The reason why this pleased the majority and why they did not fight over political office was that they had learned how to work hard and be frugal.

Isocrates 7 *Areopagiticus* 24

### [18] Anti-Tyranny Law 337/6 BC

μὴ ἐξεῖναι δὲ τῶν βουλευτῶν τῶν τῆς βουλῆς τῆς ἐξ Ἀρείου πάγου καταλελυμένου τοῦ δήμου ἢ τῆς δημοκρατίας τῆς Ἀθήνησιν ἀνιέναι εἰς Ἄρειον πάγον μηδὲ συνκαθίζειν ἐν τῷ συνεδρίῳ μηδὲ βουλεύειν μηδὲ περὶ ἐνός·

It shall not be permitted for the councillors of the Council of the Areopagos, if the People or the democracy at Athens have been overthrown, to go up to the Areopagos or to sit in session or to deliberate about anything.

