

The Impact of War on Censorial Building Programs in the Middle Republic

The censorship is a curious, unusual, and understudied office in the Roman political state. Yet, it was also one of the most important, viewed as the culmination of an individual's political career. The control of the census, the Senatorial lists, and the membership of the equites gave the censors significant control over the social makeup of the city. Even more permanent, however, were the censorial building programs overseen by these officials. The significant funds made available to the censors allowed the many censorial colleges to impact the physical makeup of the city to a greater degree than many other magistrates.

The extent of these building programs, however, varied wildly, especially in the Middle Republic. Some colleges transformed the physical landscape of Rome, while others only contracted minor repairs. To be sure, this may have simply been a matter of personal choice. Far more likely, however, is the influence of external factors.

This paper will focus on the Middle Republic, when there was no greater external factor than the series of great Roman conflicts, particularly from the Hannibalic Wars of the third century BCE to the Third Macedonian War of the mid-second century BCE. By examining the building programs of the censors during this period, there is much that we can learn about issues relating to resource abundance versus stress, as well as the influence of new ideas and the needs of empire resulting from Roman expansion.

Critical to this analysis will be the extensive programs under censors such as Cato, who focused on transforming Rome to meet its new needs as an imperial center in the wake of the costly Second Punic War. The sources reveal that such improvements included sewage systems, Hellenistic-inspired roads, and naval facilities, all of which were driven by the influx of money and slaves from Roman conquests. As I hope to show, the censor often found himself in

politically challenging times, when he was compelled to fit the demands and requirements of his office to the shifting fortunes of Rome amid a period of turbulence and expansion. By focusing on this particular office during this time period, we will also be able to gain additional insight into the strengths and weaknesses of Roman administration amid a rapidly changing world.