

THE ROMAN SENATE AS CICERO SAW IT: A STUDY BASED ON SELECTED LITERARY WORKS OF CICERO

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The Roman senate is commonly regarded as the quintessential embodiment of ancient Rome and its ideals. From the foundation of Rome to its eventual decline, the senate stood as one of the most dominant institutions, holding an unparalleled position of power in Roman politics as well as in the broader spectrum of the ancient Roman society. In the corpus of literary sources pertaining to the ancient Roman senate, the works of Cicero clearly stands out, especially due to the controversial relationship that developed between the senate and Cicero as well as Cicero's own personality. In such a context, the present study considers the Roman senate during the late Republic as depicted through Cicero's works, in view of considering Cicero's attitude towards the senate, particularly within the social, political and cultural framework of the late Republic, and ultimately determining how fair a picture of the senate he projects through his works.

The research was conducted through analyzing some of Cicero's definitive works (in their original), along with those of other ancient historians, for the purpose of comparison. Views of modern scholars and critics were duly considered with regard to the interpretation of ancient evidence; through the analysis of their books, journal articles and research papers.

Upon synthesizing the collected references found in Cicero and other ancient writers along with modern scholarship, it is apparent that Cicero's depiction of the senate in his works is idealistic, and is defined by his own philosophical convictions as reflected in his philosophical treatises. On the one hand, for Cicero the senate represented the living embodiment of the Republican values. On the other hand it was only the senate that had the capability to provide Rome and its people with the guidance that was desperately needed, especially during a critical time as the late Republic. Thus, for Cicero the senate became not only the nucleus of the best form of government that is logically realizable, but also a necessity for its proper functioning. However, it should be noted that, though Cicero had an idealized conception about the senate, he was not blind towards its certain weaknesses. Through his political Cicero makes it a point to emphasize and vehemently criticize certain vices, weaknesses and the overall hypocrisy of the senate.

It is indeed interesting to see that Cicero attributes the weaknesses and vices he observes in the senate not to the institution that is the senate, but rather to the people that work the institution. This is exactly why Cicero does not want to compromise the role and position that he attributes to the senate. For according to Cicero, the wellbeing of the society, the freedom of the people, justice and virtue of the city and the very existence of the Republican ideals depend on the role that the senate plays in the organism of government. In conclusion it could be derived that, though this attitude towards the senate had opened him to a number of criticisms of duplicity, inconsistency and even wishful thinking, the fact that Cicero devotion to his own political ideals and moral standards set forth by his philosophical ideologies should provide an explanation as well as some degree of justification to his conduct.