

Document 16: Professor Fergus Millar

Background

The following text is from *The Crowd in the Late Republic*, written by Professor Fergus Millar in 1998. The book focuses on the role of Roman people in the government during the final decades of the Roman Republic. Millar is a British historian and professor of Ancient History at Oxford University.

The constitution of the Roman Republic made it a variety of democracy. Every adult male citizen, unless specifically disqualified, had a vote, and there was no formal exclusion of the poor. Free slaves could also vote. . . . The system within which they voted was characterized by the feature that all voting, without exception, took place within subgroups (Tribal or Century Assemblies). Within each subgroup, the principle of the majority vote prevailed. The vote of each subgroup . . . was determined by the majority of group votes. . . . The formal powers of the citizen as voter were divided into three categories. First, there was a residual role of the assembly to meet as criminal courts. . . . Then there were elections, conducted by either the Century Assembly or the Tribal Assembly. . . . The most fundamental of all the rights of the people was, however, the fact that they, and they alone, could legislate. Proposals for laws could be put before them only by a limited group of elected annual magistrates. . . . The normal assembly for the passage of laws was the Tribal Assembly. . . . The exclusive right of the assemblies to pass legislation is by far the strongest reason why, in purely formal terms, the Roman Republic has to be characterized as a democracy.

Vocabulary

- **anomalous:** different from what is standard or expected
- **legislate:** make laws