



Res publica, forma rei publicae, SPQR

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Claudia Moatti

Res publica, forma rei publicae and SPQR.

When Fergus Millar published his book *The Crowd in Rome in the Late Republic*, it raised considerable debate among the historians of the late Roman Republic. Coming in the wake of several articles, this book underlined the role of rhetoric and persuasion as proof of political participation in Rome. To rapidly sum up his argument, Millar emphasized the real power of the fraction of the Roman people who participated in the elections and voted on the laws. He clearly argued that, in Rome, politics existed as an unpredictable world. Several historians responded to this construction. For example, Henrik Mouritsen instead emphasized the ritualistic aspect of Roman politics and the passive role of the people. In Germany, historians followed a sociological approach to the topic (through Max Weber and Pierre Bourdieu), focusing on what they called the “political culture” of the elite — the consensus on ethics, on rules, values, and rituals — and on the forms of symbolic domination. Not only did these historians reject the idea that any ideological debate existed between the members of the elite, but, like Christian Meier, they thought that politics was so embedded in the social that the late Republic faced a “crisis without alternative”: the deficit of politics would explain the passage to monarchy.

It is precisely the definition and the evaluation of Roman “politics” that is at stake in these debates. What kind of city was Rome? Was it similar to a Greek one or was it radically different? The great merit of Fergus Millar’s work is precisely to have introduced more politics, and thus more movement in the description of Republican Rome. My goal today is to follow up on his argument, but with another method.

Instead of analyzing the role of the people, I shall look *at the language of politics*, especially at the notion of *res publica*, one of the most important political notions, besides *populus* and *civitas*, and one of the most understudied. What I propose here, summarizing some ideas that will shortly be published in a book¹, is not a history of ideas, nor a history of the concept and its meanings. Instead, I am looking at what the uses of the word in different contexts can tell us about the workings of Roman politics.

My argument is that *res publica* does not have a precise meaning; it was what the citizens made it, through common action or through conflict. This uncertain character is confirmed by the old conception of the Roman constitution as composed of *partes*, the list of which cannot be strictly defined. In the second century, however, a formalization emerged, designed to put an end to the conflicts: the mixed constitution and the ideological need for consensus became the new model for part of the elite. This process of formalization ended with the Augustan invention of the SPQR.

The language of politics (democracy, republic, liberty, etc.) is never fixed and clear; it is open to interpretation and this is where politics lies. This is why we have to take into account the

¹ Res publica. *Histoire discontinue de la "chose publique"*. Forthcoming.

plurality of the points of view when analyzing ancient politics, since there is no absolute truth in this domain. Plurality means looking at the historicity and at the discontinuities of political language. Who is speaking, with what purpose, what stakes? Lexical continuity hides these discontinuities, diachronic as well as synchronic, and it is the work of the historian to analyze them.

In the case of *res publica*, however, there is a greater difficulty. Unlike other political words, like *politeia*, where we hear the word “polis”, or *democratia*, where we hear “demos”, or in opposition to any other noun like “shoe” or “table”, *res publica* has no explicit referent. It is, like the word “God”, a signifier without a signified. This imprecision explains why the word was used to refer to the royal period as well as to the Roman Republic and the Empire. It also explains why, in Medieval Ages, it was claimed by the partisans of the Emperor and by the communal movement, by the Christian community and by lay powers. *Res publica* is indeed a vague notion, as Cicero said².

The Greek translations of *res publica* (*politeia*, *to koinon*, *ta dêmosia pragmata*, *ta koina*) only capture one aspect of the notion, but not the imprecision of the “thing”; and the plural (*pragmata* or *koina*) does not render the singular *res*. In contrast, modern languages have preserved the same uncertainty (République, Republic, repubblica) which may have conditioned the history of politics in the West. Only “commonwealth” does not share this fuzziness: but the “common good” is not the “public thing”.

If we agree that any language provides a worldview, then we have to deal with two issues: what effect did this imprecision have on Roman society? And what was at stake when a part of the elite tried to clarify and formalize it?³

Res, res publica, res populi

Res publica was written in two words whose order could be reversed (*publica res*), and which had many equivalents: *res romana*, *res summa*⁴, sometimes just *res*⁵. It is evident that *res* is the most important of the two words. But *res* has no a priori referent, as I have already said. Rather, it is a kind of carryall an envelope, that may be filled or not. It is why I call it a “kenotic notion” and the history of the notion can be seen as a pendular movement from void to full. Void, as when Caesar said, according to Suetonius, that *res publica* was just a

² Cicéron, *de oratore* II. 67 : *res publica* is for the orator a vague and broad topic, *vagam et liberam et late patentem*.

³ Here, I will only discuss the *res publica romana*, and not the local *res publicae*.

⁴ We find *res romana*, *communis* ou *romana publica* (Plaute, *Amph.* 10 ; Accius, *Brutus*, 36, Klot 366 : *pulcherrime auguratum est rem Romanam publicam summam fore.*) ; *res summa nostra publica*, *summa* (Plaute, *Mercator*, 986 ; Accius, *Decius*, v.15 (ROL, II, p.552) ; Plaut. *Merc.* 985.

⁵ Ennius, *Ann.* IX, 2 about Fabius Cunctator: *unus homo nobis cunctando restituit rem* ; Cato, fragm.LVI (*dissuasio legis Iuniae de feneratione* (191 av.JC) (ORF 8.56) : *Camerini cives nostri oppidum pulchrum habuere, agrum optimum atque pulcherrimum, rem fortunatissimam*. Also, according to the majority of modern historians, the most common title of the dictators until the 3rd century BCE was *rei gerundae causa* (F. Hurllet, *La dictature de Sylla : monarchie ou magistrature républicaine ?*, Brussels-Rome, 1993 ; followed by A. Giovannini, *Les institutions de la République romaine*, Bale, 2016, p.91). But there is no clear evidence for this in the sources, although the expression is used in a military context (Liv.10.42 for example). In that case, it is possible to more generally translate “dictatorship to deal with the conflict”.

word (*appellatio*) without any corpus or species⁶; full when *res publica* was assimilated by synecdoche to one or several elements, the armies, the cult of the gods, the *aerarium* for example; or when the Senate voted the so-called *senatus consultum ultimum*.

A *res*, in fact, existed insofar as it was the subject of action. In the 2nd century CE, the jurist Gaius rightly presented Roman law through three categories: *personae*, *res* and actions (*Instit.*I, 8). He meant that a *res* is given legal (and social, economic) existence because there are persons in conflict to whom the praetor gives an action. *Res* thus presupposes a plurality of actors and their interaction⁷, and interaction here means debate and litigation — an idea that the neuter plural of the Greeks cannot render.

I would like to insist on this idea of litigation. As several historians of law have shown⁸, in private law *res* forms a constellation with *lis* (trial) and *causa* (the legal definition of the case): *res* is the affair in question in a particular trial⁹. We can easily understand how, by extension, *res* came to designate the “asset” about which there is a trial. The asset is, so to speak, the *corpus* of the affair, but in Latin there is only one word (*res*) that means the affair as well as the asset; the *corpus* is understood from the sole point of view of the judicial case. The same meanings can be found in *das Ding* in German, that precisely comes from the Saxon word *Thing*.

This judicial constellation is also valid in a public context. In the *sc de bacchanalibus* of 186 BCE, *res* covers the whole affair in question: as the subject of the deliberation of the senate (*ea res cosoleretur*), of the conflict opposing Rome and the followers of Bacchus, and of the consul’s inquiry and repression against them¹⁰.

If we apply these remarks to *res publica*, we can say that *res publica* is the world of affairs about which the citizens have conflicts or debates, and about which they act in common. The word *res* unifies the variety of these affairs, and this highlights the fact that to have something in common does not mean there is a consensus on it. Such a definition also presupposes spaces

⁶ Suet. *Jul.* 77.1.

⁷ This idea of the plurality and of the materiality of the world does not only appear in imperial jurisprudence, as wrote J. Pocock, “The ideal of citizenship since classical times”, in *Theorizing Citizenship*, ed. R. Beiner, New York : 1995, p. 33-55.

⁸ M. Bretonne, *I fondamenti del diritto romano. La cosa e la natura*, Rome-Bari: 1998 ; Y. Thomas, “La valeur des choses. Le droit romain hors la religion”, *Annales* 2002/6, p.1431-1462.

⁹ The most ancient example is *XII Tables* I.6-8 (*FIRA I.p.21 ff*) : Table 6 REM UBI PACUNT, ORATO (Auct., *Her.*, 2, 13, 20 ; Scaur., *Orthogr.*, p. 2253 ; Prisc., *Inst. gramm.*, 10, 5, 32 ; Fest., P. 199): When the parties agree on the matter the magistrate shall announce it; table 7: 7. – NI PACUNT, IN COMITTO AUT IN FORO ANTE MERIDIEM CAUSSAM COICIUNTO. COM PERORANTO AMBO PRAESENTES (Auct., *Her.*, 2, 13, 20 ; Gell., 17, 2, 10 ; Scaur., *Orthogr.*, p. 2253 ; Quint., 1, 6, 11 ; Gaius, 4, 15). If they do not agree the parties shall state their case before the assembly in the meeting place or before the magistrate in the market place before noon. Both parties being present shall plead the case throughout together; Table 8: 8. – POST MERIDIEM PRAESENTI LITEM ADDICITO (Gell., 17, 2, 10 ; Plin., *N.H.*, 7, 60, 212 ; Censorin., *de die nat.*, 23. If one of the parties does not appear the magistrate shall adjudge the case, after noon, in favour of the one present.

¹⁰ *Remains of Old Latin*, IV, p. 255, n.26, line 9.

for negotiation. In the *lex Irnitana*, the clause *de rebus proferendis* concerns the suspension of trials, comitia, decurional meetings — the closure of all the places of speech and action¹¹.

If this demonstration is right, then *res publica* is by no means a pre-defined entity, or a political regime: it is the result of citizens' interaction. We can also see why litigation was the main matrix of the political in Rome, why private law was a source of metaphors (*societas*, *procuratio*, *restitutio*) for thinking about politics, and the forum a synecdoche of *res publica*. In the same way, in medieval Iceland and Scandinavia, the *þing* or *Thing*, was a court, sometimes simultaneously a place of debate¹².

Finally, in this conception, the “people” is nothing more than those who are concerned by the affairs, and in the old locution *res populi*, an expression that we find for the first time in Plautus (*Poenulus*, 524-5), *populi* is just a genitive of relation.¹³

Several consequences can be drawn from these remarks on the uncertainty and the imprecision of the ‘public thing’. They explain why physical presence was mandatory for citizens to act; and why unjustified absence was considered a kind of fraud. The focus on action suggests that early citizenship had a performative quality. The procedure of the census confirms this assertion: it was the declaration (*professio*) itself which involved the public recognition of citizenship and not the reverse¹⁴.

Modern historians have not sufficiently taken into account the importance of this idea of action, which was pertinent at all levels of society. The archaic world was primarily a space of exchanges and of power, forced or free, between men, and also between men and nonhuman things. The notion of *mancipium*, the power of action on men and things, corresponds exactly to this conception. It was only in the late republic that absolute property of things (*dominium*), as distinct from the power over persons, would be recognized¹⁵. By that time, the notion of status had changed, as had the notion of *res publica*.

The first process of formalization

We have seen that *res publica* presupposes a plurality of actors, in a plurality of spaces, concerning a plurality of affairs, litigious or not. This conception corresponds to the description of the *res publica* as composed of *partes*, which all play a role in the political life of the city, although they are not all on the same level¹⁶ (*populus plebesque*, *populus senatusque*, *populus Romanus militesque*)¹⁷.

¹¹ *AE*, 1986, 333 K.

¹² L. Musset, *Nordica et Normandica* (1947), 1997, p. 121-126; G. Karlsson, *The History of Iceland*, Minneapolis, 2000.

¹³ Bretonne, *I fondamenti*, *op. cit.*, 1998, p. 34 ; L.H. Szantyr, *Lateinische Grammatik*, II, Munich, 1965, p.74-76.

¹⁴ On the role of recognition in archaic times, see C.Moatti, « Reconnaissance et identification des personnes dans la Rome antique », in *L'identification des personnes. Genèse d'un travail d'Etat*, éd. G.Noiriel, Paris, Belin, 2007, p.27-55 (notes p.228-39).

¹⁵ See F. de Visscher, “Observations sur les origines du *dominium* romain”, *Etudes de droit romain public et privé*, Milan, 1966 ; M. Kaser, *Das Römische Privatrecht*, 1971, II, n 11 p. 401.

¹⁶ For example, the relationship between the people, or the Senate, and the magistrates is contractual in nature and is different from the relationship between the people and the Senate, or between the

This division into "parts", which emphasizes the social rather than the institutional, is undoubtedly the oldest conception, if we follow Cicero who explained that "in the text of the XII Tables, all the interests and all the parts of the city were described"¹⁸. As Pietro Catalano has suggested, this interpretation perhaps may even come from the pontifical tradition. It can be found in Cato the Censor¹⁹, in Sallust²⁰ or in Livy when he speaks of the conflicts of the orders²¹.

Listing the parts of the *res publica* was an endless task. Not only the Senate and the popular assemblies, but also the plebeian institutions, the priests, the army, and even the *pater familias* could be included in this list. From this point of view, political community appears to be plural, which confirms what we have said about the openness of the *res publica*.

Seen in terms of plurality and asymmetry, the "public thing" is thus constituted as an open whole, without any unifying principle. Even the reference to tradition does not necessarily play a unifying function: next to the *mos*, there were the *ius* and the *lex*, and there were conflicts between them; legal pluralism reflects the plurality of the *res publica*. The notion of *auctoritas* is another example of this plurality: it was not limited to the Senate, it could also characterize the people, the jurists, or the priests²². Thus, like an *anamorphosis*, the nerve center of the *res publica* moves constantly depending on the case in question.

However, a new model appeared during the second century, the mixed constitution. This reflected a new mode of thought, as Quintilian explains:

Diuisione autem adiunari finitionem docet, eamque differre a partitione quod haec sit totius in partis, illa generis in formas. Partis incertas esse, ut 'quibus constet res publica', formas certas, ut 'quot sint species rerum publicarum', quas tris accepimus: quae populi, quae paucorum, quae unius potestate regerentur.

[Cicero] further shows that definition is assisted by *division*, which he distinguishes from *partition*, making the latter the dissection of a whole into its parts and the former the division of a *genus* into its *forms* or *species*. The number of parts he regards as being

plebs and its tribunes. The priest's influence was linked to their knowledge, a secret knowledge (the calendar, the law or the relationship to the gods). On this point, see A. Schiavone, *Ius. L'invention du droit en Occident* (Turin, 2005) Paris, 2011, p 77 ff.

¹⁷ And which are themselves composed of *partes*: hence the expressions *Populus Romanus Quiritium et Patres conscripti*. Capito, a jurist from the end of the Republic, also presented the *populus* as composed of *partes*: *omnis pars civitatis omnesque eius ordines* (Gell.10.20.5).

¹⁸ Cic. *de orat.* I. 43, 193: *descriptis omnibus civitatis utilitatibus ac partibus*. It is interesting to note that in the political context of the end of the Republic, *pars* also means faction.

¹⁹ P. Catalano, 1974, pp. 667 ss; "Divisione del potere e potere popolare": <http://www.dirittoestoria.it/iusantiquum/articles/catalano.pdf>

²⁰ *Bell.Cat.*, 4.2: *partibus rei publicae*.

²¹ Liv. II, 42: *Tribuni plebi popularem potestatem lege populari celebrabant; patres satis superque gratuiti furoris in multitudine credentes esse, largitiones temeritatisque inuitamenta borrebant. Acerrimi patribus duces ad resistendum consules fuere. 7. Ea igitur pars rei publicae uicit nec in praesens modo, sed in uenientem etiam annum M. Fabium, Caesonis fratrem, et magis inuisum alterum plebi accusatione Sp. Cassi, L. Valerium, consules dedit.*

²² TLL 1.1 and A. Magdelain, *Ius, Imperium, Auctoritas. Etudes de droit romain*, Rome, 1990, p. 685-86.

uncertain, as for instance the elements of which a respublica consists; the *forms or species* are, however, certain, as for instance the number of forms of government, which we are told are three, democracy, oligarchy, and monarchy. (Quintilien, *Institutio oratoria*, Book 5.10.63)

These two definitions of *res publica* do not refer to the same mode of division: one refers to *partes*, from a very concrete and practical point of view; the other refers to *formae* and *species*, and this involves a formalization of the political according to the Greek typology. But let's go further.

In the second model, dating from the second century, the form determines the *res publica*. There are only three elements: the people, the senate, and magistrates. They have definite functions, and are defined only in relation to the whole, whose unity is postulated a priori. This is the Aristotelian idea of the composite body whose identity is defined by the mode of composition, not by its components²³. Indeed, what matters in this second model is that the *res publica* is structured in a certain way, because, as Quintilian said, the forma is fixed: "*Partes incertas esse, ut quibus constet res publica, formas certas, ut quot sint species rerum publicarum, quas tres accepimus, quae populi, quae unius potestate regerentur*". So that if one of the elements changes, the structure, and then the nature of the *res publica* change. Hence the idea that it can disappear or be radically transformed from within. The mixed constitution is indeed based on harmony between well-identified parts, on the rational and almost mechanistic interplay of the different actors. The theory of consensus, which modern historians have taken as a feature of ancient societies without considering its ideological character, is based on these premises. The place of conflict cannot be the same in these two configurations, *partes* and *forma*. In the first, conflict is part of the political game, it is somehow the division of the different parts which is the organizing point of the world's political vision. This is, for example, how Caesar interprets his relation to the senators in the 50s. In this conception, politics is the unpredictable, case by case, outcome of the tensions between the *partes*. Each has its own logic and their interaction can produce unity but also division. We could say that the *res publica* is basically divided, but that division is constantly shifting; *res publica* may alternately decrease or increase but it cannot disappear, except if destroyed from the outside. The whole does not thus come before the *partes*, it is only the result of their association or of their relations. It is immanent to the parties.

In the second configuration, however, conflict threatens the very identity of the state and even its existence, because it changes its structure. The violence of the repression of Tiberius

²³ Aristotle, *Politique* III, 3 1276 b. Cf *Topica* VI 13 150b22-26 : "the mere mention of its elements is not enough to make the thing intelligible. For the essence of any compound thing is not merely that it is a product of so-and-so, but that it is a product of them compounded in such and such a way, just as in the case of a house: for here the materials do not make a house irrespective of the way they are put together." (transl. W.A.Pickard). On the Aristotelian conception of identity, see C. Moatti, "Conservere rem publicam. Sur la continuité et la discontinuité des Etats" in *The Dream of Scipio*, Conference proceedings, La Maison française d'Oxford, 21-24 May, 2007, in *Revue de Philosophie ancienne*, 2011, 4 (n.99), 471-488.

Gracchus and his followers, then of the “seditious” *populares*, cannot be thought of without taking into account this transformation in the conception of politics.

These mutations have various consequences for our own understanding of the late Roman Republic. I cannot develop all my considerations here, but I would like to sum up the main points.

First there is the issue of “alteronomy”. The original notion of *res publica* and its description in *partes* allow us to think, following Machiavelli, that Roman society traditionally tolerated or rather dealt with conflicts and divisions. Rome was a political society, like the Greek cities. I call that toleration a capacity for “alteronomy”, to imagine alternatives and changes²⁴. This is what the new conception changed. Consequently, the late Republican crisis was not a crisis of consensus, as has often been said, but rather the expression of the incapacity of a part of the elite to face the conflicts. The mixed constitution, wrote Polybius, put an end to them; in this state of things, he adds, “everyone stays in its place” (6.5.17). It seems that in the second century a part of senatorial elite clearly sought to control political life, and, under the pretext of achieving this *concordia potestatum*, as Cicero would say (*leg. agr.* 2.6.14), to limit the number of possible changes. The mixed constitution was the perfect theory for that, with its idea of unification and rationalization²⁵. But it was not the reality of Roman society, it was only a part of it.

The second issue was the substantialization of the *res publica*, as is shown by the numerous measures taken “in the name of the *res publica*”: the so-called *senatus-consultum ultimum* voted *ne quid res publica detrimenti capiat*; the Sullanian measures against the tribunes and his penal legislation to punish the crimes against the *res publica*; the senatorial decisions made throughout the first century against those who were accused of acting *contra rem publicam*; and the Augustan law of majesty, to quote but a few²⁶. These measures impose a new idea: that of the necessary unity of the *res publica*, able now to become a norm of action. The *res publica* not only became a closed body, where the whole determines the parties — hence the exclusion of whatever threatens unity — but it was idealized, reified. It became an abstraction, in the name of which it was possible to kill the citizens, and eventually a concept. The development of allegories attest to this process: the *res publica* is presented in

²⁴ On this concept and its use in studying politics, see C. Moatti, “Historicité et altéronomie : un autre regard sur l’histoire”, *Politica antica*, 1, 2011, p. 107-118.

²⁵ According to A. E. Astin (*Scipio Aemilianus*, Oxford, 1967, p. 61 et seq; 288-293), Scipio Aemilianus’ political actions — the appeal to the people for his election to the consulate in 148 BCE (*App. Ib.* 112), and the popular support in 135 during his campaign for the second consulate (*Plut., Aemil.* 38, 4) —, reveal the opposition to the spirit of the mixed constitution. But, while the events of 135 cannot be read in the light of what Scipio was 15 years before, the Polybian chapter on the role of the superstition in Rome (6.56.6), as well as the monarchic character of the consulate, or the chapter 6.14 on the power of the people in the field of honours, rather confirm the idea of a Scipionic model of the constitution.

²⁶ On this topic, see C. Moatti, “De l’exception à la norme. Réflexions sur la défense de la *res publica* aux II^e et I^{er} siècles avant J.C.”, in *La norme sous la République et le Haut-Empire romains*, T. Itgenshorst-Hiller and Ph. Lecoq eds, forthcoming, Bordeaux, 2017.

the sources as an entity able to act, to guide people, with a voice and even a figure; the people being no more than an abstraction, a kind of corporation²⁷.

Lastly, the mixed constitution reveals a will to put an end to the uncertainty, to the unpredictable division, and to rationalize politics through a clarification of the nature and the working of the *res publica*. Historians have noticed that in the Polybian description, the tribunes of the plebs are very marginal. Polybius only alludes to them — to explain in passing that they could oppose to the consuls (6.14). The reason is not that Polybius did not want to be exhaustive, but that the mixed constitutions involved a process of “reduction” of the number of principles. Sulla’s reforms and the Ciceronian model refined this conception.

Once the constitution was defined, then the extermination of subversive elements indeed appeared to be the only way to maintain social and political peace. The invention of emergency measures and the promotion of heroic defenders of the *res publica* are clearly delineated in this vision of unity. It would be Augustus’ mission to complete this process of reduction by inventing SPQR as the final title in Rome.

*SPQR*²⁸

The expression *Senatus populusque romanus* is often considered the traditional way in which to refer to the city of Rome. Although we find evidence of it during the Republic, it was not formalized before the end of the period, nor was it commonly used in official texts. The formula typical of the Greek decrees: “it has pleased the Council and the People” was almost never found in Rome²⁹; the subject of the decision was either the Roman people³⁰, or the Senate. On the other hand, the Greek cities sometimes honored “the Roman people and the Senate”, as in the dedication on a golden crown at Delos dated 170 BCE.³¹; as for the Roman magistrates, they usually addressed the cities with their traditional formulas “to the Magistrates and the Council” of the city³², “to the Council and the people”³³, to the

²⁷ C. Moatti, *Res publica*, forthcoming, chapter 4.

²⁸ I would like to thank Patrick Le Roux and Arnaud Suspène for their remarks, suggestions and critiques on this section of the article. Any errors or imperfections however, naturally remain my own.

²⁹ We also find the formula *senatus consulto populi iussu* (ILLRP, 357) in an honorary inscription from the Republican period (difficult to date precisely) and dedicated to a certain C. Poplicius L.f. Bibulus, plebeian aedile, who was publicly (*publice*) awarded a site on which to erect a funerary monument for himself and his descendants — which was in itself extremely rare (Cic. *Phil.* IX 6,14 ; 7,17) (see also below note 44). Other formulae associating Senate decrees and the will of the people can be found in Livy (34, 6: *aut senatus decrevit aut populus iussit*), 37,19 ; 42 36 ; 38, 48 ; 41 ; 7.

³⁰ For example, Sherk, *RGE* 15.

³¹ *ID* 465. See also *ID* 2484 : a marble altar dedicated to Roma in a private sanctuary for the Egyptian gods in Delos. It was erected to thank the Senate and the Roman people, who allowed those faithful to the Serapis to honor their god.

³² Sherk, *RDGE* 38 (= *RGE* 16) : Letter to the Delphians 189-188 BCE.

³³ Sherk, *RDGE* 47 (= *RGE*, 57): Letter of Q. Mucius Scaevola to Ephesus 98/97 or 94/93 ; Sherk *RDGE*, 35 (= Sherk *RGE* 14): Letter from Scipio to Herakleia in Karia 190 BCE.; *SEG* I, n.440: Letter from Scipio accordant l’inviolabilité au temple de Colophon.

magistrates, the Council and the people, or “to the city”³⁴. What did these expressions represent for the Romans, if not primarily a Greek language? However, the emergence of the formula in Latin may also be another aspect of the formalization of political life in the late Republic, along with the idea of the mixed constitution, also influenced by Greece.

There was an area in which the expression took on its full sense in Rome, and that was in external affairs. Two epigraphic documents attest to this. The first reports on a decision, made in 189 BCE by Aemilius Paullus to restore lands to a vanquished people: “The imperator L. Aemilius, son of Lucius, decrees that the people living at Turris Lascutana, as slaves of Hastenses, will be freed. He ordains that they shall possess, in law and in fact, the lands and the town that they currently possess, as long as the people and the Senate shall will it (*dum populus senatusque | Romanus vellet*). Signed in the camp on January 21.”³⁵ A second document presents the same context and the same formula: the Tabula Alcantarensis (dated 104 BCE) concerning the submission (or *deditio*) of a people on the Iberian peninsula to the Romans, and the restoration of their lands and laws by the general Lucius Caesius. Once again the text states that the restitution will be effective “as long as it is the will of the Roman people and the Senate” (*dum populus [senatusque] Romanus vellet*).³⁶ This reflects the normal sequence of the process for the ratification of a treaty: the general commits, the people votes, and the senate confirms³⁷. However, we can note that in numerous other cases, indeed most frequently, the restitution of land, presented as a request to the Roman people, is granted by a decree from the Senate alone.³⁸

³⁴ Sherck, *RGE* 50 ; 59b, 62, 63, 64, etc.

³⁵ *CIL*, I², 614 = II, 5041 = D. I.15 ; *FIRA* I, 51 ; P.F. Girard and F. Senn, *Les lois des Romains*, Naples, 1977, p.343-44. See L.A. Garcia Moreno, “Sobre el decreto de Paulo Emilio y la “Turris Lascutana”, *Epigrafía hispánica de época romano-republicana*, Zaragoza, 1986, 195 et seq.

³⁶ R. López-Melero et al, “El bronce de Alcantara” », *Gerion* 2, 1984, 265-283 ; C. Castillo, “Miscelanea epigráfica hispano-romana” *SDHI* 52, 1986, 353-94 (*AE* 1986, 304; *AE* 1987, 474; *HEp* 2, 1990, 191); J. Richardson, *Hispaniae. The development of Roman Imperialism, 218-82 a.C.*, London, 1986, 199-201 (English translation in appendix); *AE*, 1987, 474 ; 1991, 965. On the restitution of land in the Iberian Peninsula see M.J. Pena, “Importance du rôle de la terre dans la première période de la présence romaine dans la péninsule ibérique”, in *Structures rurales et sociétés antiques (actes du colloque de Corfou)*, ed. Panagiōtēs Doukellēs, Lina G. Mendōnē, Besançon, 1996, p.329-337. We note that in this formula “populous” comes first, perhaps because of the fact that the lands initially confiscated became the property of the Roman people (F. Martín, “La formula *populus senatusque Romanus* en el bronce de Lascuta”, *Epigrafía hispánica de época romano-republicana*, Zaragoza, 1986, p.237. See also the Senate decree concerning Ariarathes V and the city of Priene (155-154) where the expression “neither the Senate nor the People” is almost certain (Serk, *RDGE* 6B = *RGE* 32, and <http://droitromain.upmf-grenoble.fr/Senatus/Prienensibus1.gr.html>).

³⁷ On the expression *Populus senatusque* which was the most frequent expression according to Cicero, *ad Fam.*15.2.4, see P. Costa *Storia del diritto romano*, I, Florence 1906, p. 233 et seq.

³⁸ See, for example the letter from Spurius Postumius and the Senate decree concerning Delphi, 189 BC (J. Pouilloux, *Fouilles de Delphes*, III, 4, 4, Paris, 1976, n. 353= Sherck, *RGE*, 15) : “Know that it has been decreed by the Senate that...”; the same thing was used in a letter from a consul to the Delphians (Sherck, *RDGE* 38 = *RGE* 16).

In the first century, however, other than its relatively frequent presence in literary sources from Sallust, Caesar, and especially Cicero³⁹, reference to the senate and the Roman people appears in a series of documents concerning either the attribution of privileges to peregrine cities, after a treaty (we are thus still in the context of external affairs), or the attribution of individual honors.

The first kind of text seeks to make Roman institutional process clear and visible for foreigners, as we can see in this inscription from Aphrodisias in Caria, concerning the privileges of the city: “Clause taken from the concession of privileges by the imperators, by the Senate and the Roman people” (εἶδος ἐκ τῶν δεδομένων φιλανθρώπων ὑπὸ τε Αὐτοκρατόρων καὶ συνκλήτου καὶ δήμου Ῥωμαίων).⁴⁰ This is the same context as the Senatorial decree of 78 BCE concerning the three Greek navarchs who had supported Rome in the Italian War. The senatorial decree refers to the fact that the “Senate and the Roman people judged their actions good, courageous and loyal to the *res publica*”, which justified the sc. (ILLRP, 513= FIRA I, 35).⁴¹

There are fewer of the second kind of texts. One of them is the testimony of Pliny the Elder, who refers to the decision of the censors of 158 BCE to clear the forum of statues of former magistrates – except for those which had been erected *e populi aut senatus sententia*⁴². Indeed, the attribution of honors to citizens, emanating from the “Senate and the Roman People”, was quite rare in Rome: most of the statues were traditionally erected by private individuals. In the Roman city there was no honorific tradition equivalent to that of the Greek cities where there is an abundance of decrees associating the people and the boulè in the decision to honor an individual:⁴³ the Roman tradition authorized individual initiatives. From the first century however, Roman *imperatores*, already honored in the eastern cities of the Mediterranean,⁴⁴ also received significant public honors in Rome – according to a procedure that remains unclear. The attribution of a golden crown to Pompey in 61 BCE

³⁹ Cicero, *ad Fam.* XV, 2, 4; *ad Brutum* I.4 (letter from Brutus); *Balb.* 28.64; *Planc.* 10.26; *Sest.* 22.49; *dom.* 24.64; *Sall. Ing.* 9.21; 21.4; *Caesar, BC.* 3.8; *Liv.* 7.31.10; 10.7.7; 24.22; 34, 6; 37, 19, etc. To these examples should be added a number of variations, for example Cic., *de rep.* I.19.31: *senatum uero et populum ut unum habeamus et fieri potest*.

⁴⁰ J. Reynolds, *Aphrodisias and Rome*, London, 1982, n. 9.

⁴¹ Sherck, *RDGE* 22 (= *RGE* 66). In the same vein see the Senatorial decree concerning Ariarathe and the city of Priene (155-154) which refers to a decision made by the Senate and the Roman people (Sherck, *RDGE* 6B= *RGE*, 32).

⁴² Pliny, *NH*, 34.30.

⁴³ A. Wallace-Hadrill, “Arcs de triomphe romains et honneurs grecs. Le langage du pouvoir à Rome”, in N. Belayche ed, *Rome, les Césars et les villes aux deux premiers siècles de notre ère*, Paris, 2001, 60 et seq. When the Senate voted for a *supplicatio* or a triumph, it was above all to thank the gods for a victory; as for the people’s prerogatives in terms of distinctions (Polybe 6.14.4), they concerned only the election to the magistrature (*honores*).

⁴⁴ Pompey for example was honoured in Mytilene (*SIG*³ 751), and in Magnesia on the Maeander (*SEG* XVII 525 = Sherck, *RGE*, n.75); Caesar was honoured in Athens (*SEG* XIV 121), or Pergamon (*IGRR* IV 305 = Sherck, *RGE*, n.79); Brutus in Athens (*SEG* XVII 75).

See also the file put together by J.L. Ferrary, “Les inscriptions du sanctuaire de Claros en l’honneur des Romains”, *BCH* 124, 2000, p. 336-376.

stems from tribunician law; the honors awarded to Caesar between 46 and 44 BCE clearly come from the Senate.⁴⁵ In this context, the inscription of Aesernia, dated between 44 and 41 BCE (depending on the date proposed for the *lex Rufrena*⁴⁶) recalling Caesar's apotheosis, is striking in its precision: *Genio Deivi Iuli/parentis patriae, /quem senatus populusque Romanus in /deorum numerum /rettulit*⁴⁷.

From this period onwards, references to "the Senate and the Roman people" became more and more frequent. There are sixteen such references in the *Philippics*, on two instances associated with *res publica* (5.19; 13.6), and numerous occurrences in Cicero's correspondence between 44-43 BC, for example in letters to and from Brutus.⁴⁸ The expression belonged to a language common to part of the elite, which made the association between the people and the Senate the guarantee of legality and legitimacy. To a certain limited extent it illustrates the institutional functioning of the city – a sort of condensation of the Roman constitution.⁴⁹ While tensions and conflicts between the Senate (the self-proclaimed defender of the *res publica*) and the people, between the *senatus-consulta* and the laws, had animated political life since the Gracchi, consensus between them appeared to be the condition necessary for the end of violence.

There were differences among them, however, as we can see in the exchanges between Cicero and Brutus concerning Gaius Antonius, one of Mark Antony's brothers, who was Brutus' prisoner in 43 BCE. Brutus considered that it was the responsibility of the Senate and the Roman people to decide his fate. For Cicero and Cassius, in the period of crisis that followed Caesar's death, and in perfect harmony with *The Dream of Scipio*, the *res publica* – an idealized and indivisible entity – was incarnated in the providential man, who stood above

⁴⁵ Suetonius said that he received numerous honours from the Senate and the Roman people (I.45) yet he specifically mentions the "Senate decrees" (I.78); Dio Cassius evokes the decisions made by "the Romans": for example the attribution of a house (XLIII, 44.6 et seq.). However, he mainly makes a list of the Senate "decrees" (XLVIII. 43.1; 44.1 ; 46, 1 ; and especially XLIV, 3sq) that he presents as a strategy to bring about his downfall. Nowhere here is it a question of the Senate and the Roman people. See J.-L. Ferrary. "Loi(s) confirmant des pouvoirs et honneurs exceptionnels décernés à César par le Sénat après la victoire de Thapsus (?)", in *Lepor. Leges Populi Romani*, under the direction of Jean-Louis Ferrary and Philippe Moreau. [En ligne]. Paris: IRHT-TELMA, 2007. URL : <http://www.cn-telma.fr/lepor/notice3000/>. Updated on: 23/07/14)

⁴⁶ See M. Coudry. "Loi Rufrena sur l'érection de statues à Divus Iulius dans les cités d'Italie (pl. sc.?)", in *Lepor. Leges Populi Romani*, edds. Jean-Louis Ferrary and Philippe Moreau. [online]. Paris:IRHT-TELMA, 2007. URL : <http://www.cn-telma.fr/lepor/notice642/>. Date de mise à jour :10/07/14 .

⁴⁷ *CIL*, I², 799= IX, 2628 = ILS 72. See L. Gasparini, 'Ancora sul frammento cesariano di Taranto', *Epigraphica*, 33 (1971) 48-51 ; W. Kierdorf, 'Funus und consecratio. Zu Terminologie und Ablauf der römischen Kaiserapotheose', *Chiron* 16, 1986, 47-9; G. Bonamente, «La scomparsa del nome di Cesare negli elenchi dei Divi», in D. Poli (a cura di) *La cultura in Cesare*, Atti del Convegno di Macerata-Matelica (30 Aprile-4 Maggio 1990), Roma 1993, 707-73.

⁴⁸ For example: *Ad Brut.* (to Cicero) I.4.2: *senatus aut populi Romani iudicium esse de iis cinibus qui pugnantes non interierint* ; I.18.2 (Cicero to Brutus): *in tanto senatus populiue consensu*.

⁴⁹ It is interesting that for Cassius Dio, the main change between the Republic and the Empire was the shift from a government "by the Senate and the Roman people," in other words public government, to a secret government (52.19.2-3).

all, including the Senate and the Roman people. This was how he suggested to Brutus that he should execute the man who was no longer a citizen because he had become a partisan of the public enemy. It was this *res publica* that the triumvirate took over, with its ambivalent title *rei publicae constituendae* and practices, in terms of the election of magistrates for example. It is worth noting that although, on several occasions, the question of the restitution of power was raised and although the traditional organs of government were consulted, the formula *senatus populusque romanus* did not appear as such in the documents of this period.⁵⁰

The expression did not reappear until Actium. In 30 BC the *lex Saenia* authorized Octavian to create patricians (Tac., *Ann.* 11.25.3) – which, in the *Res Gestae* became: “*Patriciorum numerum auxi consul quintum iussu populi ac senatus*” (8.1) — a very unusual description of the way a law was voted. But it was especially in an honorific context that the formula was used: in the inscription on the arch commemorating his three triumphs in 29 BCE (ILS 81)⁵¹, or in that on the Rimini arch, dated from the second half of the year 28 BCE. “The Senate and the Roman people, to Emperor Caesar Augustus, son of divine Iulius Caesar, having received the seventh imperial acclamation, consul for the seventh time, consul-elect for the eighth, for having decided and paid for the reparation of the Via Flaminia and the other very distinguished roads of Italy.”⁵² The honors of the year 27 BCE were placed under the same sign. After announcing the restitution of the *leges et iura populi Romani*⁵³ or presenting himself as the *Libertatis populi Romani Vindex*⁵⁴, Augustus gathered the Senate on January 13 27 BCE and announced that he would “render to the Senate and to the People of Rome the power of deciding about the public affairs” (RGDA 34). On that day numerous honors were dedicated to him, including the installation of a “golden shield” in the Curia, the inscription on which indicates that it was given to him by “the Senate and the Roman people”, in recognition of his virtues. Augustus recounts this in the *Res gestae*, and it is confirmed by two inscriptions, one in Rome and the other in Arles⁵⁵, where there is a marble copy of the *clipeus virtutis*: “The Senate and the Roman people have given this golden shield; to Emperor Caesar Augustus, son of the divine Caesar, consul for the eighth time, because of his courage, his clemency, his justice and his piety towards the gods and the homeland (*Senatus / populusque Romanus / Imp(eratori) Caesari divi f(ilio) Augusto / co(n)s(uli) VIII dedit clipeum / virtutis clementiae / iustitiae pietatis erga / deos patriamque*).

⁵⁰ See F. Millar, “Triumvirate and Principate”, in *The Roman Republic and the Augustan Revolution*, U. North Carolina, 2002, p. 241-270: p.244 et seq, in particular.

⁵¹ CIL, VI, 873 = ILS, 81 : *Senatus populusque romanus / imp. Caesari divi Iuli f. cos. quint., cos. design. sext., imp. sext., / re publica conservata*.

⁵² CIL IX, 365 = ILS 84 : *Senatus Populusque Romanus / imp. Caesari divi f. Augusto imp. sept.) / cos. sept. designat. octavom (via Flaminia (et reliqueis) celeberrimeis Italiae vieis consilio (et sumptibus) eius munificis*.

⁵³ As evidenced on the aureus of 28 BCE: see J.W. Rich and J.H.C. Williams, *Leges et iura PR Restituit*. A New Aureus of Octavian and the Settlement of 28-27 BC, *NC*, 159, 1999, pp. 169-213 ; and D. Mantovani, “Leges et iura P.R. restituit”, *Athenaeum*, 96, 2008, p. 5-55.

⁵⁴ RIC I 10. Discussion in M. Pani, “Paradigmi della lotta politica”, in Pani ed., *Epigrafia e territorio*, IV, 1996, p.295-98 especially ; Mantovani, *art. cit.* n.55, p. 5.

⁵⁵ Arles, 26 a.C (?) : CAG-13-05, p 361 = AE, 1952,165 = 1954, 39 = 1955,82 ; Rome: CIL 6, 40365 = AE 1994, 227 .

There are many other examples that follow this, always in the context of honors awarded to Augustus or his family⁵⁶. We could even say that the joint reference to the Senate and the Roman people is anchored in this politics of honors. This represented a considerable change from the republican tradition, and the formula became a slogan of the emperor.

Proof of this lies in the acronym SPQR which would come to be used on money and inscriptions by the Augustan regime and then by all subsequent emperors who sought to evoke it.⁵⁷ The first instance of this, to my knowledge, is the imperial coinage produced in mints generally situated in Iberian Peninsula.⁵⁸ They are dated between 19 and 18BCE, after the victories against the Parthians in 20BCE, and then in 17BCE⁵⁹. They have also been

⁵⁶ For example: Tab. Siarensis, lignes 9-21 (*AE* 1984, 508) ; sc de Pisone, ll.12-45 (A. Caballos, W.Eck and F. Fernández, *El Senadoconsulto de Gneo Pison Padre*, Sevilla: 1996); see also *AE*, 1899,146 (*HD* 016341= *CIL*, VI, 40325 (2 av.J.C.) in honour of Caius Caesar.

⁵⁷ J.B Giard gives several examples in his *Catalogue de monnaies de l'Empire romain. II. De Tibère à Néron*, Paris, 1988 : Tiberius n. 55; 93 ; Caligula : 37 ; 40 ; 43 ; 49-50; Claudius : 58-59 (in 46-47 CE), 68 ; 72 (in 49-50) ; Nero : 155-157 ; 160, 170-174, etc. See also Vespasian : *ILS* 255 ; 292 ; etc).

⁵⁸ Some researchers instead consider that this coinage was minted in Gaul: see T. Volk, "Hispania and the gold and silver coinage of Augustus", in *La moneda en temps d'August*, Barcelone, 1997, 59-90; a hypothesis also mobilized by M. Crawford, "The Emperor Augustus", in *Coinage and Money under the Roman Empire: Italy and the Mediterranean Economy*, 1985, p. 257 (many thanks to Arnaud Suspène for this particular reference). In this discussion, the arguments are not always convincing however. The fact that some of these coins were found in Gaul does not necessarily mean that they were produced there. It is important to remember that in the years around 40BC, the senatorial mint of Rome stopped producing coins made of silver and gold (bronze had been stopped in 82BCE ; see A.Wallace-Hadrill, "Image and authority in the Coinage of Augustus", *JRS* 76, 1986, 66-87). Only the provincial mints continued production, under the direction of Marc Antony in the east and Octavian in the west, up until 23BCE, the date at which Augustus reopened the Roman mint for coinage bearing the abbreviation *ex s.c.* (*RIC* 63-75). It was therefore the provincial mints that fulfilled the demand for gold and silver, in Bithynia, Phrygia, and Lycia, and specifically in the Iberian Peninsula. Various mints operated in this region, although their precise locations remain subject to debate: in Emerita after the founding of the colony in 25 BCE (coins minted under the responsibility of the legate P. Carisius; Dio Cassius 53, 25-26; *RIC* 1-25), and in "uncertain mints" most commonly identified in Colonia Patricia and in Caesaraugusta (J.B. Giard, *Bibliothèque Nationale. Catalogue des monnaies de l'Empire romain*, Paris: 1976, (cited BNC), p.46-48; 1091-1092 ; 1123-1148 ; 1173-1200 ; 1209-1223 ; 1224; *RIC*, p. 25-26 ; and n. 26-153) in 19/18 and 17/16 ; according to M.P. García-Bellido, the second unknown mint could be that of Colonia Celsa, a colony founded by Lepidus before the creation of that in Caesaraugusta ("The coinage supply to the army during the Cantabrian wars (Hispania 27-19 BC)", *International Congress of Numismatics (13th : 2003 : Madrid) Proceedings -*, Vol.1, p. 979-986). In 15 BCE, Augustus opened the mint in Lugdunum in Gaul, which, from the year 12 BCE, was the only one to mint silver and gold coins for the whole of the Empire. Bronze coinage continued to be produced in Rome, until Nero repatriated the minting of precious metals to Rome (R. Wolters, "The Julio-Claudians", in *Handbook of Greek and Roman Coinage*, Oxford, 2012, p. 335-355: p. 339, which on several points provides corrections to the article by H. Mattingly, "The Mints of the Early Empire", *JRS* 7, 1917, 59-70; see more recently the contribution by A. Suspène, "Des monnayages en révolution: la monnaie à Rome et dans le monde romain entre 70 av.J.C. et 73 apr. J.C.", in Guilhembet, J.-P. and Roman, Y., eds., *Rome et le monde romain de 70 avant J.-C. à 73 après J.-C.*, Paris, 2014, p. 94-107.

⁵⁹ *RIC* 135-137 (once again celebrating the return of the Roman standards= BNC 1233-1265.

found in Nîmes (19/18 BCE)⁶⁰, in Rome in 16 BCE⁶¹ and in the east.⁶²

The Iberian Peninsula held a special position for Augustus. It had been part of his domain since the agreement of Brindisium in 37 BCE, and was placed under his command after the division of the provinces between the Senate and the *princeps* in 27. At this date however, it was divided into two provinces (Citerior and Ulterior), and it was not yet completely pacified. Augustus could reasonably fear the formation of counter-powers in this region, which had seen several others before (Sertorius, Sextus Pompey). In the year 26 BCE matters were precipitated by the Cantabrian and Asturian revolts (the peoples in the north-west of the peninsula), destined to last well beyond the official end of conflicts in 25 and Augustus' return to Rome in mid-24BCE. Indeed, it was Agrippa who ultimately brought peace to the peninsula in 18BCE.⁶³

The gold and silver coinage, bearing the acronym SPQR on the reverse, but also sometimes on the obverse⁶⁴, were primarily minted in the dual context of Augustus' victories in Spain, his first victories as Augustus (the obverse of these coins features Augustus' head, wreathed or not, and the inscription CAESAR AVGVSTVS or AVGVSTVS or CAESARI AVGVSTO)⁶⁵ and of the return from Parthia of the Roman standards and the Roman prisoners (with the inscription OB CIVES SERVATOS).⁶⁶ The dedication on the altar of the Fortuna Redux (19BCE) also refers to this (FORTVN.REDV/CAESARI AVG/SPQR),⁶⁷ as do the wishes for the salvation of the *princeps* (IOVI/VOT SVSC/PRO SAL/CAES AVG/SPQR)⁶⁸. However, other iconographic elements associated with the acronym also evoke the important events of the year 27 BCE.⁶⁹

A very interesting example, dated 19-18BCE is sometimes attributed to the mint in Colonia Patricia. On the reverse it represents CAESAR AVGVSTVS in two lines, and above them there are laurels flanked by the letters SPQR, around a shield with the inscription CLV (*clipeus Virtutis*) (RIC 36a). This direct allusion to the ideology of victory and the shield of

⁶⁰ BNC p.49; and n.1332, 1341-1351.

⁶¹ RIC 359-360 = BNC 348 (moneyer L. Vinucius in 16 BCE : on the reverse, SPQR is inscribed on a triumphal arch, next to IMP CAES) ; BNC 357-360 (Idem : on the right, SPQR/IMP/CAES on the pedestal of an equestrian statue of Augustus, placed in front of walls and the door of a city) ; RIC 351-352 = BNC 331 (L. Mescinius Rufus, 16 BCE, celebrating the return of the prince, on the reverse a cippus with the inscription: S.P.Q.R/ Vota PRO REDitu CAESaris) ; RIC 369 (C. Antistius Vetus, 16 BCE : reverse, PRO VALETUDINE-CAESARIS, SPQR).

⁶² A cistophorus from Pergamum dated from 19-18 BCE, bearing the inscription, on the reverse: SPR SIGNIS RECEPTIS (RIC 508).

⁶³ See R. Syme, *Tacitus*, Oxford, 1963, p.411 ; and P. Le Roux, *La péninsule ibérique aux époques romaines*, Paris, 2010, p. 41 et seq. A third province would not be created until after the voyage in 16-13BCE. In 13BCE Hispania Ulterior would be divided into Lusitania and Baetica (*ibid.*, p. 60 et seq.).

⁶⁴ RIC 131- 137, 140-153.

⁶⁵ Giard, 1976, p. 46-47.

⁶⁶ RIC 29a-30a.

⁶⁷ RIC 53a-56a.

⁶⁸ RIC 57: most likely a wish for the return of Augustus in 19BC, thus linked to the Parthian success.

⁶⁹ C.H.V. Sutherland, « The Gold and the Silver coinage in Spain under Augustus », dans *The Numismatic Chronicle and Journal of the Royal Numismatic Society*, 6th series, vol.5.n.1/2, 1945, p. 58-78.

virtues, given to Augustus in 27 BCE, is also present in various forms on many *denarii*.⁷⁰ There is a clear connection between the military context and the Augustan “restitution”, between the appearance of the acronym SPQR and the name Augustus, awarded on January 16 27 BCE. Finally there is also a connection between the coinage and the honorary inscriptions, for example, on the coins where SPQR is in epigraphic position – which both evokes an inscription and emphasizes the function of the acronym in imperial communication. For example, on the reverse of a coin minted under the responsibility of L. Mescennius Rufus in Rome, dated 16 BCE, after the name of the moneyer there is a cippus with the inscription “SPQR Vota Suscepta PRO Salute ET REDitu Augusti”; on another it is an arch that bears the four letters of the acronym (*RIC* 359). Whether later celebrations focus on the Emperor’s military activities or on his civil actions, the construction of roads for example⁷¹, we always find these same connections.

The Augustan “restoration” was not simply a return to the past, as these coins clearly demonstrate. SPQR proclaims legality, through a striking simplification, which is late-Republican language, Ciceronian especially, emphasizing consensus. Unlike senatorial monies minted *ex senatus consulto*, these monies displayed the imperial version of the mixed constitution; the *princeps*, the Senate and the Roman people, as Aelius Aristide would show. The prince was not always depicted, but he was present at least in name, on the obverse and sometimes also on the reverse, alongside the letters SPQR.

In using this acronym, primarily associated with the *clipeus* under his reign, Augustus not only decisively consecrated the idea that he had restored institutional continuity, but he also behaved like an antiquarian. He did exactly what Varron did for the Seven Hills of Rome: he invented a tradition. The abbreviation, associated with different phrases as we have seen⁷² became the expression of imperial legitimacy, which was based less on the power of the people and the Senate, than it was on the role of these two bodies in the devolution of honors and powers. Henceforth, its usage would continue to accompany all claims to constitutional continuity under the sign of Augustus, after civil war⁷³, after a despotic reign⁷⁴,

⁷⁰ *RIC* 42-48.

⁷¹ *RIC* 42 a : SPQR /IMPeratori CAEsari/ QUOD. Viae Munitae Sunt EX EA Pecunia. Quae Iussu Senatus / AD Aerarium. DETulit.

⁷² See also *RIC* I 358 = *BNC* 345 (obverse) (16 BC, Rome, denarius of L. Mescinius Rufus) : *Iovi Optimo Maximo SPQR Vota Suscepta PRO Salute IMPeratoris CAEsaris QUOD PER EVm Res Publica IN AMPio ATQue TRANquillo Statu. Est*, in an oak wreath.

⁷³ After the civil war between 68-69 BC, *ILS* 255: *Dino Vespasiano Augusto s.p.q.R.* ; see also *RIC* 207 : *SPQR. Adsertori libertatis publicae* (inscription surrounded by an oak wreath, a clear reference to Augustus who received it in 27 BCE, without however associating it with the letters SPQR).

⁷⁴ The coinage of Vindex and of Galba is a good example of this, as C.M. Kraay shows (“The coinage of Vindex and Galba, AD 68”, *Numismatic Chronicle and Journal of the Royal Numismatic Society*, 6th series, Vol 9, n.3/4, 1949, 129-149). The themes *SPQR ob cives servatos*, or the oak wreath (the civic crown given to Augustus in 27 BCE) surrounding SPQR show that the rebellion did not aim to re-establish the republic but to restore an Augustan form of principate. The same thing after Domitian: *ILS* 274 : *Libertati ab imperatore Nerva Ca[es]ar[is] Aug., anno ab urbe condita DCCCXXXIIIX [K] Oc[t], restitu[tae], s.p.q.R.* On the connection between *restitutio* and *spqr*, see also the arch of Septimus Severus (*ILS*, 425): *ob rem publicam restitutam imperiumque populi Romani propagatum / insignibus virtutibus eorum domi*

or even as a countermark after the *damnatio memoriae* of an Emperor such as Nero.⁷⁵ This is also why it is probable that the insistent references to the Senate and the Roman people in the *Res gestae*⁷⁶ were the result of rewriting, after the formula had become one of the slogans of his reign.

The invention of the acronym, exclusively imperial in its use⁷⁷, constitutes the last stage in the formalization of Roman politics. SPQR does not reflect the “true” Republican constitution (it was never described in these terms during the republican period, the Senate and the people each having a specific role and expressions, as we have seen), but rather its imperial interpretation after a century of political conflict and debate. It was thus Augustus who, in the footsteps of the last republicans, essentially invented “the Republic” and erased all other possible interpretations.

This invention was triply effective. On one hand Augustus made the functioning of Roman institutions accessible to provincial citizens (through a striking shortcut): SPQR evokes the language used by the Greeks as well as the language of communication with the provinces.⁷⁸ There was a mirroring effect in these exchanges, and the consummate art of communication. Secondly, the formula conveyed the message of the legality of the *princeps*’ actions, whilst putting the Senate on the same level as the people as a source of law. Finally it established consensus as the ideological basis of the city, and the prince as the defender of the *res publica*, incarnated in the monetary object itself.

forisque s.p.q.R. ; or the beginning of the inscription on the arch of Constantine (ILS, 694): *Imp. Caes. Fl. Constantino maximo / p.f. Augusto s.p.q. R. quod instinctu divinitatis, mentis magnitudine, cum exercitu suo tam de tyranno quam de omni eius factione uno tempore iustis rempublicam ultus est armis, arcum triumphis insignem dicavit.*

⁷⁵ Cf. J.B. Giard, *Catalogue des monnaies de l'Empire romain*, 2. *De Tibère à Néron*, Paris, 1988, p.20-21; and n.81.84.89.123 (counter-marks on the neck); n. 90.142 (in front of the face); n.111, 121 (on the face). On these questions, see the comments of A. Hostein, “Monnaie et *damnatio memoriae*”, *CCG* XV, 2004, 219-236.

⁷⁶ 8.1 (lex Saenia); 5.1 (Dion Cassius explains that it was under pressure from the people that the Senate offered Augustus the dictatorship (54.1.2-3), as John Scheid (*Res Gestae divi Augusti*, CUF : Paris, 2007, p. 35); but Augustus summarizes the process more concisely; 34, 2 (the *clipeus*) ; 35, 1 (the title of *Pater Patriae*). To this we must add the large number of references in the RG, either to the Senate, or to the people, as the origin of the powers and honors conveyed upon him.

⁷⁷ Although references to the formula “the senate and the people” can be found in local cities, the use of the acronym seems strictly reserved for imperial use. For local evidence see, for example: *AE*, 1906, 79 = HD 21821 (Grottaferrata): *ex auctoritate s(enatus) p(opulique) Tusculani* ; *AE*, 1959, 97 = HD 019246: *senatus populusque Veliensis* ; *AE*, 1959, 60 = HD, 019192 : *ex decreto senat[us] populi[que] Senonnensium* (Sens), etc.

⁷⁸ Sherck, *RDGE* 67 = *RGE* 103; *RGE* 104.