

## **Was the Roman Republic Democratic - Jai Hudson**

Democracy is a form of government where the people have the power through the vote to choose the laws and the leaders. The Roman Republic was proclaimed after the last king, Tarquin the Proud, was overthrown in 509 BCE. Over about 500 years the Roman Republic became quite big, conquering all of Greece and destroying the ancient city of Corinth. The Romans adopted democracy from the Greeks. Therefore, many people thought differently on if it was a democracy or not.

Professor Alan Ward claimed that the Roman Republic was not a democracy, because all voting had to be done in the city of Rome, therefore only 2 percent of people could vote. Based on this fact, Ward thought it was not a democracy. Ward quoted from historian Ramsey MacMullen “... only 2 percent of Roman citizens usually voted, which makes any notion of a direct democracy nugatory...” Holding the voting only in Rome meant that only 2 percent of the people could make it to Rome, resulting in nearly invisible voting restrictions.

Professor Fergus Millar believed that the Roman Republic was definitely a democracy. Millar stated that “the constitution of the Roman Republic is a variety of democracy. Every adult male citizen, unless specifically disqualified, had a vote”. This quote means that in Millar's mind he thought it was democracy because everyone had the vote.

Polybius was a Greek Historian who greatly admired the Romans. The purpose of his writing was to describe how the Romans came to dominate the world. Polybius thought the Roman Republic could be a democracy or aristocracy or a despotism. Polybius stated “... their share of power has been so well regulated that no one can say for sure whether the constitution is an aristocracy or a democracy or a deposition.” This quote means that Polybius thought that it was so well regulated that it could be an aristocracy or a democracy or a despotism depending on what angle you looked at it from.

The Cambridge English Dictionary defines democracy as “the belief in freedom and equality between people, or a system of government based

on this belief, in which power is either held by elected representatives or directly by the people themselves.”

In this definition of democracy, the Roman Republic was not a democracy because all the voting had to be done in the city of Rome and only if you were close or had enough money to get to Rome, you could vote. After all the evidence that has been presented, I believe that Professor Alan Ward was correct and the Roman Republic was not a democracy. After all, if only 2% of the people can vote, is it really a democracy? I believe not.

**Sources:**

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/democracy>