



Summary :

The Senate (or council of Elders) is a body of aristocratic character with specific political and administrative jurisdictions in the Archaic and Classical period of the Ancient Greek history. Although not being a ruling body, the Senatus has important political and social duties, and is considered the guardian of the traditional Greek identity of the cities of the East, where the Roman emperor is to hold a dominant position.

Date

Roman period

Geographical Location

Asia Minor

1. Introduction

The Senate (or council of Elders) is a body of aristocratic character with specific political and administrative jurisdictions in the Archaic and Classical period of the ancient Greek history. The Roman Senate (Senatus = Gerousia) was a similar institution. However, in Roman Asia Minor (and generally in the Roman East), although the institution of the Senate is particularly common mainly in the Imperial period, it does not have the character of a ruling body taking political decisions and dealing with the political agenda.¹ It is activated in different fields, which are not always easy to verify.

2. Composition and Members of the Senatus

First of all, it should be noted that the Senate of Asia Minor cities is an organisation comprising a relatively high number of members and holding a key position in public life. Although the Senate had existed in some Asia Minor cities before the Romans arrived there,² the composition of this body was of high importance for both self-governed communities and provincial administration. Thus, at Sidyma of [Lycia](#) the decision for the establishment of a Senate is taken during meetings of the Boule and the Ecclesia. This shows that the institution was not a private idea but an official act performed by the leading political bodies of the city. Furthermore, it is interesting that the relevant decision should be ratified by the Roman [proconsul](#). In this way, the city makes sure that the decision is safeguarded since the Romans provide their support to the new institution.³ Information about the first members of the Senate is also provided by the same city. There were about one hundred members, with half of them being senators (councillors) and the other half common citizens.⁴ This coexistence suggests that the Senate helped the development of relations between the aristocrats of the city and less privileged individuals who enjoyed some social respect and prestige.⁵ An age limit for admittance to the Senate should not be excluded. In [Nicaea](#) of [Bithynia](#), the senator Peisistratus died at the age of 45, which provides an idea about the age limit and proves that the members of the Senate had got at least to the middle age of life.⁶ There is also evidence about forced payment upon admittance to the Senatus, which indicates that although the body was open to aristocrats, the common citizens that participated should at least be wealthy.⁷

3. The Role of the Senate in the City

The role of the Senate in the public life of the city is also confirmed by the numerous benefactions and honours from local notables, which covered a wide range of needs. Oil was supplied for the athletic needs of the senators at the gymnasium and money was distributed among the members of the Senate for both the banquets held to honour them and the construction of buildings housing their activities.⁸ It should be mentioned that the members of the Senate received amounts of money and portions of food smaller only than the senators but larger than any other social class, such as the common citizens, foreigners, [freedmen](#) and slaves.⁹ Such benefits



for the city were offered on the basis of the established social hierarchy, which was therefore confirmed and further consolidated.¹⁰ It becomes clear that the Senate was the second most important body in the city after the Boule thanks to the prestige and social respect its members and the institution itself enjoyed.

4. Activities

Quite often the activities of the Senate concerned a gymnasium. The inscriptions make frequent mention of a **gymnasiarch** of the Senatus, which indicates that this body had a **gymnasium** and appointed officials as supervisors.¹¹ Apart from the palaestra and the running track, the gymnasium premises could also include bathrooms with the necessary antechambers as well as "**stoas**", meaning roofed rooms with columns, where discussions and lectures were held particularly during the summer.¹² It is therefore indicated that great emphasis was given on the physical and intellectual culture of the Senate members through joint activities that fostered their relations and improved their standard of living in line with the traditional Greek ideal of the harmonious development of body and spirit.

However, as indicated by epigraphic evidence, the Senate not only supervised the gymnasium, but also often cooperated with the Boule and the Ecclesia in passing honorary resolutions and conferring honours (dedication of statues) to eminent figures. The persons of honour were eminent citizens with a brilliant career in the political offices of the city and generous benefactors.¹³ The public praise boosted the prestige of these people and maintained their privileged position in social hierarchy.¹⁴ It was very important for them that the Senatus, an officially acknowledged and respectable body, recognised their beneficial activities.¹⁵ Within this framework, the collaboration of the Senate during the procedures for conferring honours together with the traditional ruling bodies proves the greatly important role of the body in the society of an Asia Minor city.

5. Finance

Apart from donations and benefactions, the financing and economic support for these activities may come from the exploitation of resources appropriated by the Senatus. In any case, the exact origin of these resources is unknown as it probably differed from city to city, while the frequent references of Asia Minor inscriptions to accountants working for the Senate indicate that these resources included considerable assets needing particular attention and care.¹⁶ The Senate in **Ephesus** was involved in credit activities and granted loans,¹⁷ probably thanks to the considerable funds available for this purpose, which were increased through such activities. Moreover, the Senate in **Magnesia ad Maeandrum** possessed and exploited land, a source of income that should not be excluded in the case of other Asia Minor senates.¹⁸

6. The Relations between the Senate and the Emperor

The institution of the Senate often attracted the imperial interest. The decision on the establishment of a Senate could lead a city to send a delegation to the emperor in order to secure his support for the newly established body.¹⁹ Moreover, the emperors saw about the requests filed by the senates (councils of Elders) and exchanged letters with them.²⁰ They also tried to secure their economic vigour. Thus, they appointed accountants assigned with the tasks of rationalising and reorganising their economic matters.²¹ It is also interesting that they granted economic and juridical privileges. This was the case when the Senate of Ephesus was relieved from the obligations to contribute to the expenses of the **province of Asia** and provide accommodation to state and military officials. Finally, the assets of the Senate could not guarantee the repayment of a loan.²²

It is clear that the Senate is hugely important for the imperial policy in the provinces of the East. The role of the body in the public life of the city was to promote and consolidate the traditional values related to mature life as well as cement the status quo.²³ According to remarkable reports, statues of eminent citizens and previous emperors stood in the places where the Senate convened (in Ephesus and other cities).²⁴ In Ephesus, as soon as the Senate finds the necessary resources, it hastens to offer sacrifices to the patron goddess of the city, **Artemis**, and Emperor **Commodus**.²⁵ In this way, the traditional religion of the city is connected with the



contemporary political reality of the Roman rule in order to consolidate the imperial power.

7. The Institution's Character

Although the Senate is not a ruling body, it has important political and social duties. It either honours the local elites or promotes cultural standards connected with the gymnasium or preserves the picture of great men of the past in the collective memory of the city or even advertises the personality and the institution of the emperor, thus responding to the needs of the times. The Senate is considered the guardian of the traditional Greek identity of the cities of the East, where the Roman emperor is to hold a dominant position.

1. This conclusion is uniformly accepted by the researchers of the matter; see D. Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor* (Princeton 1950), pp. 62-63 and J.A. Van Rossum, *De Gerousia in de Griekse Steden Van het Romeinse Rijk* (doctoral thesis in Dutch with English summary, pp. 238-242) (Leiden 1988) p. 238.
2. For the Senates (Councils of Elders) of the Hellenistic years and the republican period in Asia Minor, see D. Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor* (Princeton 1950), p. 858 and V. Chapor, *La province Romaine proconsulaire d'Asie* (Paris 1904) pp. 220–223.
3. See the inscription *T.A.M. II 175 = IGRR III 582*; see also annotations by D. Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor* (Princeton 1950) p. 635.
4. See the inscription *IGRR III 597* and *598*.
5. See J. A. Van Rossum, *De Gerousia in de Griekse Steden Van het Romeinse Rijk* (Leiden 1988) p. 240 and J.H. Oliver, 'Gerusiae and Augustales' *Historia* 7 (1958), p. 477.
6. See the inscription *I. Iznik 235*
7. See J. A. Van Rossum, *De Gerousia in de Griekse Steden Van het Romeinse Rijk* (Leiden 1988) p. 240.
8. For the supply of oil, see the inscriptions *IGRR IV 182* (Lampsacus) and *I. Magn. 34* (Magnesia ad Sipylum). For the distribution of money, see the inscriptions *SEG XXXIV 1124* (Ephesus), *SEG XXX 153* (Xanthus), *IGRR IV 1629* and *1632* (Philadelphia), *I. Iznik 61* (Nicaea), *IGRR IV 1572* (Teos). For the banquets, see *SEG XLIV 1153* (Arycanda). For the construction of buildings, see *SEG XLI 1342* (Arycanda), *IGRR IV 1572* (Teos) and *IGRR IV 1431* (Smyrna). For the donations to the Senate, see J. A. Van Rossum, *De Gerousia in de Griekse Steden Van het Romeinse Rijk* (Leiden 1988), pp. 156–177.
9. Silyum is a typical example, as evidenced by the inscriptions *IGRR III 800-802*.
10. See M. Sartre, *L' Orient Romain*, (Paris 1991), p. 152.
11. For the relation between the Senate and the Gymnasium, see D. Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor* (Princeton 1950) p. 858 and J. A. Van Rossum, *De Gerousia in de Griekse Steden Van het Romeinse Rijk* (Leiden 1988) pp. 178-188. Gymnasiarchs of the Senate are also evidenced in Ephesus (*SEG XXXIV 1125*), Perge (*SEG XXXIX 1388*) and Corydallus of Lycia (*IGRR III 739 IX*).
12. This was the case in Teos, according to the inscription *IGRR IV 1572*.
13. See A.H. M. Jones, *The Greek City from Alexander to Justinian* (Oxford 1940) pp. 225-226 and A. D. Macro, "The Cities of Asia Minor under the Roman Imperium", in H. Temporini, W. Haase, *ANRW*, II. 7.2 (Berlin 1980), p. 681. There is ample epigraphic evidence concerning the matter.
14. See annotations by M. Sartre, *L' Orient Romain*, (Paris 1991) pp. 162-166.
15. See J.A. Van Rossum, *De Gerousia in de Griekse Steden Van het Romeinse Rijk*, (Leiden 1988) p. 242.



16. This is what happened in Ephesus see J. H. Oliver, *The Sacred Gerusia* (Hesperia Supplement VI, 1941) p. 93v. 11, Acmonia (IGRR IV 652), Clazomenae (IGRR IV 1555) and Prusias ad Hypium (IGRR III 65).
17. See J.H. Oliver, *The Sacred Gerusia* (Hesperia Supplement VI 1941), pp. 22-23.
18. See I.v Magn. 316. A detailed analysis is given by G. Gousin and G. Deschamps, *BCH* XII (1888) pp. 204-223. Another source of income was the exploitation of baths, inns and other shops.
19. This is exactly what happened in Apamea, according to the inscription IGRR IV 783.
20. For the correspondence between the emperors and the Senate of Ephesus and Athens, see *SEG* XLIII 757 –762 and J.H. Oliver, *Greek Constitutions of Early Roman Emperors* (Philadelphia 1989), pp. 346-351, no. 170 and pp. 401–413, no. 193–203. For the unpublished letter of Emperor Claudius to the Senate of Kos, see K. Buraselis, *Kos between Hellenism and Rome* (Philadelphia 2000), p. 193.
21. See footnote 16. The accountants were usually appointed by the emperor to inspect the finances of a city; see D. Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor* (Princeton 1950), pp. 597–598.
22. See *SEG* XLIII 765-766.
23. See J.A. Van Rossum, *De Gerousia in de Griekse Steden Van het Romeinse Rijk* (Leiden 1988) p. 242.
24. For Ephesus, see J. H. Oliver, *Greek Constitutions of Early Roman Emperors* (Philadelphia 1989) pp. 346–347, no. 170. The Senate of Athens also owned pictures of the emperors, which were carried to the places where the Ecclesia convened, see J.H. Oliver, *Greek Constitutions of Early Roman Emperors* (Philadelphia 1989), pp. 405-412, no. 196. For the case of Kos, where the Senate was assigned with the task of maintaining statues dedicated to eminent figures of the past, see K. Buraselis, *Kos Between Hellenism and Rome. Studies on the political, institutional and social history of Kos from ca. the middle 2nd c. B.C. until Late Antiquity*, (Philadelphia 2000), p. 25; see J. H. Oliver, "The sacred Gerusia" *Hesperia, Supplement VI*, pp. 96-100 v. 12.
25. See J. H. Oliver, *The sacred Gerusia*, (Hesperia, Supplement VI, Baltimore 1941) pp. 96-100 v. 12.

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Glossary :

freedman, the

a slave that was set free.

gymnasiarch, the

The man responsible for the supervision of the youngsters and the adolescents who were trained at the gymnasia and at the palaestrae. This rank, widely diffused in all cities of the ancient Greek world, constituted a public office which was usually bestowed on the most eminent and rich citizens, since it required great expenses.

gymnasium

The gymnasium was one of the most important centres of public life in Greek cities. The institution of the gymnasium, directly connected with the development of the Greek city, aimed to create virtuous citizens and gallant warriors. As educational institutions of public character, the gymnasia were intended for the physical and theoretical education of the young and consisted of separate spaces for special purposes.

proconsul, -lis

A quite high ranking official, vir spectabilis according to the rank of the senate, who was inequable only to the Domestikos of the Scholae and to the Magister Militum per Orientem. The proconsul usually served as a governor of the Imperial provinces (i.e. in Asia Minor the provinces of Asia and Cappadocia). The office was demoted from the 9th century onwards and the term was in use until the 12th century meaning a dignity.

stoa, portico, the

A long building with a roof supported by one or two colonnades parallel to its back wall.