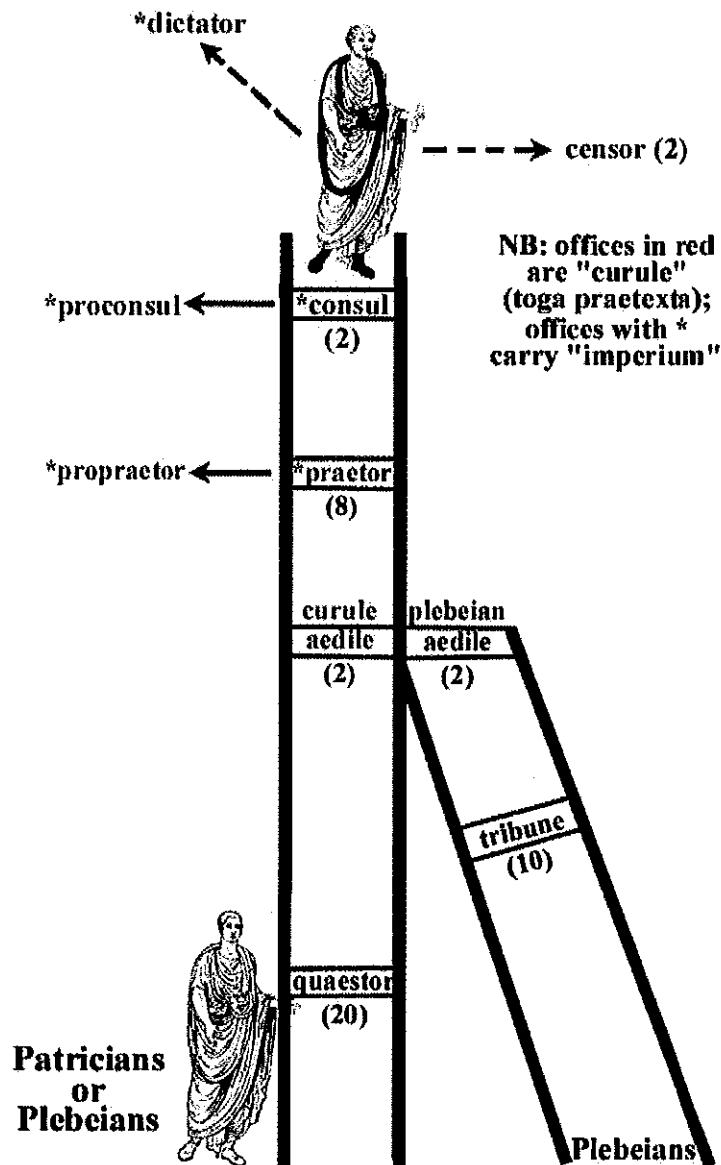


ROMAN CURSUS HONORUM



NB: This diagram shows the ladder of political advancement (*cursus honorum*) during the late Republic. The straight ladder shows the typical path of advancement (theoretically open to all freeborn male citizens), beginning with election to quaestor, the lowest office, and proceeding to consul, the highest (of course very few men made it that far; it was quite exceptional when a man like Cicero, who did not come from a noble family, was elected consul). Red text designates "curule magistrates," who had the right to sit on a special ivory folding stool (*sella curulis*) as a symbol of their office; they also had the right to wear the purple-bordered toga (*toga praetexta*). Offices marked with an asterisk carried *imperium*, the highest political authority, which included the right to command an army, to interpret and carry out the law, and to pass sentences of death. Magistrates whose title began with "pro" were in charge of provinces; the Senate normally conferred these after the men had finished their term of office in Rome. The more important provinces, especially those requiring large military forces, were assigned to ex-consuls, while the less significant provinces were governed by ex-praetors.

During the Empire, most of these offices remained in place, though their functions changed. Most significantly, *imperium* was now reserved for the emperor, and advancement in rank proceeded in orderly stages based on conditions laid down by the emperors rather than through competitive electioneering. Thus the *cursus honorum* changed from a ladder of power (with important social status attached) to a ladder of primarily social rank and status. The *cursus honorum* was, of course, reserved for men; during the entire period of Roman history, women were prohibited from holding political office, though in the Empire their roles as mothers, wives, and daughters of emperors gave a few women very high social status and even a kind of indirect rank. Even elite women who were not members of the imperial family sometimes claimed the rank of their fathers or husbands (e.g., as *consulares feminae*, "consular women").