



# The History of Ancient Rome: Book V: The Establishment of the Military Monarchy

*Theodor Mommsen*

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When Sulla died in the year 676, the oligarchy which he had restored ruled with absolute sway over the Roman state; but, as it had been established by force, it still needed force to maintain its ground against its numerous secret and open foes. It was opposed not by any single party with objects clearly expressed and under leaders distinctly acknowledged, but by a mass of multifarious elements, ranging themselves doubtless under the general name of the popular party, but in reality opposing the Sullan organization of the commonwealth on very various grounds and with very different designs. There were the men of positive law who neither mingled in nor understood politics, but who detested the arbitrary procedure of Sulla in dealing with the lives and property of the burgesses. Even during Sulla's lifetime, when all other opposition was silent, the strict jurists resisted the regent; the Cornelian laws, for example, which deprived various Italian communities of the Roman franchise, were treated in judicial decisions as null and void; and in like manner the courts held that, where a burgess had been made a prisoner of war and sold into slavery during the revolution, his franchise was not forfeited. There was, further, the remnant of the old liberal minority in the senate, which in former times had laboured to effect a compromise with the reform party and the Italians, and was now in a similar spirit inclined to modify the rigidly oligarchic constitution of Sulla by concessions to the Populares. There were, moreover, the Populares strictly so called, the honestly credulous narrow-minded radicals, who staked property and life for the current watchwords of the party-programme, only to discover with painful surprise after the victory that they had been fighting not for a reality, but for a phrase. Their special aim was to re-establish the tribunician power, which Sulla had not abolished but had divested of its most essential prerogatives, and which exercised over the multitude a charm all the more mysterious, because the institution had no obvious practical use and was in fact an empty phantom—the mere name of tribune of the people, more than a thousand years later, revolutionized Rome...

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