

## A review of corruption based on the social and economic evolution of Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome

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**Abstract.** *This paper is part of a broader research done on the evolution of corruption and represents the highlights of the phenomenon from the social, economic and religious perspective. During our research we tried to analyse the evolution from pre-corruption times, the Indian view dating 2300 B.C., continuing with the Chinese dynasty Qin (221-207 BC), the Sumerians and Semites, and also to the Persian Kingdom, and emphasising the corruption in Ancient Greece and rounding up with Ancient Rome. The circle is closed with the historical results had in those times that could be shifted in today's macroeconomic environment.*

**Keywords:** corruption, social inequality, Ancient Rome, Ancient Greece.

**JEL Classification:** B10, D73.

## 1. Introduction

The phenomenon of corruption can be dated with the rise of mankind. Although it is not an act with economic consequences, The Bible offer the first case of corruption in the world: Eve has corrupted Adam to eat of the forbidden fruit.

One of the oldest Indian sources in which it speaks of corruption, it is dated back to about 2300 years B.C. The Criminal Code of Chinese dynasty Quin (221-207 BC) had already introduced the phenomenon of corruption and were regulated extremely harsh punishments for corruption practice (Lambsdorff et al. 2005, p. 2). In Cicero's vision the corruption was one of the most serious crimes. In ancient Greece to reduce the scourge of corruption Plato proposed the capital punishment for officials or dignitaries who were accepting gifts to do their duties.

## 2. The rise of the corruption phenomenon in Ancient times

The rise of corruption decreased the prestige of priests and sanctuary, priests of Delphi oracles influencing the course of Greek policy after their will (Costas, 2001, pp. 20-22). In the Mosaic laws corrupt judges were whipped, also Egyptian laws were punishing corrupt judges with death by suicide and Indian laws were imposing seizure the assets of judges who were guilty of corruption.

We found corruption in the ancient Israel, the laws regarding justice from the book of Exodus 28:3: „Take no rewards in a cause: for rewards make blind those who have eyes to see, and make the decisions of the upright false” (Costas, 2001, pp. 20-22). The book of Samuel, Chapter 8 verse 3, referring to Samuel's sons, who followed in the service of the judges of Israel: „And his sons did not go in his ways, but moved by the love of money took rewards, and were not upright in judging” (extracted from The Bible). Also in Luke 3 John the Baptist urges tax-farmers: „...Do not make an attempt to get more money than the right amount. And men of the army put questions to him, saying, And what have we to do? And he said to them, Do no violent acts to any man, and do not take anything without right, and let your payment be enough for you” (extracted from The Bible). The Bible is replete with advice and laws against receiving bribes, extortion and store up treasures through unlawful means (Kostesky, 2012).

In the age of Sumerians and Semites, the priests became the most powerful class of Sumerian cities, because of the fees and taxes that were paid to the temples and the fact that there were no Government in that the priesthood have no representatives, served the interests of their brotherhood. King Urukagina (Uruinimghina) of Lagash (the ancient city-state of Sumer) reorganized the State administration in order to put an end to the abuses of its officials and judges. Also he regulated lower payments for ceremonies. He stand up against the corruption and greed of the clergy accusing them for greediness, for taking bribes in administering the law, for oppression against farmers and fishermen. Its measures have cleared the administration of corrupt officials, establishing laws that have regulated the taxes paid to the temples, protecting his people against extortion (Durant, 1935, p. 128).

In the Persian Kingdom corruption and bribery were eliminated, the giving or receiving of bribes being regarded as capital offense. The Persian King Cambyses II 530-522 B.C. the son of Cyrus II from Achaemenian dynasty, punished a corrupt judge skinning him. The death penalty, this time through the crucifixion, was applied by corrupt judges during the reign of the Persian King Darius (Durant, 1935, p. 361).

### 3. Corruption in Ancient Greece

*“The virtue of justice lies in moderation,  
When it governed wisely.”*  
**Aristotle**

In the history of European thinking about political corruption in the talks and the possibility of a non-corrupted policies is suggested by the Greek philosophers, especially Socrates and Plato, but also their successors from the Classical period and the late Hellenistic period, all of them focusing on political corruption and corruptibility of politicians.

Socrates rejected the politic career, considering that incompatible with the pursuit of knowledge. In contrast, Plato has not renounced the politics, however, placing it in the realm of its dualistic universe. Less radical approach followed by Plato and Aristotle was based on the development of an ideal government forms, which would incorporate the values of the goodness and of the absolute truth. Both Plato and Aristotle, the key element on which the ideal regime possess it as a result of wise and virtuous leadership, is that it is governed for the common interest (Mulgan, 2012, pp. 25-36).

In ancient Greece the corruption was often equated with violating the law in order to ensure a personal advantage. Both Plato and Thucydides offers portraits of the perfect city but then points towards corruption required in such cities, corruption without those cities cannot maintain perfect, cities that suffering transformations in a world of constant change. Socrates, according to Athenians accusations, corrupt the youth of Athens, urging them to no longer support the political agenda of the city. Both Athenians and Socrates attempted to eliminate the cause of a potential corruption facts, that Athenians killed him, Socrates with the power of the word trying to form philosophers (Saxonhouse, 2012, pp. 37-52).

Corruption was recognized as a crime and punished severely, particularly when acts of corruption were contrary to the public interest. According to Demosthenes those who accept bribes from someone else, offer or corrupt through promises, at the expense of people in general or any citizen, was punished by the Athenian law by deprivation of rights and his possessions were confiscated, the same punishment being applied to his sons (Hill, 2013, pp. 565-587).

According to Plutarch, the Athenians did not forgive the acts of corruption, killing those who were guilty of this scourge. In order to maintain relations with the Persian king Artaxerxes, the Greeks and Spartans sent their ambassadors to his court. Given this fact, the Thebans sent the ambassadors led by Pelopidas. Pelopidas being one who managed a win against the Spartans, was preferred by Artaxerxes, Artaxerxes showing him attention

and honouring him with gifts. But seeing his speech, much more powerful than the Greeks and not haughty as the Spartans, Artaxerxes stopped to show respect anymore. His requests being guaranteed, Pelopidas returns to Thebes without accepting any gifts received (Plutarch, 1967, pp. 417-419). His behaviour has ruined the lives of all other ambassadors. Athenians have convicted and executed their Ambassador Timagoras, because he abuse his position for personal gain, for the gifts received from Artaxerxes being considered bribe and above all being immoral to receive something coming from the enemy (Conover, 2010).

Archon oath is again a proof of the attempt to eradicate corruption and putting down bribery. This oath (which was probably different for other positions in the Administration) included the obligation not to accept bribes. Their oath was submitted to the Athenian people in the Agora and then again on the Acropolis. The magistrate who was caught and convicted of bribery was bound to lead to a gold statue in Delphi of equal weight with the weight in silver of money received, the ratio of gold to silver is 10:1, paying a tenfold of the fault being the old formula to punish bribe-taking (Gilbert, 1895, pp. 221-223).

During archon Fairippos period, the Athenian people win the famous battle of Marathon. After this event, the people confident in his powers for the first time put into effect ostracism law<sup>(1)</sup>, law introduced for the sake of the Athenians by Clisthenes. This law was dictated by the distrust towards citizens witch occupied important jobs, in other words was a measure against corruption of officials. The first victim of the law was a relative of the tyrant Pisisstratus, Hipparchus the leader of the friends of the tyrant. Thus, through ostracism were removed all those who would be put in jeopardy the citadel and the economic well-being of the people (Aristotle, 1992, p. 45).

A great measure against corruption and the accumulation of wealth was passed in Sparta by the legislator Lycurgus<sup>(2)</sup>. He took steps to eliminate inequality and differences in wealth of the Spartans. When he saw that the aristocrats resist, withdrew from circulation all gold and silver money and ordered only the use of the iron money. Then he gives an insignificant value of a given large amounts of iron, so the value of ten mine<sup>(3)</sup> equated in these bars of iron required a large space for storage in the home and it was necessary to have an oxcart to carry them. When those iron bars have become the current currency, earnings inequality has disappeared from Lacedaemon. For those who might have wanted to gather, to steal, to receive bribes or to plunder, these iron bars would have been impossible to hide. Also, the iron bars were phased out after the fire, were immersed in vinegar to make them breakable and unusable, being only useful in the transaction. Because they could not be used outside of Sparta, their value was null and void in the rest of Greece (Plutarch, 1914, pp. 229-233).

#### 4. Corruption in Ancient Rome

*“Justice is the crowning glory of the virtues.”*  
**Marcus Tullius Cicero**

Corruption has spread like a plague in the Roman Empire. By analyzing both the economy and politics through the prism of corruption, we can understand how much the

Romans have forgotten the wisely and liberal policies which have made Rome a strong fortress, those policies that gradually extended the privilege of citizenship - Mark Antony, after receiving a huge sum as bribe, decreed a law by which the Sicilians became Roman citizens (Lintott, 1993, p. 113) - and opening ways of political advancement of able and strong people. Through the power of corruption, the services of the administration became hereditary and the Senate, which in its heyday held his chest against power of Pyrrhus<sup>(4)</sup> and defied the armies of Hannibal<sup>(5)</sup>, it was turned into a tool of the party that held the power.

The resources of the vast Roman Empire, law and religion have been used for the senators' own interests. The Senate was controlling The Supreme Court and Judiciary Committees which had been established to judge the acts of corruption, were senators who saw their peer's behaviour naturally. Bribing voters was a common practice, but a form more perfidious of corruption began to spread in the form of games, fights with Gladiators in the arena, shows, what represented the price paid for popularity by those who held the power of the State. Thus, holding immense fortunes has become indispensable for all those who aspired to a public job. Hoarding means such fortunes were within reach in the territories conquered and annexed. Each province was like a huge state left by its owner to an administrator who was abusing his position to enrich himself also paying a small portion of its earnings to Rome. Those who had suffered from fleecing policy carried by the Governors, were residents of the provinces which worked hard and paid taxes to maintain overwhelming greed of those individuals (Havell, 1914, pp. 339-341).

Law *Cincia de Donis et Muneribus* passed in 204 B.C., forbade lawyers and magistrates to receive any kind of payment or gifts for the services offered, regulating an action for restitution. The law was updated and expanded in the imperial era under Augustus, Claudius and Nero (Lintott, 1990, pp. 1-16).

Rampant propagation of corruption obliged the Republican Rome to adopt a series of laws to stop this scourge: *Calpurnia* (149 B.C.) *Acilia* (123 B.C.), *Servilia* (110 B.C.), *Cornelia* (81 B.C.) and *Yulia Repetundarum* (59 B.C.) (Swithinbank, 2012, pp. 101-121).

An example of a corrupt official is that of Verres governor of Sicily, who in the first century B.C. is robbing the island in a huge proportion reaching to commit crimes. His process remains famous because of the presence of Cicero as spokesman for the prosecution. Verres said that „three years have brought enormous gains: in the first year gain enough for him, the gain of the second year would have been for friends and the third year brought more wealth than sufficient to bribe judges and pay lawyers” (Collins, 1873, p. 17). The evidence from Cicero were so clear and true that Hortensius one who defend Verres gave up. Verres was banished and Cicero has published the material he gathered and the five speeches he held against Verres, thus completing an image of the provincial administration in the most despicable aspect (Havell, 1914, p. 453).

Cicero also tried to eliminate corruption among the magnates of the cities of Cilicia province, whose governor was, gaining the title of “*curator rei publicae (logistes)*”.

Corruption of these tycoons destabilize the administrative system and had negative impact on growth and welfare of the people (Lintott, 1993, pp. 123-125).

A notable measure imposed by Emperor Caius Julius Caesar<sup>(6)</sup>, was the reorganization of the Senate. Thus, Caesar expelled them all what had been guilty of corruption or extortion, replacing them with distinguished and deserving officers in the Roman army, with competent citizens able from all over the empire also foreign citizens like the Gauls. This measure increased the number of senators to 900. Instead of auditors, which may be revised Senators, Caesar decided to be, probably by popular election, "Praefectus Morum" dictator for 10 years. Office *praefectus morum* it has helped to reduce the extravagance and luxury of Roman aristocrats, induced by the great fortunes looted from Roman citizens (Hannis, 1916, pp. 237-238).

To help people and to stem corruption, following complaints made by residents of the Spanish provinces about corruption Governors, the Senate passed a decree forbidding the arbitrary calculation of grain price and collection of fees through prefects (from lat. "Praefecti" - military officer), before this decree fees were paid directly to the governor. Also by decree, the governor was forbidden to force Spanish producers to give up collecting five percent of the fee paid (Lintott, 1993, pp. 72-75).

King of Numidia, Iugurtha<sup>(7)</sup> tortured to death his brother and tried to overthrow his cousin from inheriting the kingdom, which made the Roman Senate to declare war on them. But he bought patricians to defend his cause and crimes in the Senate and bribed the generals sent against him for not taking any action over his kingdom. Convened in Rome, he opened his treasury and thus, by corruption and bribery was allowed to return unharmed in the capital of his kingdom (Durant, 1944, p. 118).

Corruption, bribery, deprivation of morals were the main causes that offered Iugurtha King, the way to threaten the stability of the Roman state for six years (111-106 B.C.), according to Sallustius<sup>(8)</sup> in his monograph *Bellum Iugurthinum* (War against Iugurtha). Another of his monographs *Conjuratio Catilinae* (Catiline's conspiracy) tells about the politician Catiline, being corrupt, initiated a conspiracy which has more objectives: killing his rivals at the consulate, including Cicero; to burn Rome and finally to took the power. The conspiracy was discovered, Catiline was forced to fight with the army sent against him and lost their lives in battle near Pistoia in Etruria, in 62 B.C. (Havell, 1914, pp. 3-10). Following removal of Catiline, Cicero and Caius Antony were elected consuls, although Cicero was the son of an officer and not a senator (Plutarch, 1967, pp. 107-110).

Quartering Roman troops in houses of civilians in the provinces was often accompanied by abuses. A blatant case occurred in Asia after Mithridatic War<sup>(9)</sup> in 85 B.C. Sulla not only stationed troops in provincials homes, ruined by extortion soldiers, but also forced Asians to pay because it housed the soldiers, a fee about 14 drams per day, which was far more than the daily wage of a soldier. The emergence of corruption has been closely connected with another burden supported by the provinces of the empire: military supply grain and other goods. Britannia system was abused methodically by soldiers who have forced Britons to deliver grain to army granaries at a great distance from their farms and then forced them to pay large sums of money to be "forgiven" for the security transport

cost offered by the soldiers. Agricola, governor of Britannia in 80 AD, put an end to this abuse. Procurators had responsibility to collect money owed by the king's population. In year 4 B.C., Syrian procurator Sabinus was sent to Judea to reclaim the throne of Herod the Great who had just died. He did this with such brutality that almost triggered a riot, even being accused for use Legionnaires to help him in his actions (Saddington, 2012, pp. 122-124).

Under Tiberius, an important politician, Lucilius Capito which was the Asia's procurator robbed the Asiatic provinces from under the roman occupation. Not only he usurped the powers of Asia's governor but also his soldiers used violence to the same extent, acts for which he was convicted by Tiberius. The size of his abuses and robberies could be observed from the fact that Asian cities rose temples to Tiberius, his mother Livia and the Senate in gratitude for his conviction of Capito.

Corruption was spread quickly inside the Roman army. The soldier wages were small enough so that one of their main "attractions" was plundering the conquered territories. Corruption engulfed even regular auxiliary troupes. Caesar recounts the events of Roucillus and Egus, two leaders of his service who have distinguished themselves in various campaigns and were generously rewarded. He trusted them and has entrusted the payment of the people under his command. In exchange, they embezzled money by "increasing" the number of soldiers, deceived people by paying them less and even kept the whole prey for themselves. Caesar didn't punish them, but instead he forced them to pay all the money gathered through extortion. They borrowed a large amount of money to pay the fraud but still have not acted at Caesar's desire and ran away with the borrowed money. This story shows how much money could exist in a campaign army camp. Sallust also describes the army corruption during the third Mithridatic war. Roman soldiers, had begun to pay expertise for paintings, sculptures and reliefs which they had plundered. Even the leaders of the Second Triumvirate were using incentives when they needed soldiers withdrawn in the colonies (Saddington, 2012, pp. 124-127).

Centurions were the main pivots of the legions. A commander was nominated for two or three years, and some of the tribunes only for one year but centurions spent their entire careers in legion. Centurions had a huge influence in the Gallic wars of Caesar, and during the civil wars from the Second Triumvirate they even took and political functions. It was a centurion who forced the Senate to approve the nomination of Octavian for the position of consul, after the assassination of Caesar. The issue of centurion corruption, the actions of extortion over the population and favors greed was highly increasing, their actions becoming more oppressive that in some provinces revolts were reached (Saddington, 2012, pp. 127-130).

## 5. Conclusion

The crisis resulted from the highly demanding influence of corrupted people and corruption as a functional entity, manifested itself politically by the attempts of some politicians to establish totalitarian regimes and socioeconomically by the increasing tendency of collecting multiple properties and the problem of lower and middle peasantry

in Italy. The decrease of the number of citizens recruited for the military legions also had a powerful impact. This way the corruption becomes a moral failure of public life (Lintott, 1990, pp. 1-16).

In the late Antiquity period, the practice of selling positions in the imperial administration offers an example pretty delicate: on the one hand, the Roman and Byzantine governments were concerned with stopping the corruption and these practices, but on another level each of them was using this practice as a financial instrument and selection mechanism. In 439 B.C., those who were appointed as provincial leaders by imperial decree were made to swear that they did not paid for getting the job. The order specifies that those appointed as governors should not be promoted through bribes or payoffs, but by value, honesty and work. Also oath obliges them not to make any payment later on their appointment. This example illustrates both the weakness of governments and lack of effective measures to end corruption. But the consequences were bear by the residents of the provinces which through extortion, hard work and taxes were contributing to the recovery of the amount paid by the governor to obtain this position (Cameron, 1993, pp. 93-95).

A law from 415 AD allowed the churches of Constantinople and Alexandria to master the villages that were under their protection, to patronize them on the basis that all taxes to be paid and the king and obligations to be fulfilled. Marcian and Leo emperors tried to end this practice, and Leo prohibited all patronage contracts from Thrace in 437 and 441 (Cameron, 1993, pp. 93-95). The practice itself, corruption and the government's inability to solve these problems demonstrate the weakness of bureaucracy unable to control the great Roman Empire with its fragmented areas.

This paper tried to create an untamed view on the phenomenon of corruption from pre-Ancient and Ancient times, this way it could be seen as a window from the past with a connection towards the future of our social, economic and religious life, all being calculated to result at macroeconomic level a sustainable economic model that develops evenly those that are in need, those that create the middle class and those are thriving, with a higher bias of reducing inequality for those in need.

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## Notes

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- (1) Ostracism n. 1. A trial through which Athenians were exiling citizens whose fame and popularity could become a threat to freedom for 10 years (votes were written on a seashell, or ostrakon, hence the name); 2. FIG. law, sense of exclusion. Source: DEX.
- (2) Licurg (Lykurgos) (sec. 8-7 B.C), Legendary Spartan legislator. Tradition assigns creation of political and military spartan system (the constitution Spartan), placing his work between sec. 11 and 8 B.C. Proclaimed by Spartan hero and god. Source: DEX.
- (3) Mină, mine, s. f. Old Greek currency made of gold or silver whose value was equal to a hundred drachmas. - From fr. Mine, lat. Mina. Source: DEX.
- (4) Pyrrhus of Epirus (Pyrrhos or Pirus). It was the king of molos, a greek population from the region of Epirus and Macedonia. He earned two victories in battles with the Romans at Heracleia and Ausculum being a good strategist and general. It is said that after winning the battle of Ausculum seeing extremely high losses of its army would have exclaimed: "Another



victory like this and we are lost!” Hence the expression “Pyrrhic victory at”. Ultimately defeated at the battle of Beneventum, the Roman armies led by Manius Curius Dentatus in 275 B.C.

- (5) Hannibal (247-183 B.C.), Carthaginian General, one of the great military leaders of Antiquity. He came to Spain with his father, the Carthaginian general Hamilcar Barca (d. 229/228 B.C.). Very good strategist in the Second Punic War (218-201 B.C.) Led one of the most famous military campaigns in history, during which crossed the Pyrenees, Alps and entered the Pen. Italy, where he defeated the Roman army in several battles (Trasimene, 217 B.C.; Cannae, 216 B.C.). Defeat in battle Scipio Africanus at Zama, took refuge at the court of Antiochus III and led his fleet against the Romans, but was defeated. After the Battle of Magnesia (190 BC), the Romans asked him to surrender; He tried to escape, but he poisoned himself when no longer had escape. Source: Encyclopedia Britannica (2010). Volume 7, Bucharest: Litera.
- (6) Caesar, Gaius Julius (12 / 13.07.100? B.C., Rome, Italy today -15.03.44 B.C., Rome). General and famous Roman statesman, the conqueror of Gaul (58-50 B.C.), victorious in the civil war of 49-45 BC and dictator (46-44 B.C.), which launched a series of political and social reforms before being assassinated by a group of aristocrats in the Senate Office Building at “The Ides of March”. Talented orator and writer, is the author of works like “*Commentaries on the Gallic War*”. Source: Encyclopedia Britannica (2010). Vol. 3, Bucharest: Litera.
- (7) Iugurta (IUGURTHA), King of Numidia (118-105 B.C.). Defeated by Marius after a difficult war (111-105 B.C.), was executed in captivity in Rome (104 B.C.). Source: DE - encyclopedic dictionary (1993-2009).
- (8) Salustiu (Caius Sallustius Crispus) (86-35 cent. B.C.), Roman politician and historian. Caesar's Partisan. He wrote “About the war with Iugurta”, “About Catalina conspiracy” and a history (5 volumes) of the Roman Republic, between 78 and 67 B.C., kept fragmented. Source: DE - encyclopaedic dictionary (1993-2009).
- (9) Mithridates (Mithridates, Mithradates) Eupator VI, king of Pontus Hellenistic (112-63 B.C.). One of the great men of culture of the time and the last great politician of the Hellenistic world. Seize power after a palace revolution, after executing his mother and brother, establishing an authoritarian rule. Being afraid of reprisals, he learned to become immune to poisoning. Staunch opponent of Rome in Minor Asia. He fought three wars against the Romans, extending its authority over the N and V shores of the Black Sea. Many Greek cities, including Tyras, Histria, Tomis and Callatis, they recognized the suzerainty of being included in the mithridatic union (sec. 1 B.C.). After the third war with the Romans (74-63 cent. B.C.), he lost the conquered territories and committed suicide. Source: DE - encyclopedic dictionary (1993-2009).

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