The *annales maximi* was the most important record kept by the pontiffs in the Roman Republic. Unfortunately little is known about them. We do not have any direct evidence, only some scattered citations mainly in Latin writings. The two authors who make a report with some detail, Cicero and Servius, never saw the annals in use. In *De Oratore* (2.2.52), Cicero argues that *history began as a mere compilation of annals, on which account, and in order to preserve the general traditions, from the earliest period of the city down to the pontificate of Publius Mucius, each High Priest used to commit to writing all the events of his year of office, and record them on a white surface, and post up the tablet at his house, that all men might have liberty to acquaint themselves therewith, and to this day those records are known as the Pontifical Chronicles*. Publius Mucius Scaevola was a supreme pontiff from 130 BC to the date of his death in 115 BC, so Cicero never saw the tabula posted, but he could obtain reliable information on the elaboration of the annals. Thus, it is no doubt accurate that the *pontifex maximus* was in charge of a record that was annually displayed at his home. As we shall see, it is not so certain that Cicero fully understood the original purpose of the record, which was not banned or cancelled but simply died out, most probably because it had become meaningless by the end of the second century BC.

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1 The citations were collected by Frier (1979) and later edited and commented by Chassignet (1996).

2 Cic. *de Orat.* 2.2.52: *erat enim historia nihil aliud nisi annalium confectio, cuius rei, memoriaeque publicae retinendae causa, ab initio rerum Romanarum usque ad P. Mucium pontificem maximum, res omnes singulorum annorum mandabat litteris pontifex maximus, referebatque in album, et proponebat tabulam domi, postestas ut esset populo cognoscendi, hique etiam nunc Annales Maximi nominatur.*

3 This could be the *Regia* in the Forum or, as Frier (1999) 87 suggests, the *domus publica* on the Via Sacra.
In respect to Servius, his report reconciles mostly with Cicero’s, adding that the annals were collected in eighty books (libros). Following Mommsen most scholars attribute this edition to Scaevola himself although there is no supporting evidence. For this reason, Bruce Frier has argued convincingly that, since there is no testimony of this edition in Republican authors and the idea of revising and editing the old records, such as the Sibylline books and the Fasti Capitolini, characterizes Augustus’ policy, it is not unlikely that the final compilation of the annales maximi in eighty books dates to that moment. In any case, considering the extant citations of this last edition, it seems to have passed unnoticed to ancient writers, whether because of its restricted access or because it was not thought to offer new information.

The date of the annales’ onset is even more difficult to ascertain. Cicero states vaguely that they existed ab initio rerum Romanarum. The consensus has always been that the annales maximi must have commenced at the beginning of the Republic and that the later citations of the pontifical record regarding the regal period might have been inserted some time up to the edition in eighty books. A testimony from Cicero provides significant evidence pointing to the existence of the record around 400 BC. It is stated in De Republica (1.25) that apud Ennium et in maximis annalibus a solar eclipse was recorded 350 years after Rome’s foundation. Most probably the annals did not date any event ab urbe condita (since the foundation of the city) but according to magistracies as the consulship, so the span from the consular date to the beginning of the city might have been worked out by adding the regal period. In all likelihood, that is how Rome was thought to have been founded on the second year of the seventh Olympiad (i.e. 751/750 BC). Following Polybius, Cicero accepted

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4 Serv. A. 1.373: *ita autem annales conficiebantur: tabulam dealbatam quotannis pontifex maximus habuit, in qua prae scriptis consulum nominibus et aliorum magistratuum digna memoratus notare consueverat domi militiaeque terra marique gesta per singulos dies. Cuius diligentiae annuos commentarios in octoginta libros veteres retulerunt, eosque a pontificibus maximis a quibus fiebant annales maximos appellarunt.*


6 There are three citations in Aulus Gellius (2.11.1–4; 4.5.1–6; 11.1–9) and three in Ps.-Aurelius Victor’s *Origo Gentis Romanae* (17.3; 17.5; 18.3). Frier (1999) 39–40 considers them to stem from Verrius Flaccus’ works. However, Badian (1966 11–13) considers that the late Republican publication of the *annales maximi* somehow influenced annalists like Gn. Gellius or L. Calpurnius Piso, whereas other scholars such as Elizabeth Rawson (1971) 165 believes that Roman historians never drew on this record.


8 This is, indeed, Dionysius’ method (A.R. 1.74–75.3). However, some scholars