

# The Nobility under Augustus

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The Roman Republic began in 509 B.C. with the overthrow of the king Tarquinius Superbus by the Roman nobility. Enraged by the rape of Lucretia, the Roman nobility followed the example of Lucius Junius Brutus, ancestor of the Brutus who conspired against Caesar, who according to Livy swore “By this blood, most chaste until a prince wronged it, I swear, and I take you, gods, to witness, that I will pursue Lucius Tarquinius Superbus and his wicked wife and all his children, with sword, with fire, aye with whatsoever violence I may; and that I will suffer neither them nor any other to be king in Rome!” (Livy 1.59).<sup>1</sup>

With this violent expulsion of the last king of Rome, the nobility banded together and established a new system, the Republic. The powers of government had been divided into many public offices and elements, which Polybius describes in his sixth book. The new system endured external and internal hardships and crises, expanding for five centuries until it encompassed the Mediterranean. The aggressive leadership of the Roman Republic and the competitive nature of elections came from the passionate desire of the nobility to attain power and prestige. However, the competition that drove Roman politics was carefully maintained through the culture of the nobility, which focused on the military, public speaking, and elections. The crisis that gripped the Late Republic saw the rise of dominant individuals competing for control of Rome, with Augustus ultimately triumphing. Under Augustus, the system that had been established by the nobility of the

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Republic shifted. The culture of Republican nobility with its themes of balance, mutual celebration, and cooperation, yielded to the force of Augustus. In the new culture that emerged in its place, the nobility were dependent on a princeps, “the first man.”

While the scholarship on this transition period is immense, there are still holes and avenues for new approaches. This paper seeks to fill one of those holes by analyzing and comparing the culture of the nobility during the late Republic to the culture under Augustus. Most scholarship investigating the period has focused on leading individuals such as Pompey, Caesar, and Augustus. Karl Galinsky’s *Augustan Culture*, for example, examines how Augustus influenced Roman culture. While that approach has been fruitful, it has overlooked the value and importance of the nobility during the transition. As mentioned above and throughout the rest of this paper, the nobility developed a complex culture that allowed them to rule the Republic for five centuries. Yet, despite the power and influence of the nobility, one man was able to rise and establish a pseudo-monarchy. Scholars, such as Henry Boren and Christian Meier, have investigated how Augustus was able to establish such a stable government, but few have approached the question from the point of view of the nobility. The role of the nobility in the establishment of the principate, a government headed by a princeps, is fundamental to understanding the stability of the Augustan age and the following two centuries. By focusing on the culture of the nobility, this paper takes a new approach to answering how the principate endured for two centuries.

### **Who Were the Nobility?**

For generations scholars have been debating this simple question: who were the nobility? Unfortunately there is no ancient definition of nobility nor a consensus among scholars over a technical definition of the word (Brunt, “Nobilitas” 1). Theodor Mommsen argued in 1887 that patricians, descendants of patricians who had become plebeian, or descendants of plebeians who had held a high magistracy, qualified as *nobiles* (Brunt, “Nobilitas” 1). This was the prevailing theory until 1912 when Matthias Gelzer, who believed that “the moderns bestow this title on too wide a circle,” proposed that *nobilitas* should be reserved for those with consular ancestors (28, 32). Lily Ross Taylor agreed with Gelzer and dissected the Roman nobility by further describing the

highest class of the nobility as members of the great patrician families: the Claudii, the Aemilii, the Cornelii, and the Valerii (Taylor, *Party Politics* 26). In recent decades scholars have argued against Gelzer, and some such as P.A. Brunt have gone back to Mommsen's theory. Since there is no consensus among scholars, a working definition of nobility needs to be established for this study.

This paper relies on a comparative study of two different groups: the ruling and upper classes of the late Republic compared with the ruling and upper classes of the early Principate. Though these two groups are not entirely the same they will be collectively understood as the nobility, much in the same way Keith Hopkins and Graham Burton described the nobility, as the upper crust of society (32). These are members of the Senate, holders of major magistracies in Rome, funders of public works, and priests. These positions were unpaid and strictly voluntary. The incentive for holding these positions was the glory that would be earned by the office holder.

### **Culture of the Republican Nobility**

Through military and oratorical success the Roman nobility gained honors and prestige. The martial character of the culture was apparent in the value placed on the triumph. Not only was the triumph a magnificent parade, displaying the wealth of a conquered nation, and followed by a magnificent structure commemorating the triumph but also an opportunity for a noble to temporarily be the leading noble. However, in order for a noble to receive a triumph he needed the approval of the Senate, which necessitated cooperation. Nobles also gained prestige and popularity through eloquence such as successful speaking in the courts, assemblies, and the Senate. However, success in those areas also necessitated the support of the nobility. Therefore the Roman system, which relied on a competitive nobility to fill magistracies, also required cooperation among the nobility in order to maintain a distribution of powers.

From the Republic's beginning in 509 B.C. the nobility were heavily invested in the welfare of the state. These individuals not only had a considerable economic interest in the state, but also a strong desire to serve the state as best they could. The government did not pay people for public service. The benefits of public office came from the opportunities to gain honor, which could take many different

forms especially over the five centuries of the Republic. In its early years the Republic seemed to be under attack at all times either from the Etruscans, Gallic tribes, or neighboring Italians. According to Rosenstein, this constant threat of attack prompted the development of a “strong military ethos” and “dedication to the public welfare” in the nobility (367-68). Well into the second century B.C., ten years military service was mandatory for political office, and most young nobles spent their ten years in the cavalry, in which the fast-paced action of fighting on horseback offered more opportunities for gaining or displaying valor.

Military valor or *virtus* was “nearly the most important thing in every state but especially in Rome” (Polybius 31.29.1). Success on the battlefield won soldiers physical signs of *virtus* such as the civic crown and battle scars. The civic crown was a decoration awarded to a soldier for saving a citizen’s life in combat. One important requirement for receiving this honor was that the soldier not only save the life but also kill the opponent. In 167 B.C. Marcus Servilius Pulex Geminus, in order to prove his worth to the Senate, reportedly said: “I have on 23 occasions challenged and fought an enemy; I brought back the spoils of every man with whom I dueled; I possess a body adorned with honorable scars, every one of them received in front” (Livy 45.39.16-17). He then stripped off his toga and, pointing to each scar, told in which war he had received it. This instance, according to Rosenstein, is not unusual (366-67).

Military service was one of the first steps for a noble on the way to political office and success. Nobles often followed the *cursus honorum*, which was the sequence of magisterial offices beginning with the junior post of *quaestor* and working up to service as *praetor*, consul, and censor. The praetorship, consulship, and dictatorship were the highly prized political offices that every ambitious politician wanted. As *praetor*, consul, dictator, or pro-magistrate (office held magisterial powers but was appointed by the Senate, not the people) a Roman could lead the legions into battle, conquering for the glory of Rome and self glorification. Roman generals such as Marius, Sulla, Pompey, and Caesar earned their place in history by conquering (David 435). The power of *imperium* made this possible. *Imperium* was a constitutional power or *potestas* allowing a person to command and this was displayed

by the *fasces*, a bundle of rods and an axe, carried by an escort of lictors, attendants of the magistrates.

Election to the consulate or praetorship brought individuals both honor and *imperium*. The number of accompanying lictors denoted rank. A dictator had 24 lictors, a consul 12, a *praetor* 6. In addition to consuls, praetors, and dictators, former consuls and praetors were eligible to be appointed by the Senate to govern specific Roman provinces. Though these pro-magisterial positions were not elected but appointed, the pro-magistrate also held *imperium* and depending on whether he was an ex-consul or ex-praetor would have either 12 or 6 accompanying lictors (Millar, "The Emperor" 157). When outside the *pomerium*, the sacred boundary of the city of Rome, axes were added to the *fasces* to show military authority (Hornblower and Spawforth 752). In a society as focused on the army as Rome was, the ability to command would clearly be highly valued and desired power. *Imperium* was directly linked to the greatest reward for a general, since victorious armies hailed their generals as imperator, which often led to the granting of a triumph.

The triumph was one of the most magnificent public displays in Rome. First celebrated by Romulus, a triumph was originally a purification ritual that later developed into an extravagant parade displaying the wealth brought back by a conquering general or *triumphator* (Holliday 132). The whole city would gather for the procession, which would begin in the Campus Martius outside the *pomerium*. The triumphator would be placed in a chariot and enter the city through the *porta triumphalis*, the triumphal gate, followed by his troops, prisoners, and captured wealth. Magistrates and senators would lead the procession, signifying state approval of the ceremony. The triumph would end at the Temple of Jupiter, where the *triumphator* would make offerings and sacrifices to Jupiter (Holliday 133). During the triumph, the triumphator would be placed in a chariot and clad in regal apparel, reminiscent of a king. The Romans feared a monarchy and all appearances of a monarchy; however, they praised military glory and success so greatly that they allowed the triumphator to appear to the whole Roman citizenry dressed as a king and supposedly personifying Jupiter (Beard 233-8). The elevation usually lasted for a day, but while the triumph was in progress the *triumphator* was the

leading noble of Rome.

This supreme elevation tipped the firmly maintained balance of reputation among the members of the nobility. The triumphant figure was no longer just a member of the nobility, but a great Roman conqueror, bringing the glory of Rome's conquests home. The material display of the captured wealth and the host of exotic animals, plants, and artwork that would be brought back made the ceremony into a memorable event. The conquests became increasingly splendid as Rome's might spread across the Mediterranean to richer nations. Roman generals gained glory by conquering and expanding Rome's borders. Pompey conquered Africa for his first Triumph, Europe for his second, and Asia for his last (Plutarch *Pomp.* 45,5). Julius Caesar reportedly paraded 600 million sesterces in his quadruple triumph (Beard 15). In the late Republic, as Rome's conquests expanded into the rich eastern lands of the Mediterranean, competition for prized campaigns increased. Consuls, praetors, and pro-magistrates began to compete on an even greater scale with each other for certain military commands, as ones in the east would be more profitable than those in northern Europe. The glory of a triumph, so highly desired by the Roman nobility, was something that became jealously fought for as the triumph not only displayed the growing wealth of Rome but also the eminence of the *triumphator*, whose name and honor would be immortalized on the *Fasti*, which recorded the triumphs of Roman generals.

Before a victorious general could receive a triumph he had to return to Rome, but not enter the *pomerium*, and make his request to the Senate with a description of his victory. By appealing to the Senate, the general sought the cooperation of fellow nobles to celebrate his success. In some cases a victorious general appealed to the people if the Senate denied him. In even rarer cases, the general simply granted himself a Triumph. L. Postumius Megellus celebrated a Triumph without the approval of the Senate and according to Livy without approval of the people (Livy 10.37.12; Pittenger 35-45). Gaius Pomptinus waited four years outside of Rome before he received his triumph in 54 B.C. (Beard 164). For a general to wait four years outside Rome for a triumph, sacrificing the opportunity to run for other public offices, shows how highly prized and to what lengths

the nobility was willing to go in order to attain a triumph. Through the Senate the nobility controlled the ambitions of fellow nobles for, “the Senate has the power to add distinction and glory, and on the other hand to obscure their merits and lower their credit” (Polybius 6.15). So during the Republic for a general to have a triumph, he needed the Senate to authorize it. Therefore the nobility confirmed who received a triumph, by upholding a balance of power among the nobility. The exact criteria the Senate used to decide if a triumph was deserved is unknown, but Senators would have many considerations to keep in mind while debating the award of a triumph. A senator would be conscious that someday he might be seeking that same honor for himself, and so he might be generous. Another senator might have already received his fair share of triumphs and fear that too many triumphs might devalue his own. Regardless, the underlying truth was the immense value and prestige that a triumph represented. With a triumph the nobility engaged in mutual celebration of each other. Though one noble was in the chariot, dressed as a king, the leading senators led the parade to the Temple of Jupiter. The participation of the whole nobility in the decision making and the actual parade was essential to the spectacle of the triumph. Therefore a noble required the cooperation of the nobility to properly receive a triumph.

However, the triumphal parade was not the only physical manifestation of the victorious general. It was often the practice of victorious generals, after receiving their Triumphs, to dedicate a temple that advertised the military victory and the individual achievement. These temples were known as *manubial* temples since they were paid for with the profits from the campaign (Welch 502). Marcus Claudius Marcellus, who won his triumph by the capture of the city of Syracuse in 211 B.C., is known to have constructed the temple *Honos et Virtus* to fulfill a vow to the gods made during his military campaigns (Beard 149). In the second century B.C., leading nobles shifted away from temples and moved to arches, porticoes, and basilicas to commemorate themselves (Patterson 347). In 146 B.C., one such portico was erected by Caecilius Metellus Macedonius who displayed on it the famous artwork of Alexander at the Battle of the Granicus, which had been made for the sanctuary of Zeus at Dion in Macedonia. This served not only to honor Alexander the Great but also Metellus himself, for

having conquered Alexander's homeland (Zanker 23).

As Rome expanded so too did opportunities available to the nobility. By creating more *imperium* holding offices, the senate created another reason for the nobles to cooperate and maintain a balance of power. The Senate extended the one year-term of *imperium* in a constitutional act called *prorogatio*. The governors of provinces were appointed by the Senate to a specific province for a period of one to three years. While in the province, the governor was expected to act as a judiciary and defend against internal and external threats (Lintott, *Imperium Romanum* 49-59). *Prorogatio* was the response of the nobility to a potential disruption of the Republican system. Without *prorogationes* the Republic would have been without effective leadership over the provinces. Since *prorogatio* was granted by the Senate, the nobility effectively held control over it. The officials appointed were publicly elected, but their extension of *imperium* was granted by the Senate. Therefore a noble's hope of a provincial command depended on the support of his fellow nobles. In this way the nobility were able to cope with and develop new political procedures to handle the growing Roman state (Boren 52). These provincial assignments also gave magistrates another opportunity to gain glory on the battlefield and even a triumph. In some cases, desire for glory led governors to provoke conflicts. One such example was during Cicero's governance of Cilicia, in which he had raised a considerable force to combat a Parthian invasion, but when the war never came he decided to attack the Pindenissians (Lintott, *Imperium Romanum* 53). Therefore prorogation represented another highly valued office for the nobles, who depended on mutual cooperation through the collective appointment of the Senate.

Public speaking was essential to politics and in order for a noble to gain the opportunity to speak to the Senate he had to either hold a magisterial office or be asked to speak by a magistrate. In this way nobles relied on each other through cooperation and support. To rise in politics, an ambitious, young noble needed to make himself known to the people, deliver speeches on new laws at legislative assemblies, and prosecute in the law courts (Millar, *The Crowd* 74). The development of the *quaestiones perpetuae* (standing courts) in the second century B.C. opened a new arena for politicians to hone their oratorical skills and

improve their reputations. Cases brought before these courts dealt mostly with members of the senatorial order and were heard before juries composed of senators, *equites*, or a combination of the two. These cases were also held in public in the Forum. So in addition to the eyes and ears of the assembled nobility, an orator also had a large public audience noisily expressing its favor and disfavor (David 426). This atmosphere was ripe for any orator, young or old, to gain honor. A young noble could gain fame among the people by prosecuting a corrupt politician and being championed as a defender of the people or he could gain the respect of the nobility through his eloquence. An older noble with years of experience could return a favor to a friend or gain a new friend by defending him, improving his social standing. Both could enjoy the success of a victory in the courts and the increase in fame and *auctoritas* (authority). While *auctoritas* carried no formal power, it was a very influential quality for Roman politicians who could earn it through election to a magistracy, social standing, wealth, or familial prestige (David 421). In the same way, a politician could rely on his own *auctoritas* or the *auctoritas* of a patron in passing legislation or speaking before the Senate (Galinsky 13).

Most opportunities to speak were reserved for those who held or had held the highest elected offices. Speaking in the Senate followed a strict guideline beginning with the *princeps senatus* (leader of the Senate). The two consuls-elect would speak next, followed by the rest of the Senate in a descending order of rank (David 425). This order of speakers shows that in the Senate, the nobility cooperated in an orderly manner and in theory gave every senator an opportunity to speak, though that was not always the case. As the meetings typically began at sunrise and ended at sundown there were too many senators to speak separately on any one issue, not to mention the number of different opinions on an issue would have been exhausted after several speakers. Also the presiding magistrate could end debate once he felt all opinions had been heard (Parrish 162). Unless a certain issue was exceptionally complex or contested, it is unlikely that a junior senator would have been able to speak.

## Electioneering – Becoming a Noble

A distinctive feature of the Roman Republic is that nobility was generated by electoral success (Yakobson 199). Roman citizens voting in their classes ennobled families. Consequently this made elections both a necessity and, in some respects, an annoyance or obstacle for the nobility. For a noble to achieve political success he needed to campaign. Thus, he not only needed the cooperative support of fellow nobles, but also the favor of people of the lower classes. The nobility had to tolerate the annoyance of flattering those deemed inferior to them in order to win a desired election (*Comm. Pet.* 42). Nonetheless, the nobility circumvented much of the democratic nature of the elections through the structure of the assemblies and campaigning practices. Their strategies show how the nobility maintained a balance of power through cooperation despite the influence of the people.

The Romans had many different assemblies, but for the aspiring politician the *comitia centuriata* was the most important because at this assembly praetors and consuls were elected. The structure of the centuriate assembly was based on the enrollment of soldiers and the collection of taxes. The assembly was held in the Campus Martius, outside the *pomerium*, because it was considered a military body. After the reorganization of the local tribes in 241 B.C. the centuriate assembly included 193 centuries based on wealth and tribal divisions (Taylor, *Roman Voting* 87). These individual centuries each had one collective vote and were grouped into one of five property classes. The first to vote was the *centuria praerogativa*, which consisted of one century chosen by lot of juniors of the first class. The first class, consisting of 69 centuries and organized by tribe, twelve centuries of equites, and one century of artisans followed. Then the *sex suffragia*, which were composed of six centuries of the Tities, Ramnes, and Luceres clan tribes. While the distribution of centuries into the lower classes is debated, scholars agree that it favored the nobility by giving a smaller, wealthier portion of the population a greater vote (Taylor, *Roman Voting* 84; Phillips, "Voter Turnout" 57). Votes were counted and announced after each division had voted. Once a candidate had a majority of votes (Taylor, *Roman Voting* 97), he was elected, and for consular elections the assembly ended once two men had received a majority (Phillips, "Voter Turnout" 49). Clearly an election could not be decided until at least the second property class had voted. If the

first class voted as a block for two candidates then the vote would likely not reach the lower classes. Through cooperation among the nobility, the nobles could have avoided the obstacle of popular elections. However, it is unlikely that the first class would have voted as a block, especially in the late Republic. One exception is the consular election of 63 B.C. in which Cicero is reported to have received the vote of the first 97 centuries (Phillips, "Voter Turnout" 54). Sulla's reforms in 81 B.C. had increased the number of praetors to eight and quaestors to twenty. This widened the base of eligible candidates for the offices of *praetor* and consul, who were already wealthy and well known politicians (i.e. members of the first property class). Consequently it increased competition in the late Republic, which would ultimately lead to a breakdown in the system of cooperation.

In order to make campaigning easier Roman politicians relied on fellow nobles to help in their canvassing. In the patron-client system, as explained by Matthias Gelzer, Roman politicians influenced their clients' votes (139). Through a complex web of relationships, in which one man could be both a patron and a client, politicians exercised their influence over friends, benefactors, family, and others to vote in a block for one candidate (Taylor, *Party Politics* 23-25). This concept is clearly stated in the *Commentariolum Petitionis*: "You must concern yourself with the whole city, all the *collegia*, districts and neighborhoods. If you unite the leading men in these to yourself in *amicitia*, you will find it easy to get the crowds following in their wake" (30).

Clearly, in order to win such a high office as the consulship, a Roman politician had to campaign diligently to build his network of friendly voters. The *Commentariolum Petitionis*, supposedly written by Cicero's brother Quintus, is a letter addressed to Cicero filled with canvassing tips fitted especially to the consular elections of 64 B.C. Though there is disagreement over the authenticity of the document, the Latin is written in Late Republican prose and therefore is fitting to the period (Tatum 117). The work is filled with useful information about the political world of the late Republic. Quintus tells Cicero that "a campaign for election to a magistracy can be divided into two kinds of activity: firstly to gain the support of one's *amici* [friends], secondly to win the goodwill of the people" (16). In securing the support of friends Cicero's brother advocated many tactics aimed at securing

for Cicero a wide range of supporters. He first recommended that Cicero call in *beneficia* (favors) from those he had supported in law courts or promoted in politics (Nicolet 300). Those being accused in these cases were well established nobles and would be in a great moral obligation to Cicero. He goes on in thorough detail listing the many different areas of support that Cicero can call on such as his own tribe, equites, young nobles fond of Cicero's eloquence, and Cicero's escort of supporters or *adsectatio* (Nicolet 300-02). Members of the nobility not only brought their circle of friends and clients to the ballot box, but their own personal prestige. By having the backing of a prestigious senator or head of state, a candidate could win over votes merely by the passive support of a leading man (Mouritsen 108). Quintus's advice for gaining the support of the people is that "This requires that you show knowledge of people's names, that you have winning manners, persistence, generosity, reputation and confidence in your public programme" (*Comm. Pet.* 41). Quintus does not underscore the value of the masses. He advised that Cicero use flattery, which though "disgraceful in the rest of one's life, is essential while electioneering" (42). This advice shows what lengths the nobility were willing to go in order to gain political office.

In order to be elected to the desired offices, nobles had to flatter inferiors and appear to be the friend and supporter of everyone. Cicero must be generous, ingratiating, and friendly, but not partisan (Yakobson 90). The *Commentariolum Petitionis* insists that he must appeal to all segments of society. The Senate must believe that Cicero will preserve their prestige; the *equites* and the wealthy must believe that he will maintain peace and quiet; and the people must believe that he will not be hostile to them (*Comm. Pet.* 53). Therefore Cicero should not take a stance on any issue. "In your canvassing," Quintus observes, "you should not adopt a definite policy -- either in the meetings of the Senate or of the people" (53). This seems ironic since Cicero was campaigning for the highest political office, yet he had to stay out of politics in order to obtain it. Clearly campaigning must have been an obstacle to the nobility.

Through military valor and oratorical prowess individual nobles could gain honor and prestige. Relying on these and a network of friends and supporters, a noble could be elected to higher magisterial

offices like the praetorship and consulship, which contained greater powers such as *imperium* and in turn offered greater opportunities to gain and display prestige, such as a triumph or sponsoring a public work. The garnering of honors by the Senate and election to offices by public assemblies maintained equality among the nobility, who both prized prestige and, crucially, feared a tyranny. Despite the competition for offices and honors the nobility governed Rome through cooperation and a balance of power for five centuries.

### Crisis

Unfortunately, the system could not handle the burden of intense competition which occurred during the final decades of the Republic, which provoked a breakdown in the normal function of the nobility. The events that shook the foundations of Roman governance from 88 B.C. to 27 B.C. are well known; however, it is necessary to review them to understand the character and nature of nobility culture under Augustus. Through the rise of dominant individuals, a new era in Rome began as private armies, proscriptions, constitutional reforms, and special commands subverted the nobility's balance of power.

Sulla did exceptional things that would later be used by Augustus to justify his own actions. First, the Senate not only appointed Sulla dictator *legibus faciendis et rei publicae constituendae causa* (for the sake of making laws and setting the Republic), granting him the power to reform the constitution of Rome, but also made the tenure of the office indefinite (Plut. *Sull.* 33.1). This contradicts the tradition of limiting the power of a single person and set the stage for Sulla and his successors to change the power structure of Roman politics. The second precedent set by Sulla was the use of proscriptions, decrees naming enemies of the state, which he used to eliminate much of his opposition and scare everyone else into submission. Through his proscriptions Sulla solidified his political power and thus in turn was able to pass his desired reforms. Of these reforms, Sulla's modification of the magistrates would have the greatest effect on the culture of the nobility. Sulla increased the number of annual quaestors from ten to twenty and praetors from six to eight. However, there remained only two consuls per year. This broadening of the base of candidates for the consulship, without a proportional increase in opportunity for further advancement, greatly intensified aristocratic competition in the

late Republic (Beard and Crawford 69). The intensity of competition led to the increased use of violence as a political tool as in the murder of C. Clodius in 52 B.C. by a gang of Milo's supporters (Dio 40.47 ff; Lintott, *Violence* 209 - 216). The nobility shocked by the political violence allowed enterprising and ambitious individuals to rise to the forefront of politics and take unprecedented powers, which disturbed the balance of power even further.

Pompey the Great, considered by some to be the first princeps, had unmatched influence in Rome, which conflicted with the Republican system that restricted such a consolidation of influence (Beard and Crawford 85). His career was nothing but exceptional for as he rose to a dominant position in Rome, Pompey, like Sulla, worked outside many of the traditional regulations regarding military command, holding office, and receiving triumphs. First, Pompey broke nearly all the rules of the *cursus honorum*. He both raised and led legions and earned a triumph as a *privatus*, without *imperium*. Pompey's first triumph was filled with controversies. He received the triumph without holding a magistracy, and even though he had been granted the greatest honor in an unorthodox manner, he chose to further aggrandize himself by attempting to have his chariot pulled by four elephants rather than the traditional four horses (Beard 16-17). He then jumped from holding no magisterial office straight to consul with a decree by the Senate exempting him from the *Lex Annalis*. This was exceptionally unconventional and yet the Senate allowed it. Second, with the passing of the *Lex Gabinia* in 67 B.C., Pompey was granted the special command to handle the pirates in the Mediterranean. This command made his *imperium* greater than the *imperium* of all military officials in the east.

Before Pompey, much construction had been done to aggrandize the individual such as the construction of porticoes and arches to commemorate the individual's achievements. Pompey's building served the same purpose, but his buildings were built on a much larger scale that overshadowed the porticoes and arches of former nobles. As Rome's conquests brought her into greater contact with the eastern Mediterranean, which had flourished for centuries, Rome became steadily more and more enamored with the luxuries of Hellenism (Beard 148). This growth in the nobility's interest in Hellenism is cited

by some as the reason for Rome's moral decline in the late Republic, and for this reason the Senate would not allow a permanent theater to be built in Rome until Pompey, with all of his influence, constructed one in 55 B.C. This theater marks a turning point in public works construction for the Roman nobility. Pompey's theater not only glorified him on a scale previously unheard of but was also a gift to the people of Rome (Zanker 25). The porticoes and arches of other leading Romans did little for the people of Rome, but a permanent theater gave the people of Rome a place to go for entertainment and naturally they would praise Pompey for his generosity. Public donations were not a precedent since politicians had been catering to the people of Rome for centuries, but the scale on which Pompey pandered was new and would be repeated again and again in the following century. Though Pompey exceeded all those in power and authority he never solidified his position as foremost Roman. The nobility still maintained control of the Republic through its balance of power and mutual cooperation, with which Pompey complied. The Republic gradually became increasingly dependent on dominant individuals such as Pompey, however, and this development threatened a system based on the equality of the nobility (Meier 59).

The assassination of Julius Caesar was one of the last major attempts by the nobility to maintain the balance of power. Caesar had defeated Pompey and the Senate and won the civil war, which he started in 49 B.C. when he crossed the Rubicon. In the process, Caesar became the dominant noble of Rome. The Senate granted him exceptional honors and powers such as the status of *dictator perpetuo*, which effectively made him something of a monarch or tyrant (Meier 61). His dominant position did not last, however, for a conspiracy among the nobility arose to assassinate him, which they did on the Ides of March in 44 B.C. Caesar's mistake had been in taking too much power and honor. His position as leading Roman had elevated and distanced himself from the traditional power base of Rome, the Senate and nobility. The nobility did not support Caesar because he was the antithesis to their oligarchic system of equality and cooperation. Their assassination of him reflected an attempt to restore their power and authority over the state.

The *Triumviri Rei Publicae Constituendae Consulari Potestate*, formed by

the Lex Titia in 43 B.C. consisted of Antony, Octavian, and Lepidus. A legally recognized office, established to restore the Republic, it more accurately built on the Republic to form a new political culture. These three men were entrusted with handling the crisis left over after Caesar's assassination. They held supreme consular power over other magistrates both in Rome and abroad. Although normal republican proceedings such as electoral and legislative assemblies continued to be held during this time (43 to 28 B.C.), the triumvirate dominated political life and enacted harsh actions such as their own proscriptions. One of the victims of these proscriptions was Cicero, whose name was added to the list for proposing that Antony be declared a public enemy of the state (Williamson 73).

Despite the growing audacity of leading individuals, elections still played a prominent role in the lives of the nobility. Pompey relied on the tribune of the plebs who passed his laws by the popular support at plebeian assemblies. It seems that the voters became not only more important but more volatile as the crises of the period became ever more disturbing. The nobility's reliance on the people and competition within itself became increasingly more violent. Considering the stakes, it is no surprise that bribery and violence increased. They were no longer competing for military campaigns with the hope of a triumph, but for the dominance of the Roman political field and, ultimately, in the cases of Pompey and Caesar and Antony and Octavian, the reins of government (Beard and Crawford 2).

### **Nobility under Augustus**

Though Augustus restored the Republic, the role of the nobility in this new Republic was diminished. After the years of civil war and proscriptions, the Roman nobility had been changed not only by the loss of life but also by a subtle shift in power and authority. During the late Republic, the culture of the nobility had been governed by a heightened sense of competition. Under the *principate*, popular elections were still held, offices still contained the same powers, but a subtle shift in the nature and culture of the nobility had nonetheless occurred. As Tacitus describes, Augustus

was wholly unopposed, for the boldest spirits had fallen in battle, or in the proscription, while the remaining nobles, the readier

they were to be slaves, were raised the higher by wealth and promotion, so that, aggrandized by revolution, they preferred the safety of the present to the dangerous past. (Tacitus *Ann.* 1.2)

The rise of Augustus to supreme prominence changed not only the forms of honors that the nobility strove for, but also the manner and way in which they achieved honor.

The opportunity for a military command in a province slightly changed under Augustus. With the settlement of 27 B.C., Augustus was appointed by the Senate to govern as a proconsul a large province containing Spain, Gaul, and Syria (Millar, "The Emperor" 156). Governors were appointed to the remaining provinces by the Senate in the Republican tradition because these provinces were considered peaceful and easy to govern (Strabo 17.3.24-5). Therefore the provinces not administered by Augustus did not have the opportunity for military action. But Augustus could not govern the huge area he had been appointed to, so he appointed his own legates to govern specific areas within his jurisdiction, called *legati Augusti pro praetore*. Augustan legates became new, highly prized offices. Augustus himself appointed his *legati* from former praetors and consuls, which meant that a noble had to curry the favor of only one man. In the Republican period, a noble seeking a pro-magisterial position would have needed the approval of the Senate, and therefore he would have needed the cooperation of the nobility. Under Augustus, a noble only needed the approval of Augustus. A legate served until he was replaced, so he did not have the time restraint that a proconsul did. Also, the provinces governed by Augustus' legates were the ones with standing armies and formidable enemies on the borders (Millar, "The Emperor" 157). This direct change to the nobility had a more subtle change on the culture. Though the new position offered another opportunity for a noble to achieve glory, it detracted from the proconsular positions appointed by the Senate. Even though a proconsular governance of a peaceful province may have been appealing, the provinces governed by Augustan legates were the provinces with the legions, with the military operations, and therefore the provinces with the opportunities to gain military glory.

The culture still prized military valor and glory, but in order to achieve it the nobility had to take positions subordinate to another

noble, Augustus (Boren 62). So, instead of leading a successful political life through cooperation among the nobility, the nobility had to adapt to the changes in the system. The tendency of inscriptions honoring nobles to list the offices held by the nobles shifted in response with the addition of the new Augustan offices. An inscription honoring Quintus Varius Geminus first lists his services to the divine Augustus as a legate and then his service as a proconsul, followed by many other positions (Chisholm 116). Since the inscription lists his service as a legate to Augustus first and ends with his being a superintendent for maintenance of public temples in Rome, it can be assumed that the inscription is listing the offices held in descending order of honor. Therefore Varius' greatest honor or achievement was to be a legate of Augustus; his proconsulship was secondary. Like other nobles under Augustus, Varius gained honor and fame by rising through the ranks and seeking a post as an Augustan legate. L. Piso around 14-11 B.C. was appointed by Augustus as a legate in the province of Thrace, and he received triumphal honors (Dio 54.34.7; Tacitus, "Annals" 6.10; Cooley 329). Nobles no longer advanced their political careers through mutual celebration or cooperation, but by currying favor of one man (Boren 64). Augustus' position as the guardian of honors and powers had been granted to him by the Senate when it appointed him governor of the militarized provinces.

Nobles received honors for military success; however, the honors were not full triumphs but substitutions. Individuals appointed by Augustus himself did not have an independent *imperium* (Eck 138). Without an independent *imperium* or military action in public provinces, nobles had no right to a full triumph, the highest honor for a noble. A legate's victory belonged to Augustus. The full triumph was then reserved only for Augustus or members of his immediate family. The last triumph bestowed to a noble outside the imperial family was to L. Cornelius Balbus, who as proconsul of Africa defeated the Garamantes in 19 B.C. (Talbert 362). Nero Claudius Drusus led many military campaigns into Germany from 12 to 9 B.C. His victories are recounted by Dio, who notes that "for these successes he received the triumphal honors, the right to ride into the city on horseback" (Dio 54.32). Though the full triumph was largely restricted, military glory remained a vital part of the culture of the nobility. In place of a

full triumph, a successful general would receive triumphal *ornamenta* or *insignia*. It is not clear what these honors included, but for the nobility under Augustus, triumphal *ornamenta* or *insignia* were the closest things to a full triumph and therefore one of the highest honors available to the nobility (Beard 70). In addition to these, a successful general would have a bronze statue of himself installed in the Forum of Augustus (Dio 55.10.3; Swan 97). Finally completed in 2 B.C., the Forum of Augustus was a massive structure dedicated to Mars. Like the *manubial* temples of the Republic, it was paid for with profits from military campaigns (Beard 43). The statue replaced triumphal building projects, which had previously provided an opportunity for self-aggrandizement.

By consolidating the means to receive honors in Augustus, the nobility elevated Augustus and solidified his position. No one outside of Augustus or his immediate family received a triumph after Balbus in 19 B.C. Though the nobility was not aware that Balbus would be the last non-imperial family member to receive a traditional triumph, the *Fasti Triumphales*, which displayed a list of all the triumphs, would have been a reminder that at one time nobles could receive a triumph. A noble would also have seen and known the origins of the theater of Pompey or the countless arches and porticoes of other *triumphators*. The *ornamenta*, *insignia*, and statues were clearly substitutes for the full triumph and triumphal buildings. However, under Augustus, these substitutes were accepted. The honors were still bestowed by the Senate, which was still the highest and most respected institution in Rome (Talbert 39; Brunt, "The Role" 423). Also, the frequency of inscriptions mentioning these honors from this and later periods attests to the value that the nobility placed on them (Eck 142). The reign of Augustus spanned 41 years and, in that time, the frequency of triumphs, even those bestowed on Augustus and members of his family, was low (Beard 69-70). Though a noble could not have genuinely hoped for a triumph, Tacitus claims of this time that "all was tranquil, and there were magistrates with the same titles; there was a younger generation, sprung up since the victory of Actium, and even many of the older men had been born during the civil wars. How few were left who had seen the republic" (*Ann.* 1.3). The substitution of inferior honors for the triumph shows that the relationship between

power and prestige that had dominated the lives of the nobility during the Republic had shifted. The mutual celebration of the Republican nobility, the bestowal of honors by the Senate, was not in place during the principate. Power and prestige was not dispersed among the nobility, but concentrated in Augustus, and Augustus was the means by which the nobility gained the honors still available to them.

The power of persuasion and oratorical excellence was popular among the nobility during the Republic. The traditional respect and value placed on oratory was still in place under Augustus, who was even judged for his speaking, which according to Tacitus was “an easy and fluent way of speaking” (*Ann.* 13.3). Members of the nobility could still gain a reputation as an orator in the courts and before the Senate, as they had during the Republic (Rutledge 111). However, the focus of some of the debates was different. During the Republic senators had debated whether or not to award a general with a triumph. That cooperation in order to celebrate a noble ended with the loss of the triumph. Debates about honors in the Senate had new topics to focus on such as whether or not to bestow an honor on Augustus or a member of his family (Tacitus, *Ann.* 1.14; Rutledge 117). During Augustus’ reign a new type of orator began to appear, *delator*. *Delatores* were informants and prosecutors for the emperor, working against the interests of the Senate in favor of the emperor (Rutledge 112). Though these types of orators were not as prominent under Augustus as they became under Tiberius, a person whom many scholars consider the first *delator*, Cassius Severus, did appear under Augustus (Winterbottom 90-1; Syme 100-2). The career of Cassius Severus reveals a shift in oratory. His style of oration was considered inferior to Ciceronian oratory, plagued with disordered attacks on fellow nobles (Tacitus, *Dialogus* 26.4). While oratory had been used in the Republic by nobles in prosecutions of other nobles, such as in the case of Cicero and Catiline, Cassius Severus used prosecution of other nobles to support Augustus (Rutledge 112-113). In this way oratory was still a means by which nobles could rise politically; however, its focus became currying the favor of Augustus, not persuading the people or the Senate.

During the Republic, there had been a balance between prestige and power. As the power of office increased so did the value placed on the prestige that could be obtained through the office. However,

under Augustus, changes were made to several of the magistracies that diluted the power of the magistracies and to some extent the prestige. Under Augustus, the tradition of electing *suffect consuls* (replacement consuls) halfway through the year became popular (Phillips, "The Conspiracy" 106-08). This meant that there would be four consuls throughout the year, two *ordinarii* and two *suffecti*, but only two would serve at a time. This had a direct effect on the nobility, who prized the consular office. The pyramid shape of the Roman government, with the lesser magistracies making up the broad base and the highest magistracies capping off the pyramid, meant that the consulship was both at the top of the *cursus honorum* and the most competitive office to obtain. However, when the number of openings was doubled, the opportunity to reach the office became better and therefore the competition for it would have slipped. A candidate who lost by a slim margin for *consul ordinarius* could be content to wait for half the year and run again. However, by limiting the term from one year to half a year, another effect occurs. The consulship not only lost some of its splendor with the increase in consuls, but the half year term limited the power of the office. The consul's greatest power was *imperium*, yet with half a year, a consul did not have much time to do anything substantial. Though the consulship was less powerful and less competitive an office to be elected to, it was still the consulship. It was still at the top of the *cursus honorum*, and a former consul could still go on to be appointed as a legate or proconsular governor. Though it had lost much of its power and influence, it still retained the respect of the office. The nobility still competed for the consulship in elections.

During Augustus' reign the nobility continued to be elected to office through popular assemblies; however, several shifts occurred in the structure of elections and the behavior of the nobility to the point that the nobility no longer needed to campaign as diligently as they had during the Republic. A direct change to the election process was made by the *Lex Valeria Cornelia* of A.D. 5, known to us by the *Tabula Hebana*. The law created ten new centuries named after the grandsons of Augustus, C. and L. Caesar, to vote first in the *comitia centuriata*. These centuries would vote on the praetors and consuls. The votes of these centuries would be announced prior to the voting of the following centuries in the assembly. Consequently these votes would have had

some influence on the voting of the following centuries (Jones, *Studies* 37). The concept of a preliminary vote of centuries was nothing new. During the Republic, the *centuria praerogativa* and the first property class had the honor of voting first and of its votes being announced before the lower property classes voted (Brunt, "The Lex" 75). However, the new centuries had the effect of creating a new honor for the nobility. Rather than voting in the first property class or the *centuria praerogativa*, some nobles would vote in one of the centuries named for the grandsons of Augustus. The nobles in these new centuries had no exceptional power, except that their votes would perhaps influence the following centuries, but they did have exceptional prestige.

These changes to traditional, Republican offices meant that the nobility could not gain popularity through traditional ways. During the Republic, for example, the aedileship provided an opportunity for nobles to achieve popularity. Of its many functions, the *aedile* was responsible for sponsoring major games and festivals. The aedileship was a stepping stone on the *cursus honorum* that led directly to the praetorship, and so many aediles would use the office as self advertisement. By spending lavishly on extravagant games and festivals, aediles would gain popularity among the masses, popularity which the nobles hoped would reimburse them at the ballot box in the form of votes. During Augustus' reign, however, the aedileship began to lose much of its appeal. In 22 B.C. the responsibility for sponsoring festivals and games was transferred to the praetorship (Jones, *Augustus* 87). Unfortunately the responsibility had been one of the appeals of the office for it was an opportunity for the nobility to gain popularity with the masses. During the Republic nobles had made names for themselves as being generous to the people by sponsoring extravagant festivals and games. Despite this loss the office was not without other responsibilities and opportunities to gain popularity. Egnatius Rufus became an *aedile* in 21 B.C., one year after the transfer of festivals and games. He gained so much popularity by sponsoring a fire brigade as an *aedile* that he was elected *praetor* immediately after his aedileship (Velleius Paterculus 2.91.3). Gradually, however, the aedileship lost the responsibility for the fire service as well as management of the corn supply and aqueducts (Jones, *Augustus* 87). Without the opportunities to gain the popularity of the people, the aedileship lost prestige and

power. This change again reveals how the nobility could not as easily gain popularity through the traditional pathways.

Instead the nobility had to use what scholars today call the patron-client system. This system (discussed above) was still in place during the reign of Augustus; however, the system focused on Augustus rather than a network of nobles. Throughout the early principate, the person with the greatest influence was Augustus. According to Dio, in A.D. 7 Augustus had appointed all the candidates running for offices due to the factional disputes that had disrupted the assembly (55.34.2). Regardless of whether or not Augustus directly or indirectly through his influence appointed the magistrates himself, the underlying truth is that he possessed an exceptional degree of influence in the Roman state (Galinsky 10-28). As consul for part of his reign (27 B.C. to 23 B.C.), Augustus exercised the consular power of *nominatio*, which allowed him to accept the intention of an individual to run for office. All consuls had this power. They would receive the *professiones* of candidates and then announce their names at the assembly (Jones, *Studies* 33). However, Augustus also had the right to *commendatio*, which was not a constitutional power. *Commendatio* was the act of endorsement of a candidate. Naturally Augustus' endorsement would have been highly valued, for he had in essence become the supreme patron of the Roman state. During the Republic, candidates would appeal to individuals of significant public stature, as Cicero had done to Pompey (*Comm. Pet.* 5; Favro 61). However the influence held by Augustus exceeded all those in Rome (*Res Gestae* 34) and consequently his endorsement exceeded all those at the elections.

During the Republic, the Senate was the prestigious body of ex-magistrates, which provided advice to the magistrates. Senators were highly esteemed. However, under Augustus, another level of prestige was added by making senatorial rank a social class (Talbert 39). There were two laws under Augustus, the *lex Julia de Maritandis Ordinibus* of 18 B.C. and the *lex Papia Poppaea* of 9 A.D. that applied directly to marriage. These laws placed restrictions on senatorial marriage. For example, the *lex Julia* forbade senators, sons and daughters of senators, grandsons and granddaughters of senators, and even great-grandsons and great-granddaughters of senators from marrying freedmen or freedwomen (Cooley 355). This law effectively turned the Senate

into its own social class, which made it more prestigious. Yet it also represented a limitation on the freedoms of the nobility.

During the Republic, it might have been expected for senators to marry their social or economic equals, but it was never legally imposed on them. In order for senators to identify other senators and those of senatorial rank, a certain dress code was enforced in the Forum requiring the wearing of a toga (Suet. *Aug.* 40.5). In addition to the toga, which any Roman citizen could wear, those of senatorial rank were distinguished by the *latus clavus*, a broad purple stripe running down the front of the tunic (Cooley 383). This was a badge of honor, reserved only for those of senatorial rank. A further separation of the Senate from the rest of the people was evident in the theater. In the *lex Julia theatralis* of 22 B.C. the first row at any theater was reserved for those of senatorial rank (Suet. *Aug.* 44). This meant that not only was the show on display but also the nobility. The nobility had prestigious front row seats at the theater, which would have meant that they would have been closer to the entertainment and separated from the people (Talbert 43). This must have developed a sense of comradeship for the nobility, who were now dressing the same and sitting together in the theaters. These changes were made not by the nobility, but through laws proposed by Augustus. Though these laws were passed by the Senate and people, the honor that they bestowed on the senatorial nobility again originated with Augustus.

## **Conclusion**

The Augustan regime succeeded where Pompey and Caesar had failed. Augustus dominated Rome for 41 years and established a new system, the Principate. As this paper has shown, the stability of Augustus' regime can be attributed in part to his relationship with the nobility. Both the Republican and Augustan nobility valued military and oratorical success. Both relied on popular elections to attain political offices. While the Republican nobility had relied on a system of cooperation and a distribution of powers to attain honor and glory, the nobility under Augustus' reign adapted to a political world in which power and honors were concentrated into one man. Augustus was the monarch of Rome in everything except title, which is apparent from the coinage of the period (Galinsky 28-41). In this way he was able to avoid the fates of Tarquinius Superbus and Julius

Caesar while remaining in power. This paper has explained how the nobility became dependent on Augustus to receive honors and political advancement. By granting Augustus exceptional powers, honors, and titles, the nobility strengthened both the positions of Augustus and themselves. Through this symbiotic relationship, the Roman state experienced relative stability for nearly two centuries.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In keeping with classical scholarship, this paper cites original sources according to book, chapter, and line numbers.

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