ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: CHOOSING ONE'S WORDS: HOW JULIO-CLAUDIAN EMPERORS COMMANDED THEIR ELITE SUBJECTS IN THE WORKS OF LATIN HISTORIANS

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Roman emperors acted within a culture deeply concerned with personal honor. In this environment issuing commands to aristocratic subjects presented the potential for conflict, as the honor of the commanded subject was at risk. One technique adopted by some of the Julio-Claudian dynasty was to embrace ambiguity in how they phrased their commands. Through an examination of the verbs used by Latin historians to describe the emperor issuing a command, it becomes clear that emperors relied upon this type of ambiguous phrasing when dealing with elite subjects. However, there was little use of ambiguity when dealing with non-elite subjects. There is a generational divide in the use of ambiguity, and it is argued here that this was because the elder Julio-Claudians had been present for the genesis of this strategy during the reign of Augustus, while the younger members of the dynasty had not. Strategic ambiguity was a method by which the emperor could fashion himself as first citizen rather than as a master.

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Introduction

In 32 CE, Gaius Cestius, a former consul of Rome, found himself in an uncomfortable position. Quintus Servaeus and Minucius Thermus, two Roman aristocrats associated with Sejanus, the now disgraced Praetorian Prefect, were being called to trial as part of the general purge of Sejanus' friends and family. There was sympathy for these two men among the senate, but "Tiberius, berating them as principals in crime, advised the elder C. Cestius to tell the senate what he had written to him; and Cestius undertook the accusation" (Tac. *Ann.* 6.7.2).[1] What is interesting about this passage is that Tiberius is not represented as explicitly ordering Cestius to read the letter. The verb Tacitus chose, *admoneo,* can be translated as "suggest", "advise", or "urge", all of which suggest that the decision rested with Cestius.[2] Tacitus chose a flexible verb which could convey both suggestion and command.

The question is why would Tacitus choose to have Tiberius couch his command in such a way? The answer seems to lie in the nature of the principate itself and the social constraints the early emperors operated under. I concur with Matthew Roller's contention that in the early phases of the principate, it was unclear exactly what the princeps was and was not.[3] What was clear is that the traditional system of power distribution across the aristocratic class was being supplanted by a concentration of power in the hands of an autocratic emperor. Despite that concentration, the cooperation of the elite class remained essential. This was especially true in the transitional period during which the cultural norms of the Republic had not assimilated to one-man rule. A nascent autocracy can endure the resistance of part of the elite, but it cannot

[1] Loeb Translation
[2] Oxford Latin Dictionary, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), s.v. "admoneo" https://archive.org/details/aa.-vv.-oxford-latin-dictionary-1968/page/48/mode/2up.
[3] Matthew Roller, *Constructing Autocracy: Aristocrats and Emperors in Julio-Claudian Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 7-8.

succeed with universal opposition. The emperor required elite support, whether that be through the creation of a new elite group or the co-opting of the extant elites. After Actium, Octavian would do both, purging Antonine aristocrats and installing *novis homines* as needed.[4] However, this reconstitution of the aristocracy could not be done whenever it suited the emperor. Augustus and his successors staked their claim to legitimacy on republican antecedents, so installing an entirely new aristocracy was out of the question, as was reconstituting it every time there was a succession. Therefore, the emperor had to win the support of the elites as they existed. To do so Augustus manufactured the illusion that he remained the most prestigious aristocrat among many, and that the other members of the Roman elite were free in the same political sense as previous generations. Construction of that illusion was a process that required a number of techniques, and one that appears directly in our sources is the strategic employment of ambiguity surrounding the power dynamic between emperor and his elite subjects.

There are overt ways to incentivize and coerce a given population, but these were not the only tools available to the early emperors, and they came with a cost.[5] Indiscriminate coercion can prove counterproductive by building resentment among those who find themselves on the receiving end of these techniques. Even when carefully applied, the application of force and fear undermined the Augustan claim to legitimacy, based as it was on the idea that republican *libertas* was not infringed upon by the existence of the emperor.[6] There were other, more innocuous tactics that yielded results with minimal expense of time or resources. Speaking carefully and utilizing communication strategies that concealed or ameliorated the consolidation of power in

[4] Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), 356-57.
[5] Sam Van Overmeire, "According to the Habit of Foreign Kings: Nero, Ruler Ideology and the Hellenistic Monarchs," *Latomus* 71, no. 3 (2012): 755.
[6] The contrast between Republican *libertas* and the *dominatio* of the principate is a recurring theme in Tacitus, who is one of the sources that will be examined in this essay. Thomas Strunk, *History after Liberty: Tacitus on Tyrants, Sycophants, and Republicans* (Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 25.

the hands of the emperor was such a strategy. Such simple maneuvers can prove remarkably effective, even on those who may be expected to see through such a technique. For effectively no cost, the would-be autocrat can make significant strides towards shoring up support simply by modulating how he speaks to different audiences. Language, well employed, can act as a screen for the concentration of power. One of the most fundamental linguistic expressions of power is the giving of commands.

Augustus faced a societal problem with his appeal to republicanism as the basis of his power; those republican institutions and traditions were expressly anti-monarchical, and in conflict with perpetual rule by one man. Augustus navigated this problem by concealing the true nature of his government. He made the situation ambiguous by presenting himself as a continuation of the Republican tradition rather than a disruption.[7] One method for creating that ambiguity was being careful in how the emperor verbally expressed his power. Commands had to be given, but they did not always need to be presented as explicit orders.[8] When Tacitus chose *admoneo* to describe how Tiberius commanded Cestius, it suggests a recognition the emperor was employing this kind of linguistic sensitivity. Instead of issuing Cestius a direct order, as he certainly could have, Tiberius blurred the power differential and the nature of the emperor-subject relationship. To assess whether this type of communication was actually used, I have evaluated selections from the works of six Latin historians: three dealing with the Republic, Caesar, Sallust, and Livy; two on the early principate, Tacitus and Suetonius; and one on the later empire, Ammianus. Intentional ambiguity is present in the works of both second century

[7] In *Res Gestae* 5 and 6 Augustus takes pains to make clear that he repeatedly refused positions of power, and that the power he *did* hold was delegated to him through the senate. In *RG* 8 - 12, each section begins with the senate as the actor, and Augustus as the passive recipient.

[8] Obedience did not come naturally to Roman aristocrats, except in specific circumstances, and being seen as obeying too willingly was conflated with servility. J.E.Lendon, *Empire of Honour: The Art of Government in the Roman World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 20-21.

sources, and largely absent in works that pre and post-date them. This raises an important question; did the early emperors modulate their speech when dealing with elite subjects?

I will examine the verbs used by several Latin historians to describe the emperor issuing commands to better understand if ambiguity was integral to Imperial communication strategy with the Imperial elite. Following the exploration of ambiguous word usage in the texts, I will turn to how the Augustan regime sought to represent itself as a continuation of the Republic, and how we can understand linguistic ambiguity as an important part of that representation. Finally, I will briefly focus on Tacitus who most regularly employed these verbs, with an emphasis on how by representing imperial commands in this fashion he is able to connect the Julio-Claudian past with his own time.[9]

Returning to the example of Gaius Cestius, there was no realistic scenario in which Cestius chose not to comply with Tiberius simply because the emperor opted to use ambiguous language. The introduction of ambiguity served a performative function, blurring the power relationship by suggesting a freedom of choice on the part of the subject, but it did not undermine the real distribution of power. In Cestius' case, Tacitus represented Tiberius as engaging simultaneously in two distinct verbal maneuvers. Not only did he *suggest* to Cestius that he undertake the prosecution of Servaeus and Thermus, but he also framed his suggestion in such a way as to reveal Cestius' role as an informer against them by suggesting Cestius read aloud to the rest of the senate the letter he had written to Tiberius about the two men. This ensured that Cestius would not be in a position to assert his autonomy, no matter how Tiberius framed his order. Having been exposed by Tiberius, Cestius stood to gain nothing by refusing, his reputation was already damaged. By nominally putting the choice in Cestius' hands though,

[9] For the centrality of *libertas* in the literature and historiography of the principate see Dylan Sailor, *Writing and Empire in Tacitus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 126-127.

Tiberius was able to issue a command without having to be explicit. This was not a sincere offer of alternatives, but rather a way to allow Tiberius to avoid insulting the rest of the audience, Cestius' senatorial colleagues. This simple tonal shift blurs the relationship between Tiberius and Cestius without ever truly obscuring it, a dynamic which ordinarily benefits both parties. The issuer of the command can still make clear what his desires are, while the subject of the command is allowed the appearance of autonomy. In this specific case, Tiberius avoided being seen to order a consular aristocrat to do something in the same manner one might a slave. He degraded Cestius individually through the revelation of his prior role as an informer, but simultaneously preserved the corporate honor of the aristocracy by giving Cestius the appearance of choice. Tiberius signaled to the rest of the senate that regardless of his opinion of Cestius personally, he still respected the individual autonomy of all aristocrats as members of an elite class. The emperors competed with eminent aristocrats for honor, while simultaneously working to avoid dishonoring the collective aristocracy.[10]

This was the complex social framework the early emperors found themselves in when dealing with their fellow Roman aristocrats. The preeminence of the emperor created problems, for he operated in a nominally republican system that was never intended to function with a single fixed center of power. Accordingly, Augustus and some of the early emperors worked to obfuscate the situation. This was necessary because while the emperors may have had effectively autocratic political power, they were constrained by a much older social system that was inherently anti-monarchical, as it sought to prevent the concentration of power in the hands of any one man.

[10] Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 111. For the competition with other great aristocrats, and 188 for the dangers of insulting powerful men, and how aristocratic society resented such insults.

There emerge two claims to be made based on the examination of these commands. First, how emperors issued commands was an important element in constructing the requisite ambiguity in Julio-Claudian imperial interpersonal communications. The language of command therefore merits a systematic study into how our sources have actually represented such communications.[11] The command is the most direct expression of power present in the texts, and how the emperor chooses to issue a command can inform us about the social dynamic present between him and the subject. The information drawn from this examination suggests a strong correlation between an elite audience and the imperial use of linguistic ambiguity. The second claim is that Tacitus is making a statement about the replacement of freedom and truth with illusion under the principate, and how even that fades with the entrenchment of autocracy (Tac. *Hist.* 1.1 and *Ann.* 4.33). While he repeatedly represented Tiberius as using ambiguous language when speaking to elite subjects, he made it clear that the ambiguity in the form of the command did not equate to ambiguity in function (e.g., Tac. *Ann.* 1.77.3). An examination of the language in the *Annals* will show that the verbiage he used when dealing with Tiberius as the first imperial successor is markedly different from the more unequivocal words he chose to use to depict commands from Nero, who came to power when the principate was more firmly entrenched.

The social rank of the subject affected how likely the emperor was to employ more polite language. In the two second century sources who deal directly with the Julio-Claudians, the emperors are represented as being far more likely to use verbs like *admoneo*, which are open to multiple interpretations, when dealing with elite subjects (1:2.5) vs non-elites (1:27). Second,

[11]Scholars like Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, Matthew Roller, and Aloys Winterling have explored this subject in depth, and I am deeply indebted to their work on the subject of early imperial communications and self-representation. Across all three there is a central theme of obscuring the true political power dynamic in the early principate. Matthew Roller, *Constructing Autocracy.* Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "Civilis Princeps: Between Citizen and King," *Journal of Roman Studies* 72 (1982): 32-48. Aloys Winterling *Politics and Society in Imperial Rome* (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2009).

there appears to be a generational divide between the four post-Augustan Julio-Claudians. The word selection of Tacitus and Suetonius suggest that Tiberius and Claudius were more sensitive to the needs of aristocratic honor and the importance of preserving both corporate and individual dignity (1:1.7 verbs being ambiguous). Caligula and Nero on the other hand, showed comparatively little inclination to disguise their power when dealing with the elite population (1:17.5 verbs being ambiguous). I will examine how the honor needs were different in the case of each of the Julio-Claudians, and how that would have impacted their deployment of communication strategies such as ambiguous commands. Furthermore, the lived experience of Augustus' reign may have better prepared Tiberius and Claudius to sustain the Augustan model by demonstrating a successful framework for imperial-elite communications. Lacking this experience, Caligula would end up dead at the hands of men concerned with the preservation of their honor who would not countenance continued degradation at his hands.[12] Nero would provoke enmity among the senate, leading to the Pisonian conspiracy, which was largely driven by personal animus.[13] As Machiavelli would later understand, to injure a man without crushing him utterly invited reprisal.[14] An injury to the honor of a Roman aristocrat would not be forgotten. The early Roman emperors were dealing with proud men and women.[15] While

[12] Certainly, attempts were made (some successfully), on the lives of both Tiberius and Claudius, but the root cause does not appear to be revenge for insult or maltreatment. In Tiberius' case, the conspiracy of Sejanus (if it existed) was discovered and prevented before he had an opportunity to try to remove his target, whether that was the young Caligula or Tiberius himself. There is an account in Tacitus that Tiberius met his end at the business end of a pillow (*Ann*. 6.50), but even if we accept that version of events, this was a murder of expedience. The Praetorian prefect Macro, smothered Tiberius in this version of his death in order to ensure that Caligula became emperor, thereby preserving his position as Praetorian prefect. Tiberius in his later days would see conspiracies everywhere, but whether the threat was real or imagined is unknown. Claudius was also the subject of many conspiracies, largely driven by his perceived weakness. He was able to put them down, but ultimately came to a bad end anyway. He was served poisoned mushrooms by his wife Agrippina (*Ann*. 12.67), but again, as with Tiberius, the issue in this final plot was the succession, not injured dignity.

[13] Josiah Osgood, "The Topography of Roman Assassination, 133 BCE - 222 CE," in *The Topography of Violence in the Greco Roman World*, ed. Werner Reiss and Garrett G. Fagan (Ann Arbor MI, 2016), 43.

[14] Niccolo Machiavelli *The Prince* Chapter 3.

[15] Insults from monarchs could provide the impetus for assassination and was no doubt on the mind of historians who dealt with imperial murders. Lendon, *Empire of Honour, 29.*

nobody would directly challenge his authority to command, that is, the function, it was still important that he do so in the appropriate form.

Honor Culture and Politeness Theory

Before turning to the Julio-Claudian case in detail, it is necessary to consider the broader social context in which they operated; namely, the honor culture of ancient Rome and how that affected elite interaction. Ancient Rome, and the ancient Mediterranean more broadly, were socially bound up in concerns of honor and shame. The biblical scholar Bruce Malina defines honor as "the value of the person in his or her own eyes (that is, one's claim to worth) plus that person's value in the eyes of his or her own social group."[16] This meant that social interactions necessarily brought with them an opportunity to increase the honor of the participants, or conversely to bring shame upon them.

This is especially true when the social status of the two parties is unequal. In their study of shame, "Shame as the Emotional Response to Threat to the Social Self," Kemeny, Gruenwald, and Dickerson have found that shame is most frequently evoked under two situations, the first being when some personal flaw is revealed to one's social group. This can be considered a self-inflicted source of shame, insofar as the offense, if not necessarily the revelation of it, was the responsibility of the shamed individual. The second common context for producing a shame response is when interaction with a social superior highlights a person's own lower status.[17] If drawing attention to disparity in levels of social status is a potential context for producing shame,

[16] Bruce Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Revised Edition), (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press 1993), 31.
[17] Margaret Kemeny, Tara L. Gruenewald, and Sally S. Dickerson, "Shame as the Emotional Response to Threat to the Social Self: Implications for Behavior, Physiology, and Health," *Psychological Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (2004): 153-60.

then it is worth pausing to consider what levels of disparity are most likely to produce the greatest response. The difference in power plays a direct role in the strength of a shame response when one's lower status is highlighted. The smaller the delta, the greater the potential loss of face. If, for instance, a corporate CEO brusquely orders an entry level employee to do something, or is simply rude to them, the low-level employee loses only a little face, so great is the difference in their respective powers. The entry level employee is not of sufficient status to demand respect. If the CEO is rude to a vice president, or other executive level employee, the loss of face is much higher. Through rudeness, however formulated, the CEO profoundly denigrates their co-elite executive. Accordingly, there is a greater loss of face, or shame.

The command is one of the clearest ways to demonstrate a difference in status, as naturally, only the party who holds higher status will have a reasonable expectation of obedience. Being commanded to do something impinges upon the "radius of self-worth".[18] It clarifies the extent to which one's own will can be executed. When this occurs, there is a tension between the individual's self-interest and his honor. Presumably, if one fails to obey the orders of someone more powerful than himself, there will be consequences, and therefore it is often rational to comply. But by complying with another's demands, the subject is forced to recognize his reduced ability to affect his own will upon the world. This can cause a feeling of resentment, as his reduced position is made clear; if done publicly, it can serve to shame the party who is compelled to obey. These were, and remain, very real stakes that fundamentally alter how individuals approach social engagement. In a confrontational context, this can produce a dynamic social scientists call "challenge and riposte", in which both parties work to defend their own honor while simultaneously enhancing their prestige at the expense of their interlocutor.[19]

[18] Philip Fisher, *The Vehement Passions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 176-177.
[19] Zeba Crook, "Honor, Shame, and Social Status Revisited," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, No. 3 (2009): 593.

This dynamic tells us two things about these social interactions. First, that in any adversarial interaction, the distribution of honor becomes zero-sum. For the superior to make a claim for his authority, he must necessarily do so at the expense of the honor of his subject. Conversely, if the subject is to attempt to make an honor claim by demonstrating that he retains his autonomy, he would do so at the cost of honor to the superior. Second, all of this highlights the presence of the third party, the audience to this series of challenges and ripostes. The presence of an audience means that in addition to the direct interaction between the two individuals, there is a performative element at work. Just like any other performance, that given during an interpersonal contest which could impact one's honor or bring him shame was always done with one eye on the audience. Shame and honor were public facing in the Roman context; thus, the audience is central to this examination of how the early emperors were presented as giving commands.[20] The audience, in this context, was the social elite of the empire. This was true of the actual interactions between the emperor and aristocrats, but it was also true of the literary accounts composed by the Roman historians. The Roman literati were largely members of the aristocracy, which primarily consisted of the senatorial and equestrian classes. It was this audience that was the primary arbiter of what constituted a valid claim to honor, or conversely, was deserving of shame.[21]

What tools were at the emperor's disposal for navigating these series of honor challenges? The sociolinguistic theory of "politeness", specifically, as applied to broader organizational theory, may help elucidate how simple rhetorical choices could mollify or defuse

[20] For honor as a public commodity rather than a private one. Lendon, *Empire of Honour,* 54, and Unni Wikan, "Shame and Honour: A Contestable Pair," *Man* 19, no.4. (1984): 638.
[21] Crook, "Honor, Shame and Social Status," 599. On the centrality of the "Public Court of Reputation" and external validation of one's honor, which was of far greater consequence in collectivist societies like those of the Ancient Mediterranean than an internal assessment of one's honor. Similarly, see Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 58 for the inability of an aristocrat or even emperor to generate honor for themselves or others without public consent.

situations that might otherwise become an adversarial one with serious honor ramifications.[22] Interpersonal interactions in an honor culture can create situations wherein the participants actively risk losing face; and in a scenario in which both parties act solely to preserve their own face, the situation becomes adversarial and zero-sum. Politeness theory focuses instead on the role that an individual can have in preserving the face of the other party.[23]

Politeness in this context becomes relevant when an interaction between individuals produces a "Face threatening act". In the broader sense, this can be anything which could potentially cause a loss of face, such as contradicting, demeaning, imposing, or asking a favor of someone. All of these are scenarios which could cause the person being accosted to somehow lose face.[24] By engaging in "polite" linguistic maneuvers, the person committing the face threatening act can minimize the potential loss of face for the target of their action.

There are two primary forms of polite engagement, negative and positive politeness. Negative politeness operates by establishing social distance between the actor committing the face threatening act and the recipient of the act. This can be accomplished through means such as increased formality, "Excuse me sir…" or a verbal recognition that the actor is imposing on the recipient of the action. Positive politeness on the other hand, operates by minimizing social distance to minimize the threat to the recipients face by acting as if an intimate connection exists between both parties. A connection which, if in fact extant, would ameliorate the threat to one's face because the relationship is close enough that the loss of face is not an issue. An example of

[22] Brown and Levinson, 1987 is the basic framework for Politeness Theory as it applies to sociolinguistics and anthropology. David Morand makes the case for the application of Politeness Theory to better understanding organizations and how they function. David Morand, "Dominance, Deference, and Egalitarianism in Organizational Interaction: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Power and Politeness," *Organization Science* 7, no. 5 (1996): 544–56. David Morand, "Language and Power: An Empirical Analysis of Linguistic Strategies Used in Superior-Subordinate Communication," *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 21, no. 3 (2000): 235-248.
[23] Morand, "Language and Power," 237.
[24] Morand, "Language and Power," 237.

a tactic for the positive politeness strategy includes using nicknames or slang terms of address "Hey bro…".[25] Unsurprisingly, negative politeness generally is considered by test subjects to be the "more polite" linguistic strategy, as positive strategies run the risk of overstepping interpersonal boundaries and actually causing offense.[26] The introduction of ambiguity is one negative politeness tactic. By obscuring the precise nature of the interaction, whether that be a command, a request, or any other form of potential face threatening act, ambiguity assumes less on the part of the speaker, lowering the stakes of a given engagement by providing both parties room to maneuver.

Tone matters, which is the subject under examination here.[27] Even today, where personal honor is not forefront in most individual's minds, people may bristle when given an explicit command without some sort of ameliorative qualifier.[28] Consider the modern workplace, in which most supervisors will issue commands by prefacing them with "would" or "could" and often concluding with "please", turning the command into a request. Both the supervisor and the employee understand the power differential, but politeness serves to blur the lines, and make the subordinate party feel respected.[29] There are environments in which these niceties are cast aside for the sake of expediency, such as in an emergency or similar high stress environments. However, these exceptions highlight that polite discourse is the expectation, rather than an anomaly. The explicitly given command serves to bring either the hierarchical differences between the interlocutors or the urgency of the situation into sharper relief. Contemporary

[25] Morand, "Language and Power," 238-239.
[26] Morand, "Language and Power," 239.
[27] On the broader importance of the emperor's speech see: Josiah Osgood, "The Vox and Verba of an Emperor: Claudius, Seneca and « le prince idéal »," *The Classical Journal* 102, no. 4 (2007 2006): 336.
[28] David Morand, "Dominance, Deference, and Egalitarianism,"545. On how politeness is a necessary lubricant for face-to-face encounters.
[29] Status effacement of this sort can be beneficial to the effacer, in a way that status enhancement sometimes is not. Cameron Anderson, Daniel R. Ames, and Samuel D. Gosling, "Punishing Hubris: The Perils of Overestimating One's Status in a Group," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 34, no. 1 (January 2008): 97.

politeness theory of course will not map perfectly onto an ancient honor society, but it does provide a useful context for understanding how linguistic strategies like ambiguity would be consciously employed by ancient actors, who, if anything, were considerably more sensitive to the threat of losing face than we are today.

Because the command reduces status to a binary, the more and the less powerful, it is useful for examining how early Roman emperors interacted with each elite and non-elite subjects. Theoretically at least, Augustus and the aristocracy were fellow members of an elite ruling class.[30] After giving up the consulate in 23 BCE, Augustus no longer had an institutionalized authority to issue orders to other senators.[31] His Tribunican powers alone did not equate to the right to command. When faced with a command issued by one who the individual does not recognize as authorized to do so, a common response is anger; without the appropriate authority, the command is a form of insult.[32] As mentioned above, being given a command impinges on the subject's radius of self-worth and forces a recalibration of how they can expect to impact their environment. Allowing the subject room to maneuver helps to reduce the loss of face in such an event.[33] If there is no room to maneuver to preserve face, and the social recalibration is deemed unjust by the diminished party, the essential result is anger. According to Aristotle, the capacity for righteous anger at the unjust is necessary to being a free man or woman. The individual who gets angry at the right things and to the proper degree is a 'good tempered' man because the response matches the offense; however, a man with a

[30] Lendon, *Empire of Honour,* 110.
[31] Except in the context of the military hierarchy in those provinces in which he held *imperium.* There was no shame or dishonor associated with following explicit commands in the context of the military. Lendon, *Empire of Honour,* 21.
[32] Barbara Rosenwein, *Anger: The Conflicted History of an Emotion* (Yale University Press, 2020), 84.
[33] Jon Hall, "Social Evasion and Aristocratic Manners in Cicero's De Oratore," *American Journal of Philology* 117, no. 1 (1996): 95–120.

deficiency of anger is thought unlikely to defend himself or his intimates. This tolerance for being insulted, or having your friends insulted, makes one both slavish and a fool (Aristotle *Eth. Nic.* 4.5.1126).[34] For the ancients, the most famous example of injured pride and the resultant anger was Achilles. When Agamemnon demands the Trojan woman Briseis from Achilles, the hero is forced to recognize that he cannot affect his own will upon the situation, and instead must suffer to be diminished in not only his self-respect, but because of the public nature of the event, in the respect of all the Greeks (Hom. *Il.* 1.185-190).[35] Accordingly, his affective response is his wrath, his iconic attribute.

Sources and Data Sets

Finding contemporary examples of the emperor issuing commands is problematic. Some sources, such as inscriptions, are too formulaic from which to glean much insight. To establish a comparative, it was necessary to view the imperial commands against those issued by Republican magistrates. Six Latin historians ranging from the first century BCE through the fourth century CE were selected.[36] The objective was to establish a broad sampling of commands issued by elite Romans to others of both elite and non-elite status. The sum of this work has resulted in 779 instances of an elite Roman issuing a command. The works under consideration and the number of commands found in each are presented in Table 1.

[34] See Fisher, *Vehement Passions*, 175, for further exploration of anger as a legitimate response to perceived injustice.
[35] Achilles does contemplate just killing Agamemnon, but Athena arrives specifically to stay his hand.
[36] Vellius Paterculus was considered, but ultimately did not prove particularly fruitful as his literary style rarely captured any of the historical persons written about issuing commands. However, his encomium to Tiberius can at times be useful as a counterpoint to the much more critical accounts of Tacitus and Suetonius.

Table 1. Commands in Sources

Caesar: *De Bello Civili*	66 commands
Sallust: *Catiline*	12 commands
Livy: *Ab Urbe Condita* (Books 1-30)	405 commands
Tacitus: *Annales*	121 commands
Suetonius: *Vitae* (Julio-Claudians)	87 commands
Ammianus: *Rerum Gestarum* (Books 14-25)	88 commands

In the case of the earlier works, the principate is either not yet extant or not the subject of the work, so the subject under examination is how republican magistrates are portrayed as communicating their commands. The reason for their inclusion is to get a broader sense of how Roman aristocrats with the authority to issue orders did so.

All these men (with the possible exception of Ammianus) come from the aristocracy. Caesar was a leading nobleman of his time from a Patrician family, and ultimately the most powerful man in Rome who acted as something of a bridge between the earlier "men with armies" and Octavian and the formation of the principate.

Sallust's early life is difficult to parse, but he seems to have come from an equestrian family in Amiternum.[37] However, it is not essential for this exercise to trace his overall career path. More important for here is to establish that he was a member of the Roman elite. Sallust was certainly a member of the senatorial order, as he was famously booted from that body for immorality by the Pompeian Appius Claudius Pulcher in 50 BCE. He was later reinstated, and

[37] D.C. Earl, "The Early Career of Sallust," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 15, no. 3 (August 1966): 302.

that he rose to the praetorship under the auspices of Caesar and was granted the governorship of Africa in 46-45 after the defeat of the Pompeians.[38]

Livy represents a slightly different model than most of the other historians considered here, as he never held any governmental office himself. He was from a noble family in Patavium and spent a considerable amount of time in Rome during the reign of Augustus. His work of course does not touch on the principate but covering both the early kings and the early and middle republic provides a window through which to see multiple phases of the development of Roman government, and how Livy imagined those men to have issued commands.

Tacitus and Suetonius provide the most detailed accounts of the lives and reigns of the Julio-Claudian emperors. Tacitus was suffect consul in 97 and held the governorship of Asia under Trajan. His membership in the uppermost levels of the elite class meant that he had personal experience with the psychological toll exacted by serving under an emperor that was hostile towards the aristocracy. Suetonius was from an equestrian family, he did not have the same level of political success that Tacitus enjoyed, but he held a series of positions in the secretariat until being dismissed by Hadrian in 121-122.[39]

Finally, the life of Ammianus Marcellinus is the least well known among these sources. He was most likely from a noble family, possibly from Antioch.[40] He identifies himself as "a soldier and a Greek" at the close of his work (31.16.9), but little else is known. He served in the military under the commander Ursicinus during the reign of Constantius and Julian (15.5.22).

Taken together, these authors largely produced work for an elite audience. Some, such as Livy and Ammianus, may have had literary circles that were a mixture of classes, but others, like

[38] Walter Allen, "Sallust's Political Career," *Studies in Philology* 51, no. 1 (January 1954): 6.
[39] Robin Seager, *Tiberius* 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing), 237.
[40] J. F. Matthews, "The Origin of Ammianus," *The Classical Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (1994): 267-268.

Caesar and Tacitus, were themselves highly successful politicians and were a part of the elite social network. Their works provide a lens through which to view how commands were perceived across the literate elite of the empire.

To be clear, the language used by these historians is not indicative of what the emperor, king, or magistrate actually said or did. These works are both histories and literary constructions, but they are valuable for this project as they suggest how emperors were understood to communicate their commands to various groups of subjects, and those methods are transmitted to us intentionally by these historians. Being either members of the social elite themselves, or closely associated with the aristocracy, these historians would have chosen language that was believable to their audience. The 779 commands under consideration form several patterns, which in turn form a reasonable basis from which to draw conclusions about the intentionality, or lack thereof, of these authors when it comes to the expression of commands.

To make use of the information drawn from these texts, the commands will be divided along two axes. The first axis is the object of the command. This a binary division of the various subjects into "elite" and "non-elite". For this exercise, elites are classified as any Roman man or woman of the senatorial or equestrian class. There is not sufficient justification to separate these two groups, as together they form the core of elite Roman society.[41] Within this framework, the non-elites are everyone not included in the previous category. It should be noted that this non-elite group includes some very powerful individuals, such as foreign kings. While

[41]John Weisweiler describes the distinction as one of political activity, not as an entirely separate social caste. "The senate was not an independent group but the politically active stratum of the landowning classes in the Mediterranean World." John Weisweiler, *From Republican Empire to Universal State: Monarchy, State Formation and Elite Power in Early Imperial and Late Antique Rome (27 BCE-476 CE),* Empire and After, (Pennsylvania University Press, Philadelphia, 2022). Similarly, Andrew Wallace-Hadrill expresses skepticism that there is enough evidence to treat the senate and the equestrians as fully distinct populations. "It would be a mistake, however, to distinguish too sharply the senate from the upper equestrian order. There is no sign of an ideological gulf, in this area at least, between the two classes." Wallace-Hadrill, "Civilis Princeps," 46.

not frequent, this does occur, such as Tiberius' order to the Thracian kings that they refrain from violence (Tac. *Ann.* 2.65.1) or Constantius' entreaty to Arasces to remain a loyal vassal (Amm. *RG* 20.11.1). The rationale for keeping the 'elite' category so narrow is that it was only the Roman aristocracy that warranted a level of respect that would necessitate the emperor to employ polite linguistic tactics when issuing them commands. Being seen to issue straightforward commands to a foreign king or potentate whereas he did not do the same to a Roman aristocrat could actually reinforce the emperor's *civilitas*, by restating the aristocracy's position as the sole group worthy of such respect.[42]

The second axis is that of the commands themselves, which are divided into three categories: "equivocal", "unequivocal", and "indeterminate". The distinction hangs on the definition of the verb used to issue the command. Equivocal verbs are those which have multiple interpretations, some of which do not correspond to a direct command. In the example of Tiberius and Cestius that verb is *admoneo*, which is frequently translated as "suggest" or "advise". An unequivocal command verb is one which can only be reasonably interpreted as a direct order; *iubeo* and *impero* are two of the most frequent in these texts. Barring extremely specialized cases, these two verbs always denote an explicit order given with the expectation of obedience. An indeterminate verb, unsurprisingly, is applied to those cases where the determination of equivocal-unequivocal seems exceptionally uncertain.

The graphs below will be used to display how the various sources represent Roman commanders using language to express their commands. Figures 1 and 2 show the distribution of the commands across the two described axes: elite vs non-elite subject, and whether the verb used was equivocal, unequivocal, or indeterminate.

[42] For *civilitas* as a feature of the principate see Wallace-Hadrill, "Civilis Princeps".

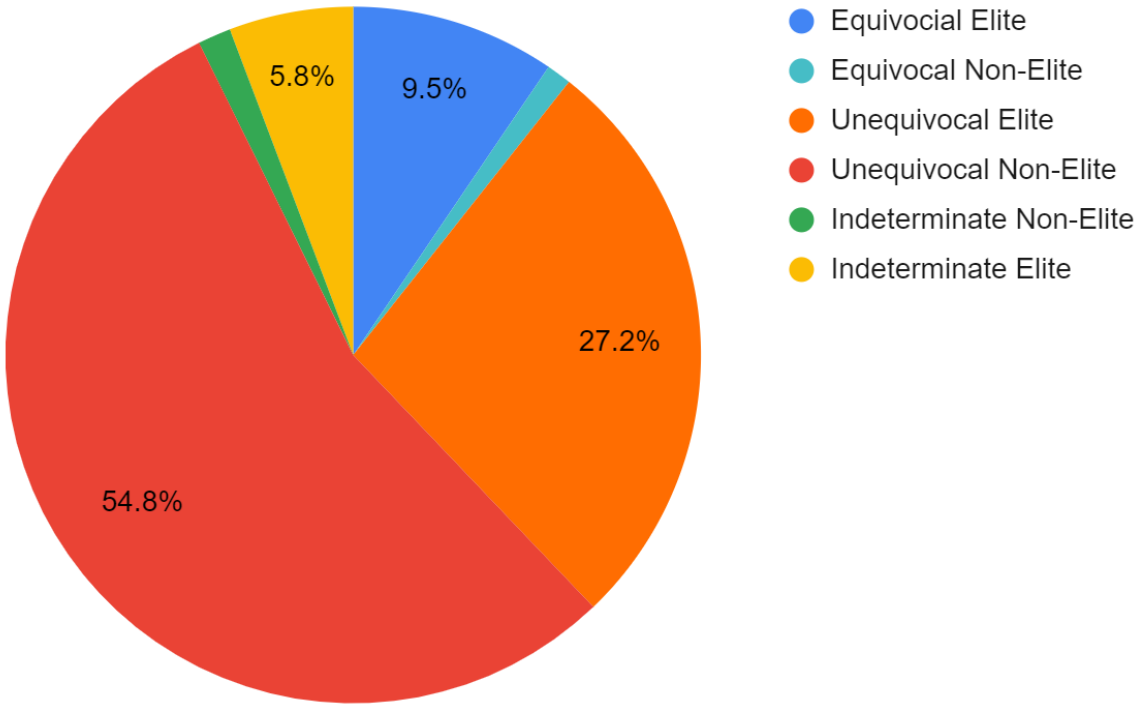

Figure 1. Distribution of Commands

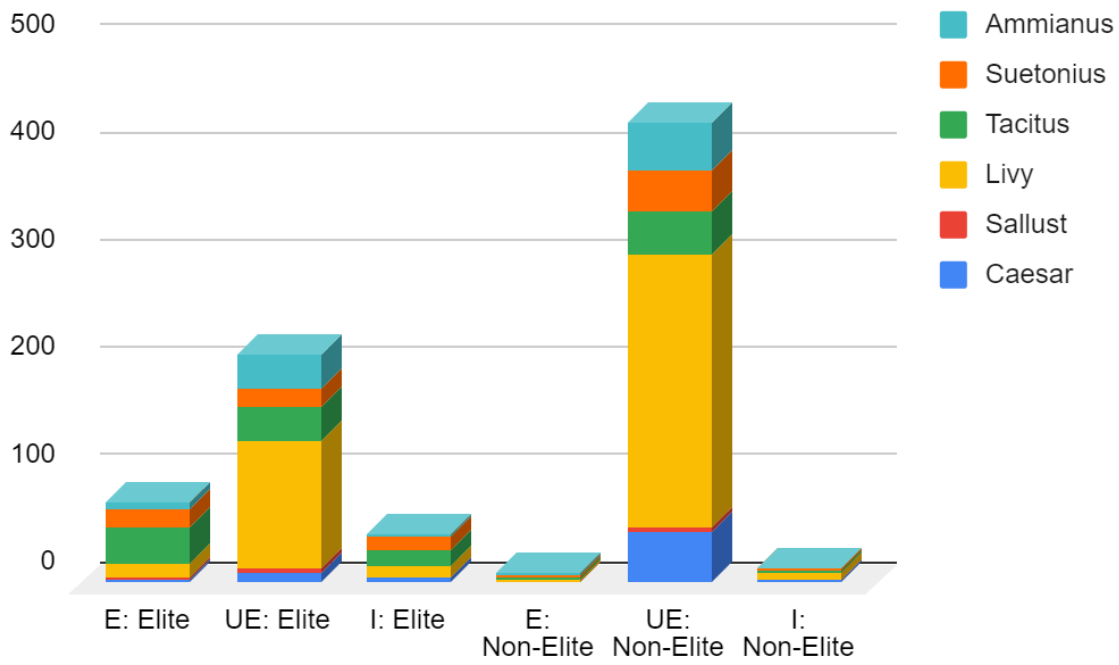

Figure 2. Commands by Author

The combined trend strongly favors the use of unambiguous language, representing an overwhelming 82% of the total sample. Meanwhile, ambiguous language is a mere 10.6%. In Figure 2, there are two features I would like to highlight. The first, is that while the incidence of equivocal commands to elite audiences is small when compared with unequivocal commands, it still towers over the column of equivocal commands to non-elites. More important still, is that the occurrence of equivocal commands to elite audiences is almost entirely attributable to our second century sources dealing with the early principate: Tacitus and Suetonius. Not only that, but there is a similar preponderance of these two historians in the column for indeterminate commands to elite subjects. This is in part due to Tacitus and Suetonious simply using a much broader vocabulary compared to the other sources considered here, but that alone does not suffice to explain the degree of difference between them, and the other sources examined. In Figure 3, not only are unambiguous commands overwhelmingly preferred, but over 60% of commands are expressed via the single verb *iubeo*.

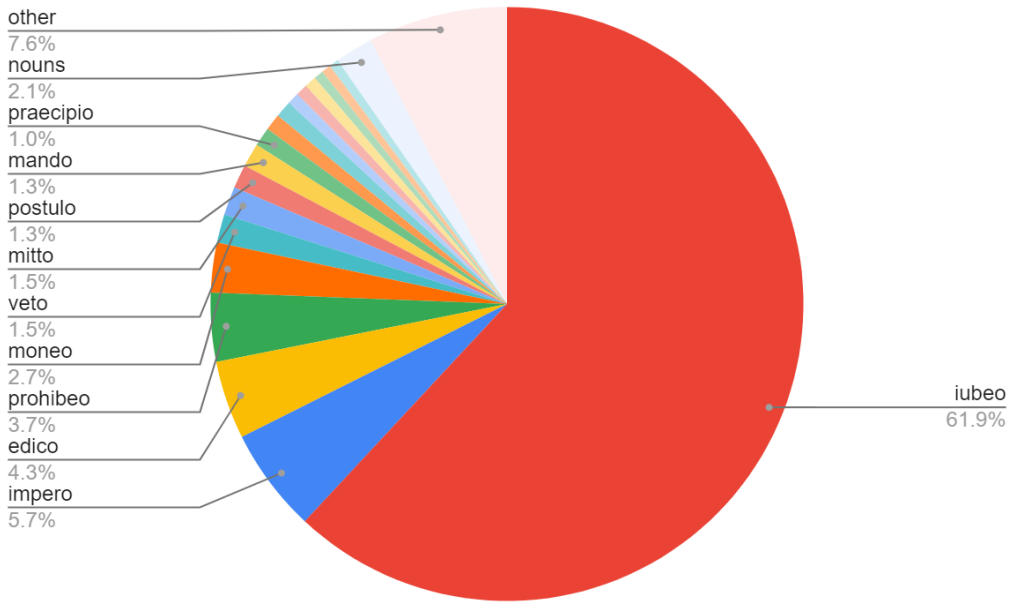

Figure 3. Command Verb Frequency

Livy, whose work accounts for over half the total sample, was extremely consistent in his word choice. *Iubeo, impero,* and *edico* account for almost 90% of the commands in his work.[43] This tells us that during the Augustan regime it was the expectation that a Republican magistrate would have issued his orders in a clear, and unambiguous way. This makes sense when we consider that the two magistracies emphasized in Livy's work are the consuls and dictators who led the Roman state during times of war and internal discord. As such they are operating both within civil society, but also as the head of a military hierarchy that brooked no disobedience. Old fashioned Roman discipline is a recurrent theme in Livy's work. One of the first acts of the Republic after the ouster of Tarquinius Superbus is Brutus's execution of his own sons for treason (Liv. 2.5). Manlius Torquatus and his colleague Publius Decius Mus had sworn to uphold Roman discipline, and Manlius followed through (Liv. 8.7). He executed his own son after he disobeyed his father's command and broke ranks to fight against the Latin champion in the war with the Latin League in an attempt to echo his father's successful duel with the Gaul many years before (Liv. 7.10). L. Papirius Cursor, while dictator, nearly executed his Master of Horse Q. Fabius (Liv. 8.33-35) when Fabius engaged in battle with the Samnites despite orders to hold his position (Liv. 8.30). Certainly, the military aspects of Roman history are not Livy's sole focus, but it is usually the central driver of the narrative. The exceptions to this are typically when Livy instead focuses on times of internal discord at Rome.

Given his emphasis on the military exploits of the Republic, and his veneration of the heroic discipline of a bygone era, it is unsurprising that Livy almost exclusively uses unambiguous verbs when he composed his work. However, he is not alone. While not providing nearly as large a data set, both Caesar and Sallust prefer unambiguous language as

[43] *iubeo*: 305, *edico*: 31, *impero*: 26, out of 405 total commands in Livy.

well; *iubeo* and *impero* account for three quarters of the total commands in both authors.[44] As with Livy, Caesar's work is heavily focused on military matters; consequently, most of the commands are within that framework. But there are two instances where Caesar writes about his interactions with Pompey via proxy (Caesar, *B.C.* 1.26.3), and with a senatorial envoy (3.17.2), where the tone shifts decidedly, and instead of ordering or demanding anything, Caesar asks (*postulo).* In both passages, Caesar is engaged in potential peace talks with the Pompeians, and his request is rebuffed in each. It is notable that both passages end with Caesar turning all his energy to the prosecution of the war. Given the pseudo-memoir nature of the work, it seems clear that Caesar is intent on presenting himself as the reasonable party, who, only after being refused a fair hearing, is forced to take up arms again. Part of that self-representation as a reasonable man is the use of *postulo.* I draw attention to these two examples because Caesar is unique among this group of sources in having actually written or directed the writing of this work himself.

Sallust's *Catiline* is of interest because while Cicero and the other consuls are always written as giving their orders clearly, Catiline himself is different. Catiline gives his followers commands on three notable occasions.[45] One of these is presented as an explicit order, when he told his followers to arm themselves as they move about the city (Sal. *Cat.* 27). But the other two are presented as exhortations to be mindful of his interests during the election (Sal. *Cat.* 21*),* and to prepare themselves for action (Sal. *Cat.* 27*).*[46] This is relevant because it shows that while Catiline is the leader of the conspiracy, he is depicted as employing this simple linguistic maneuver through which he urges his comrades to action, rather than explicitly demanding it.

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[44] Caesar: *iubeo:* 44, *impero:* 7. Sallust: *iubeo*: 8, *impero*: 1.
[45] He also gives orders to C. Manlius (*Cat.* 59), but this is in the context of a battle where once again we see the military hierarchy in action.
[46] *Cohortor* and *hortor,* respectively.

Catiline had extremely limited resources, especially when compared to official magistrates or the princeps, but this was a tool that was available to him precisely because it required so little cost.

Ammianus is very much in line with Caesar, Sallust, and Livy. Unequivocal commands make up 86% of the commands in books 14-25. In his work, there is a bifurcated setting; some of the text focuses on the military exploits of Julian and Constantius, but there is also a considerable emphasis on the imperial court. The court was an important feature of government that quite naturally did not exist during the Republic, and it is also the primary focus of the action in the *Annals* and the *Vitae.*

Figures 4 and 5 show the comparative frequency of *iubeo* and other verbs in Caesar, Sallust, Livy, and Ammianus versus their occurrence in Tacitus and Suetonius.

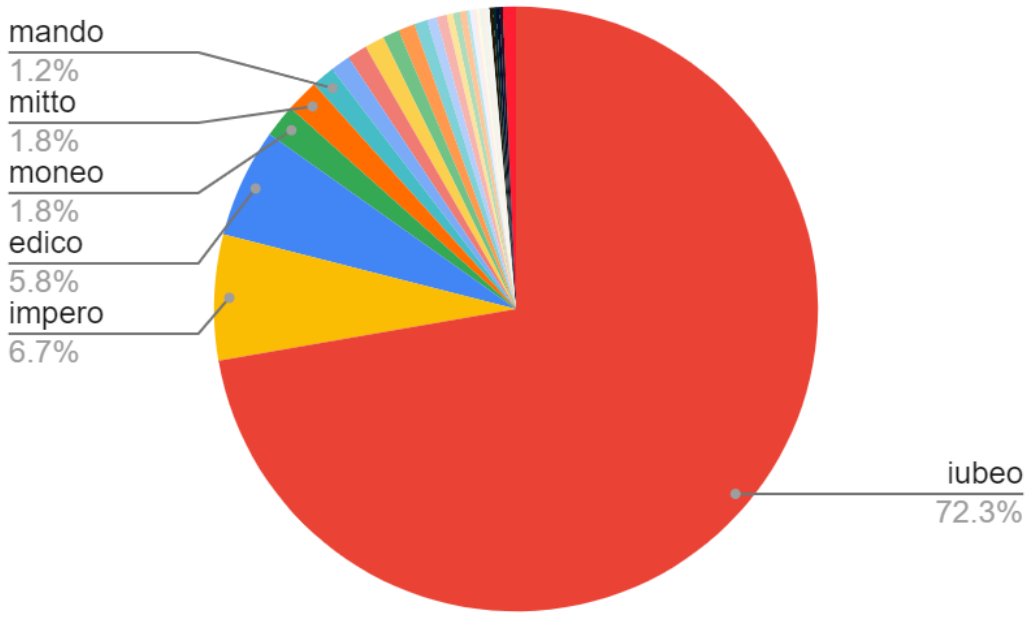

Figure 4. Command Verb Frequency in Caesar, Sallust, Livy & Ammianus

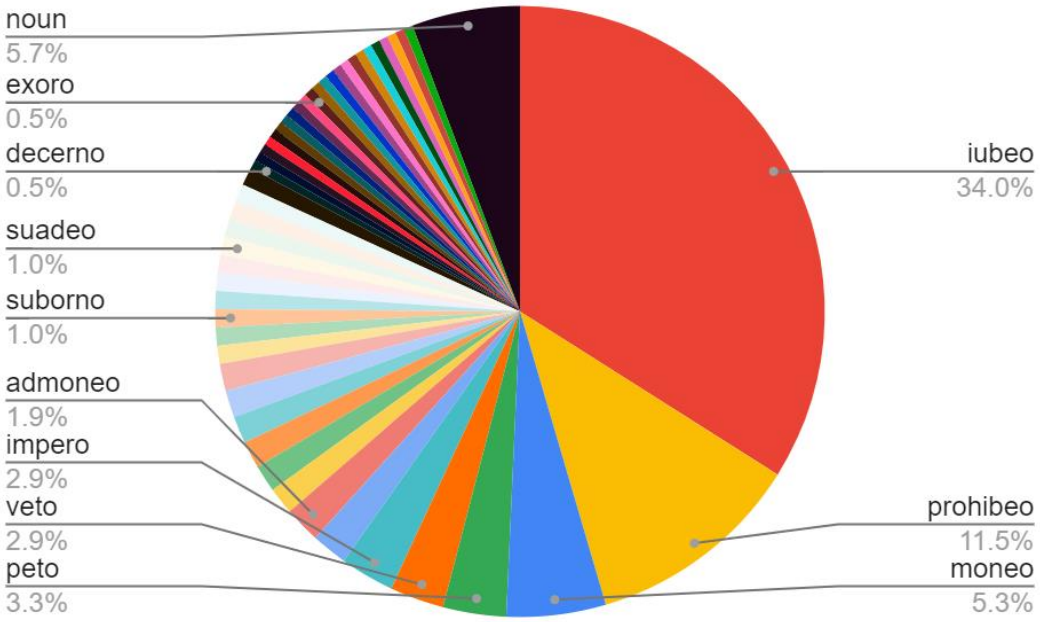

Figure 5. Command Verb Frequency in Tacitus & Suetonius

These charts make clear that Tacitus and Suetonius were choosing not only different verbs, but a much broader selection as well. This is because in Tacitus and Suetonius, unlike the other four sources, there is a greater frequency of equivocal verbs.

Before moving on to a closer examination of the second century material, one verb deserves some special scrutiny. *Prohibeo* is one of the only verbs that appears both as unequivocal and indeterminate depending on context. Occurring only five times in the early and later sources, it appears 24 times in our second century sources, 17 of which are in Tacitus. While the simplest meaning, "to prohibit or forbid" is clear, there is also a more official meaning, "to veto". In these cases, while the veto is a clear and unequivocal act, it is also an act that is strictly within the emperor's official suite of powers, as part of his Tribunican *potestas*. Therefore, when used in this official capacity I have categorized the veto as indeterminate since it is explicit but does not have the socially problematic aspects of other unequivocal commands.

Perhaps it would be better to use Wallace-Hadrill's wording, and instead consider this use of *prohibeo* as a *civilitas* command, since the emperor is acting as a Roman magistrate, and is not infringing on the self determination of any other member of the elite class by doing so. (e.g., Tac. *Ann.* 3.18.2). Interestingly enough, *veto* is used comparatively rarely by Tacitus, and in the context of the emperor only once (Tac. *Ann.* 2.59.3). This instance is significant though, as it occurs when Tacitus explains that travel to Egypt was forbidden to senators and illustrious equestrians by Augustus, which contributes to Tacitus' evaluation of the reign of Augustus as a *"dominationis arcana"*. However, there are no instances where Tacitus uses *veto* as the verb when having the emperor issue a legal veto; the word chosen is almost always *prohibeo.* *Intercedo* sees some use but is comparatively quite rare.

Beyond the veto, *prohibeo* offers another unique problem in that throughout the *Annals*, Tiberius and Nero both prohibit the Senate to enact various honors or oaths of obedience (Tac. *Ann.* 1.14.1 and 4.37.3). In these instances, I am again treating *prohibeo* as indeterminate. While it offers little room for maneuvering on the part of the subject, it serves as part of the *recusatio* and thus reasserts the emperor's position as first among a group of theoretical equals, a ritualized action which Wallace-Hadrill clearly articulates as an important element in the performance of a *Civilis Princeps.*[47] In all other cases, such as when Tiberius prohibits C. Galba from provincial command (Tac. *Ann.* 6.40.2), or when Nero forbids Thrasea from accompanying the rest of the Senate to celebrate the birth of the emperor's daughter (Tac. *Ann.* 15.23.4), *prohibeo* will be treated as an unequivocal command. The key difference is how the context suggests the command will be interpreted vis a vis the honor of the subject. When the emperor prohibits a subject or group of subjects from swearing an oath of obedience, this serves to

[47] Wallace-Hadrill, "Civilis Princeps," 36-37.

increase the subject's honor. They are publicly declared worthy of making their own decisions, which suggests to the listener that the emperor values their thoughts and opinions. On the other hand, when the emperor prohibits someone from an office or taking part in an activity, he is actively diminishing the theoretical freedom of action of the subject.

It is the expectation of obedience that is implied by unequivocal verbs that is so important. Even though across most of the texts there is the implicit expectation on the part of the reader that the commander will be obeyed, it is only through unequivocal commands that the speaker takes that implicit assumption and makes it explicit. In constructing the command this way, the speaker does away with any ambiguity regarding the power differential and clarifies his position of dominance. This deprives the object of his command of their perceived autonomy, reducing them to a level analogous to that of a slave confronted with the will of their master. If the speaker instead deigns to use an equivocal verb form, he allows the subject to retain his dignity by choosing to do as he is asked/advised/suggested/etc. This is the mechanism by which the emperor sidesteps a zero-sum honor conflict. The emperor declines to speak tyrannically, and in doing so the aristocratic subjects save face when they comply. In these cases, the aristocrat is simply yielding to the far greater *auctoritas* of the emperor, which is a socially acceptable form of compliance, as opposed to the slavish obedience implied by acquiescence to the direct order of another. In the parlance of politeness theory, this would be a negative politeness technique, as it assumes less about the relationship than an explicit command would.

Having established that Tacitus and Suetonius employed more ambiguous language than the other four sources here, we will turn now to an examination of how these second century authors understood the emperor to speak, and how that contrasts with how Republican magistrates and the emperors of the 4th century were depicted. Two trends appear across the

works of Tacitus and Suetonius when the emperor issues commands. First, emperors are much more likely to be depicted as using an equivocal verb when addressing a member of the Roman elite class. The second is that the first trend does not hold for each emperor when taken individually. While Tiberius and Claudius are both depicted as using equivocal commands to the aristocracy, Caligula and Nero are presented as being far more explicit, using unequivocal commands with little apparent distinction between elite and non-elite subjects. Neither of these trends hold true for the other sources. Republican magistrates are almost always depicted as using unequivocal verbs, regardless of subject. In Ammianus, there are nine instances of the emperor using equivocal verbs, but this represents a mere 10% of the total.[48] Three of these ten are commands to subjects defined here as non-elite, marking another distinction when compared to Tacitus and Suetonius.

Let us now look at how the commands are distributed in our various sources. The first point of examination is an aggregate of all the Julio-Claudian emperors in Tacitus and Suetonius compared with the Republican magistrates and later emperors described in the earlier and later sources. Figures 6 through 11 show the total breakdown of Equivocal-Unequivocal-Indeterminate commands. Figures 6 and 7 show the total breakdown of command by type across both elite and non-elite subjects. Figures 8 and 9 are the command breakdown when we examine solely elite subjects, and Figures 10 and 11 are the same for non-elites.

[48] Ammianus 14.7.14, 14.11.21, 18.2.9, 19.12.5, 20.4.8, 20.8.1, 20.9.4, 20.11.1, 20.12.2,

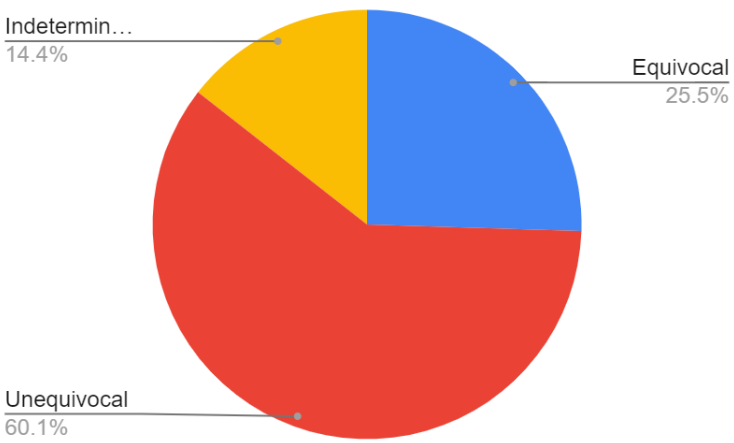

Figure 6. Command Types in Tacitus & Suetonius

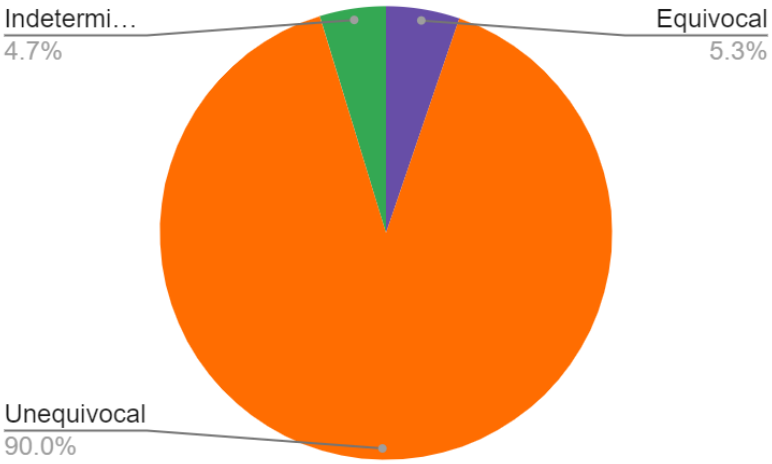

Figure 7. Command Types in Caesar, Sallust, Livy & Ammianus

As seen here, there is a much higher frequency of equivocal verb usage in Tacitus and Suetonius when compared against the other four sources.

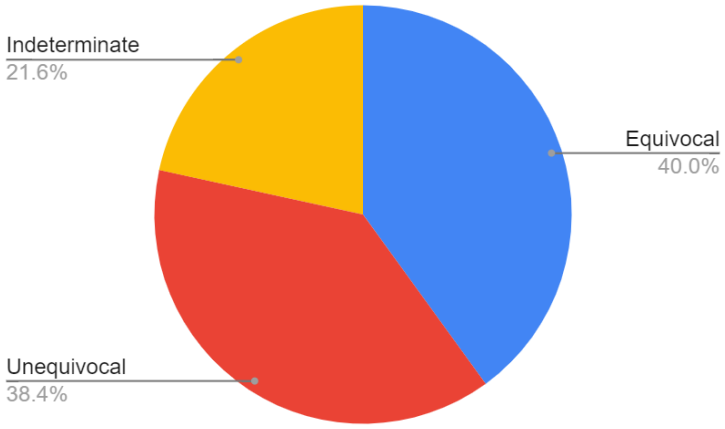

Figure 8. Commands to Elite Subjects in Tacitus & Suetonius

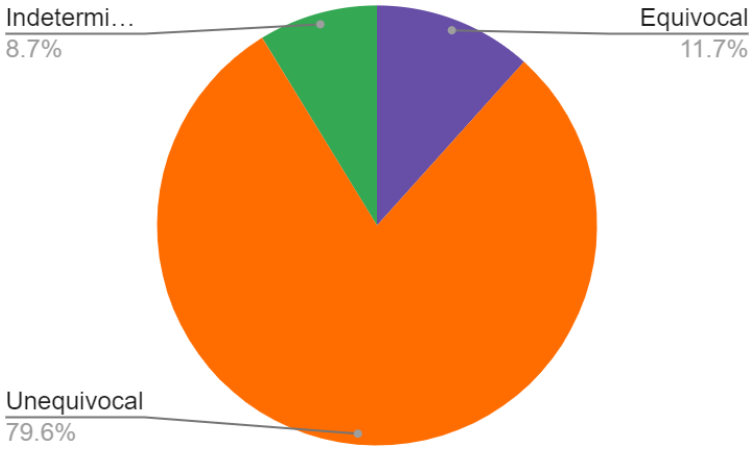

Figure 9. Commands to Elite Subjects in Caesar, Sallust, Livy & Ammianus

In both groups the frequency of equivocal verb usage is higher when we are looking solely at elite subjects. However, the disparity is quite large, while unequivocal verbs still represent an overwhelming majority in the other four sources, in Tacitus and Suetonius these verbs are in the minority, with equivocal verbs representing the plurality of commands issued.

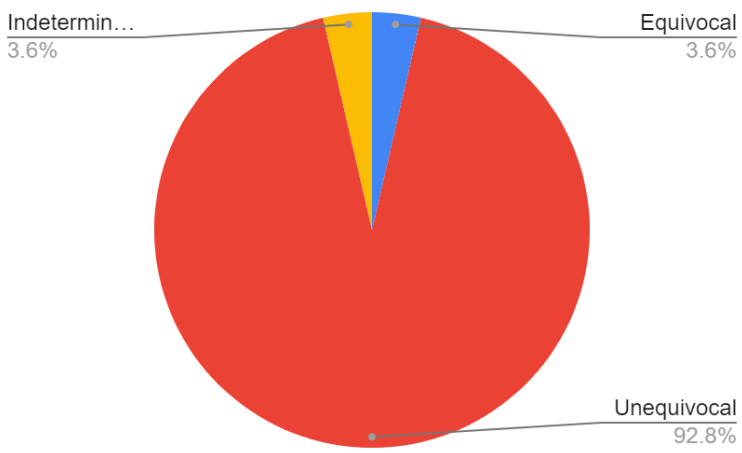

Figure 10. Commands to Non-Elite Subjects in Tacitus & Suetonius

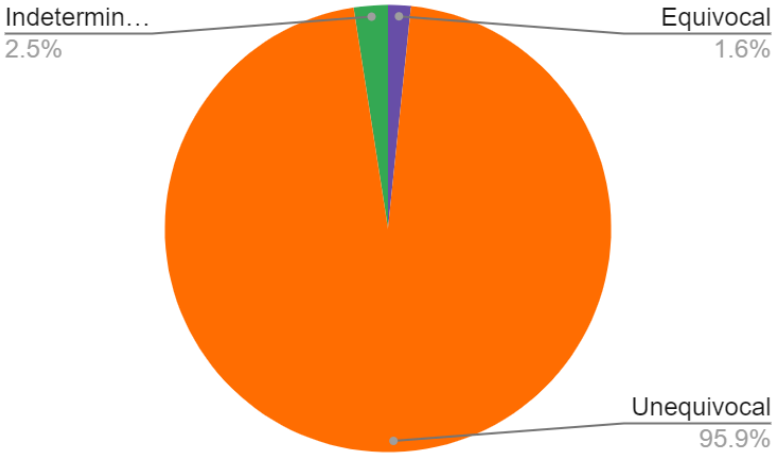

Figure 11. Commands to Non-Elite Subjects in Caesar, Sallust, Livy & Ammianus

Unlike the previous category, there is little difference between the two sets of sources when it comes to how men in positions of power are represented as speaking to non-elites. In all six sources, when the speaker is addressing a non-elite subject, the verb form chosen is almost always explicitly clear.

Taken as a group, the various commanders are depicted as favoring unequivocal commands, which account for 60% of commands issued in Tacitus and Suetonius, and fully 90% in the other four sources. All six sources agree on how one should issue commands to a non-elite subject: clearly. It is rare for an elite commander to issue an order to a non-elite in an

ambiguous way. However, when the subject of the command is limited to elite subjects, suddenly the distinction between Tacitus and Suetonius in comparison with the other four is made evident. Unequivocal commands fall to less than 40% of the total, while equivocal commands verbs are used with far greater frequency, accounting for 40% of the total. When compared against the issuance of commands to non-elites, represented in Figures 10 and 11, the magnitude of difference is evident. When viewed side by side, it becomes clear that these two authors intentionally altered the language they chose to use when their commanders issued an order to elite subjects as opposed to non-elites.[49] The other four sources show a slightly less acute preference for unequivocal verbs when addressing elite subjects, but the unequivocal verbs remain the rule even with elite subjects.

What then, is the reason for this distinction between Tacitus and Suetonius and the other four sources? There are two reasons that immediately leap to mind: the time of composition and the subject matter. In writing about the principate shortly after the transition from Domitian to Nerva and Trajan, Tacitus and Suetonius were more interested in the ways that emperors engaged with their elite subjects. In the very opening of his *Panegyricus*, Pliny claims that Trajan is distinct from his predecessors, not a god, but a fellow citizen. According to Pliny, Trajan interpreted the emperor's role as father to the state rather than master.

> He is one of us—and his special virtue lies in his thinking so, as also in his never forgetting that he is a man himself while a ruler of men. Let us then appreciate our good fortune and prove our worth by our use of it, -and at the same time remember that there can be no merit if greater deference is paid to rulers who delight in the servitude of their subjects than to those who value their liberty (Pliny *Pan.* 2)[50].

[49] In Tacitus' case, it would be a mistake to think that this is merely coincidence. As Syme has pointed out, Tacitus is a consummate wordsmith, and great attention was paid to word selection. By tracing the author's usage of specific words, Syme found that Tacitus at least not only is careful with his works internal language, but particular words both came into and fell out of favor over the course of his works. This means that the differentiation between equivocal and unequivocal verbs based on subject should not be read as happenstance. We are dealing with an exceptionally deliberate author in Tacitus and should credit him with intentionality when it comes to this sort of authorial decision. Ronald Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 711-745.

[50] Translation Betty Radice

This is a theme that Pliny returns to repeatedly throughout the panegyric. Later in the text he praises Trajan's courtesy and modesty as a ruler, comparing being ruled by Trajan to being ruled by law (*Pan.* 24), he extols him for encouraging freedom of opinion and honesty (*Pan. 44-45)*. But, according to Pliny, the single most praiseworthy feature of Trajan's rule is that he does not impinge upon the freedom and authority of the consuls. "The consuls will not have to listen to anything against their will nor have decisions forced on them. Our office retains and will retain the respect due to it, and in exercising our authority we need lose none of our peace of mind"[51] (*Pan.* 93).

While the *Panegyricus* is too fawning a speech to be taken as truly descriptive of Trajan's rule, it is helpful to our current examination as it demonstrates that aristocratic independence was still central to elite ideology, and remained important enough to Pliny and his audience that he felt it justified touching on the subject repeatedly throughout the speech, at the beginning, middle, and end.

The discrepancy between how emperors speak to elite and non-elite subjects indicates that Tacitus and Suetonius were similarly sensitive to the importance of aristocratic autonomy. The degree of variation is too extreme to be coincidental; there was a conscious decision to depict the emperor issuing commands to aristocrats in a more ambiguous manner than he would when speaking to all other subjects. Some of the unequivocal commands issued to members of the elite class by Tiberius and Claudius were within a military context, which as discussed previously, involves a secondary hierarchical structure that allows for the issuance of direct

[51] Translation Betty Radice

orders without any loss of face on the part of the subordinate.[52] The selection of any given verb is a literary decision, and cannot be used to determine the words an emperor actually spoke or the tone in which the command was delivered, but the representation is enough to infer that ambiguous communications were central to emperor-elite interpersonal exchanges. It would appear that emperors were sensitive to the honor ramifications of issuing direct orders to elite subjects. Being seen meekly following orders presented a potential loss of face and could create an uncomfortable commonality between the aristocrats of Rome and common slaves.[53]

When Tacitus and Suetonius wrote about the emperors approaching the senate as a body, their emphasis on imperial ambiguity became even more evident. In these instances, their commands were almost always couched in the form of questions or requests. When Tiberius asked for powers for Germanicus or Drusus, Tacitus used the verb *petō*, which has the primary meaning "to ask, beg".[54] Tacitus continued to describe Tiberius as asking for favors from the senate late in his reign. Even after the purge of Sejanus, when relations with the senate reached their nadir, Tiberius asked the senate for permission to have Macro, the praetorian prefect, and an escort of guards accompany him whenever he entered the senate house (Tac. *Ann.* 6.15.3).[55] Similarly, when Claudius hoped to marry Agrippina, he was depicted as asking for the senate to overturn the old prohibition against uncles marrying their nieces (Tac. *Ann.* 12.7.2).[56] Early in

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[52] See for example, Tiberius' command to Blaseus to withdraw from North Africa despite Tacfarinas still being on the loose. (Tac. *Ann.* 4.23.2) Similarly, Claudius orders Corbulo to disengage from fighting in Germany, (Tac. *Ann.* 11.19.2) and orders Helvidius Priscus to return to Syria from Armenia. (Tac. *Ann.* 12.49.2)

[53] Roller, *Constructing Autocracy*,

[54] For Germanicus: (Tac. *Ann.* 3.29.1), for Drusus: (*Ann.* 3.56.1). In a similar vein, see *Ann.* 1.14.3, where Tiberius asks for proconsular powers for Germanicus, (*Ann.* 2.50.1) at which Tiberius asks that the case against Appuleia Varilla be limited solely to slanders against Augustus, or perhaps most famously in Tiberius's case, *Ann.* 3.12.15 at which point he requests that Gn. Piso not be convicted solely because the victim was the emperor's adopted son.

[55] As it happened the request was moot, as Tiberius had been gone from Rome for some time and was never to return.

[56] *"Nec Claudius ultra exspectato obvius apud forum praebet se gratantibus, senatumque ingressus decretum* ***postulat****…"*

his reign even Nero was represented as requesting favors from the senate rather than demanding their compliance. He sought their permission to erect statues to his father and consular honors for Asconius Labeo, his guardian (Tac. *Ann*. 13.10.1-2).

The emperor making requests of the senate created a paradox. Since the emperor asked for something, it is inferred that the power to grant his wish ultimately lay with the senate. But, at the same time, both parties understood that the senate could not deny the request. The senate could only respond positively in these instances, but they did so while being shown public deference from the emperor. It is a system that functions only so long as the parties involved do not draw any attention to its deficiencies. Once the paradoxical nature of the arrangement is acknowledged, it becomes unsustainable.[57]

However, not all Julio-Claudian emperors were equally concerned with the dignity of the aristocracy. Having just lived through Domitian's reign, which was famously hostile to the senatorial elite, and writing under Trajan, who was much better disposed to them, it makes sense that Tacitus and Suetonius would emphasize the difference between the emperors. Figure 12 is a proportional representation of the equivocal and unequivocal commands given by the Julio Claudians, divided by subject class. Along the Y-axis is the percentage of commands within a given category, and the X-axis divides elites from non-elites, and then subdivides each of those groups into smaller groups of subjects that are depicted as having received commands unequivocally versus those that were received equivocally. Figure 13 displays the raw number of command incidents by type and subject.

[57] Winterling, *Politics and Society*, 111-112.

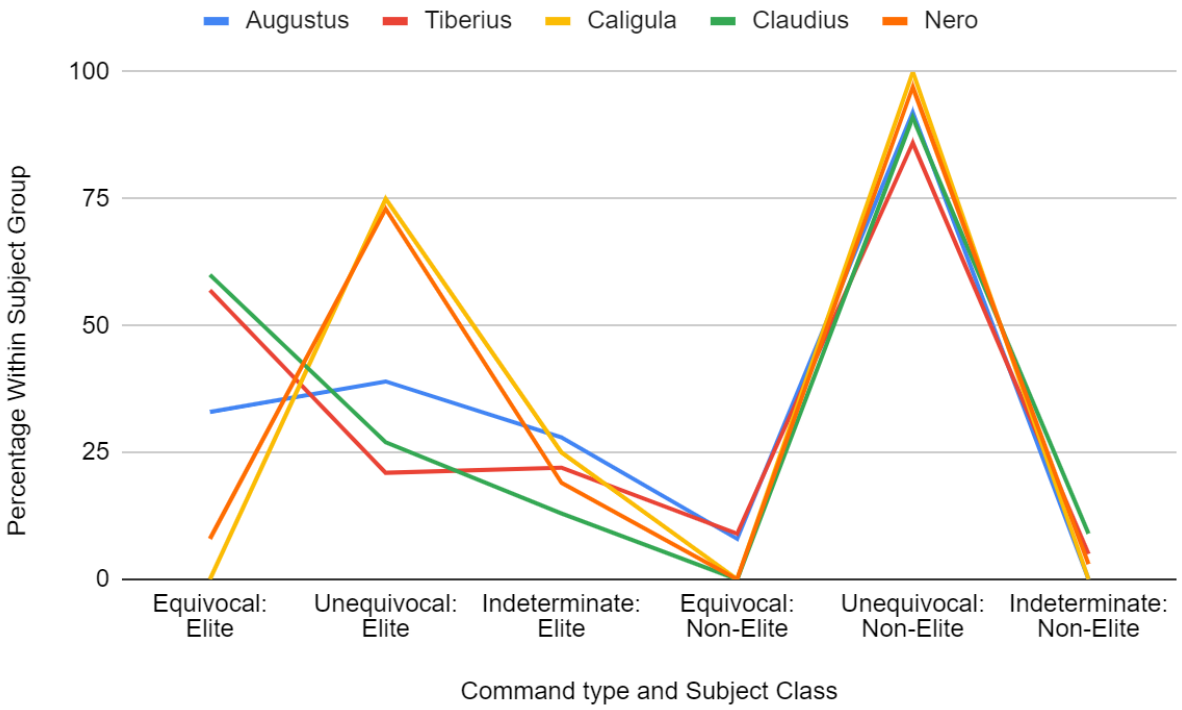

Figure 12. Proportional Representation of Commands by Emperor

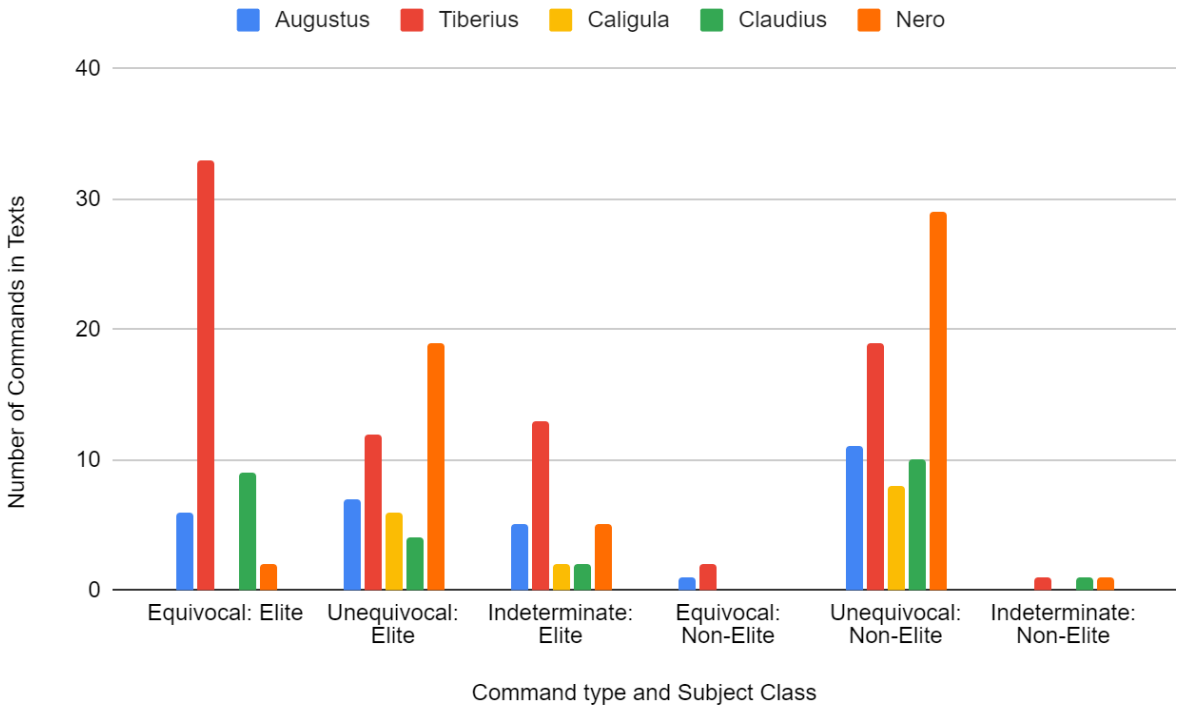

Figure 13. Number of Commands by Subject and Type per Emperor

These figures show that Tacitus and Suetonius articulate a real difference between Nero and Caligula compared with Augustus, Tiberius, and Claudius. While both Tiberius and Claudius are seen to be substantially less likely to use an unequivocal command with an elite subject, Caligula and Nero are the opposite, and are more likely to use an unequivocal command than any other type. Within the limited corpus of these two authors, there is an unbalanced distribution of data points. Tacitus' *Annals* did not include the reign of Augustus, and among the many lacunae are all the books on Caligula.[58] Consequently, the distribution of data points is unequal across the emperors. However, enough remains that the difference between the various Julio-Claudians becomes evident.

Caligula and Nero differed from their older counterparts in two relevant ways. First, they lacked experience with the Augustan implementation of ambiguity when it was most successful, and accordingly they did not see how effective it could be. Second, their youth at their respective accessions, combined with their own lack of accomplishments, made Caligula and Nero insecure.[59] They were reliant solely on their inherited honor, and because they had limited opportunities for acquiring honor, they may have intentionally moved towards a more confrontational communication strategy, in which they attempted to acquire honor by actively denigrating their elite interlocutors. Because honor interactions can be zero sum, there is a logic to abandoning the ambiguity necessary for successful imperial-elite discourse in the Augustan style, and instead approaching their rule as kings instead of princeps.[60]

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[58] Refer to Figure 13 for the chart of total commands per Emperor.

[59] Claudius too had little claim to personal *auctoritas* when he came to the throne, but his age and demeanor may help explain his radically different approach to the aristocracy.

[60] Winterling argues that in Caligula's case, this breakdown in communication is derived from a radical cynicism that is unleashed after an unsuccessful plot against him fails. In its aftermath, he purposefully cast off the ambiguity that had characterized imperial-senate communications through the reigns of Augustus and the first half of Tiberius. In doing so, he no longer felt any compunction to protect the honor of the aristocracy; his program became one of alienation, and instead of relying on the support of the elite he sought to diminish them. Winterling, *Politics and Society*, 115. He further expounds his theories of Caligula and his need to assert himself as an overawing figure in a

Thus, the emperor can take one of two distinct approaches to the principate. A princeps can embrace their power openly, as a king, or they can maintain the illusion that the republic still exists. There is a logic to both approaches. Kings have an inherent claim to legitimacy that was lacking in the principate, as kings made no pretense about being the first among many citizens. However, kingship ran counter to the Roman tradition. The principate evolved as it did precisely because Augustus strove to create a system that allowed him to function as an autocrat by shunning the outward trappings of kingship, and claiming to uphold republican values, rather than subverting them. By embracing that system, those emperors who chose to maintain that the values of the republic still applied had to act out their respect for the aristocracy even more than their actual republican precedents had. Form triumphed over function within this frame, and the linguistic illusion of freedom was all that it required to secure the cooperation of much of the elite.

Augustus and the Obscuring of Autocracy

Tacitus and Suetonius consciously chose to write the emperor giving commands through ambiguous verbs when dealing with elite subjects, an emphasis not found in the sources dealing with Republican magistrates or in late antiquity. This distinction exists because Augustus constructed a system in which this type of ambiguous communication was particularly useful. The early emperors were operating within a social framework bound up in personal honor, and a political one which simultaneously pretended the republic was still extant while concentrating all real power in the emperor's hands.

separate monograph dedicated to the young emperor. Aloys Winterling, *Caligula: A Biography* (The Joan Palevsky Imprint in Classical Literature. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

When Octavian defeated Marcus Antonius at the battle of Actium in 31 BC, he was already styling himself as a liberator and restorer of the Republic.[61] With the example of Gaius Julius Caesar freshly before him, Augustus understood that his self-representation would dictate whether he was viewed as legitimate as he moved to become the sole ruler of Rome. Caesar had allowed his self-representation to come too close to resembling kingship, and Augustus would not make the same mistake. Instead, he carefully established himself as a traditionalist, and claimed to derive his power from long standing republican systems. Through appeals to *mos maiorum*, Augustus worked to conceal the revolutionary effect his regime had on Roman governance. As a result, Augustus was able to forge a unique relationship with the aristocracy based upon his unmatchable prestige, which, unlike naked political power, had a republican precedent.[62]

Augustus needed the support of the aristocrats to maintain his position, and adopted communicative methods designed to appeal to their desire for a sense of equity.[63] This was not the only course available to him though. If naked power was the only objective, he could have adopted an explicitly revolutionary position, and worked to replace the aristocracy rather than conciliate it. He could have relied on loyalists to command the military, while trusting in the loyalty of the soldiers themselves as their supreme benefactor. The army could be used as a stick with which to threaten recalcitrant aristocrats. However, this would probably provoke further civil violence, so instead, he sought to draw the aristocracy closer to himself. He would remain preeminent through the honor granted him by his unique status as restorer of the republic and the

[61] For Octavian/Augustus' self-styling before and after Actium, see *Res Gestae* 1, for discussion, see Roller *Constructing Autocracy*, 214-215.
[62] Ronald Syme understood this program of legitimization to be the work of a cohort of calculating, cynical men, for whom the accumulation of power was an end unto itself. Syme, *The Roman Revolution*, 314.
[63] Kurt Raaflaub, "Aristocracy and Freedom of Speech in the Greco-Roman World," in *Free Speech in Classical Antiquity*, ed. Ralph Mark Rosen, (Boston: Brill, 2004), 57-58.

guarantor of peace rather than overt coercion. These two accomplishments accorded him an unparalleled level of prestige and justified his unique position.

This basis for rule was perfectly workable so long as Augustus lived. The succession posed a very different sort of problem. Like any charismatic leader, the legitimacy of his rule was largely dependent upon features unique to the leader. The very idea of hereditary succession obliterated the appeal to tradition that Augustus had used so successfully throughout his reign. There was no clear precedent to follow, and many who lived under Augustus may have expected the government to revert to its republican antecedents after his death rather than transition into a hereditary monarchy. After all, Augustus claimed he held his preeminent position due to the *auctoritas* accorded him for his accomplishments. This leads to the second problem; those accomplishments and the relationship they allowed Augustus to have with his elite subjects could not be cleanly transmitted to his successors. This is Malina's duality of honor- ascribed honor the dynastic name and honor or the family, versus acquired honor, that which is awarded based on one's own accomplishments. Complicating the situation, Augustus' successors would lack equivalent opportunities to acquire such prestige. At his death, the empire was largely at peace, and he had instructed that the present boundaries were to be maintained. Tiberius had served as Rome's most successful commander in numerous campaigns, but Caligula, Claudius, and Nero had no such accomplishments they could claim. Since they lacked the level of acquired honor that could meaningfully augment their ascribed honor, they were disadvantaged when presented with the need to command a population of aristocrats who may have had greater claims to honor than themselves.

His successors found themselves locked into the Augustan model, but without the massive reservoir of honor that he had enjoyed. Despite lacking the *auctoritas* that enabled his

specific style of rule, his successors could not simply abandon the Augustan program without disrupting the relationship between the emperor and the aristocracy. Like Augustus' acquired honor, the network of loyalists built up over multiple civil and foreign wars was not automatically transferred to Augustus' successors. As such, Tiberius and the later Julio-Claudians' legitimacy was provided by the system Augustus had created, rather than by the aspects unique to him as an individual that had done so much to actually make that system function. Without that system, they had no greater claim to power than any other powerful aristocrat. Tiberius, as the first to succeed as *princeps*, was the most vulnerable. To follow Augustus' example, Tiberius, and his successors had to find ways to ensure that like Augustus they were not universally reviled as tyrants.[64] The opening of Book 1 in the *Annals* deals specifically with the issue of Tiberius' succession, and the possibility of a reversion to normal republican operations was brought up when Tiberius initially refuses to take up the position of his adoptive father. Though, as Tacitus is quick to point out, this is merely the first of Tiberius' repeated, but insincere nods towards liberty (Tac. *Ann.* 1.11-13).[65]

Failing to act with the appropriate *civilitas* towards the aristocracy would open an emperor up to critiques of tyranny or saddle him with the undesirable title of king, which would undermine the Augustan model, reliant as it was on its appeals to the republican past. In order to avoid this, the emperor must make himself appear a citizen first, and ruler second.[66] Augustus understood how quickly the positive opinion of a leading man could sour if he were thought to be abusing his position. In recounting the rise and fall of the decemvir Appius Claudius, Livy

[64] D.C.A. Shotter, "Tacitus and Tiberius," *Ancient Society* XIX (1988): 236.
[65] Tacitus is never willing to give Tiberius any credit for sincerity, but there are modern historians who believe Tiberius may truly have genuinely desired a semi-autonomous senate which would work in tandem with the emperor. DCA Shotter, "Ea simulacra libertatis," *Latomus*, 25 (1966): 268.
[66] Wallace-Hadrill, "Civilis Princeps,", 36.

wrote a speech in which M. Hortatius Barbatus reminded the decemvirs that it was not the title king that their ancestors had found so offensive about the Tarquinii, but their supreme arrogance and violence (Liv. 3.39). In singling out arrogance and violence, Livy, through Horatius, identified a major benefit of the Augustan model, which sought to incorporate the aristocracy and reiterate their independence, even while it bound them closer and closer to the emperor.[67]

Rome and kingship had a fraught history, spanning a series of seven kings. While sources agree on the seven, they are of varying historicity. Little can be definitively said about Romulus, and only slightly more about his immediate successors, but the situation becomes clearer towards the sixth century BC.[68] The important king for our purposes is the final one, L. Tarquinius Superbus. Tarquinius was either the son or grandson of Tarquinius Priscus, the predecessor to the current king Servius Tullius (Liv. 1.46). Servius is represented in Livy as an archetypical good king; he instituted reforms that benefited the populace, respected the leading men of the city, and did not abuse his power. Tarquinius Priscus' two sons, Tarquinius and Arruns, had married the two daughters of Servius, both of whom were named Tullia. As Livy presents it, it was only by fortunate happenstance that the ambitious young Tarquinius was married to the upright Tullia, while his brother Arruns was married to her ferocious sister (Liv. 1.46-47). Tarquinius and his sister-in-law both lusted after the power of the kingship but were stymied by their respective marriages. However, not the sort to be stopped by inconvenient spouses, they eliminated their problematic partners. The newly liberated widow and widower quickly found solace together and began working towards their grander goal, seizing the

[67] There is a distinction between the post Actium period and the triumvirate, in which violence certainly played a large part. Consider for example, the request of Augustus to his longtime opponent Gn. Calpurnius Piso to stand for the consulate as his partner in 23. This assessment speaks only of Augustus the princeps, at which time he was more focused on fashioning his image. As such it does not deal with his more brutal methods when he was still Octavian, especially during proscriptions held while he was a triumvir.

[68] H.H. Scullard, *A History of the Roman World* 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 1980), 48.

kingship for themselves. After mustering support among the aristocracy, Tarquinius eventually made his move and usurped the throne. Servius was murdered, and his body was trampled in the muddy street under the carriage of his daughter Tullia (Liv. 1.48). Thus began the reign of Rome's seventh and final king, Tarquin the Proud. A monarchy that inaugurated its first king under the shadow of fratricide would see its last come to pass under fratricide, sororicide, and finally patricide.

The coup in the royal house can be read as a metaphor for civil war. One problem with such a rise to power is that there is always the option to resort to more violence in order to maintain it. This is made clear by Livy, who depicts Tarquin as a classic tyrant.[69] He confiscated, exiled, and executed at whim, and did so often with no purpose beyond his own enrichment or personal animus (Liv. 1.48). Livy identified the senate as the most victimized population and described how Tarquin ceased to consult with them in matters of import.[70] His reign would come to an end with a final crime, the rape of Lucretia by his son Sextus Tarquinius. One of the epochal moments in Roman history, the rape and subsequent suicide of Lucretia galvanized her father, husband, and their friend Brutus into action. They formed a coalition of oppressed and outraged Romans and ousted Tarquinius, Tullia, and their children from power and exiled them from the city, establishing the Republic (Liv. 1.59). Livy may have been milking this for literary effect, but it was exactly this kind of resentment that the new Julio-

[69] The tyrant can be understood as a prefabricated image, usually characterized by sexual license, which is certainly a feature we see in Tarquin and Appius Claudius the Decemvir and will see similar charges levelled against emperors like Tiberius. J. Roger Dunkle, "The Rhetorical Tyrant in Roman Historiography: Sallust, Livy and Tacitus," *The Classical World* 65, no. 1 (1971): 19.

[70] As discussed above, we can see in Livy's account the emphasis on the senate as the body with which kingly interactions were most important. Livy 59 BCE - 17CE would write his histories during the reign of Augustus, who was determined to avoid comparisons with rulers like Tarquinius. A classic response to the question of to what extent Livy was himself a mouthpiece of Augustan propaganda is Syme's in *The Roman Revolution* (1939) in Chapter 30 "The Organization of Opinion".

Claudian regime needed to avoid. If Augustus and his successors were to retain power, and if naked force was not the solution, then aristocratic cooperation was essential.

This contrast between incorporation and subjugation speaks to the essential problem the Roman aristocracy had with monarchs. A king was able to flatten the social hierarchy, placing himself at one level and all others equal in their subject status beneath him. This was problematic because it created an artificial commonality across the entire subject populace. Specifically, it created an intolerable similarity between aristocrats and the lowest members of the social hierarchy: slaves. In Hortatius' harangue against A. Claudius, it was the bad behavior of a leader that he insisted Romans hated, not just the title of king (Liv. 3.39). Claudius' arrogance caused him to act towards his fellow citizens as if he was not their equal, but their master. Cicero charged Tarquinius Superbus with the same, depicting his reign in the language of slavery. When Brutus and Lucretia's family drove the king from Rome, they freed their fellow citizens from the "yoke of slavery" (Cic. *Rep*. 2.46). In Roman society, slaves were vulnerable to all manner of abuses that a citizen was shielded from, in particular, physical violence. The Roman citizen, unlike a slave, was theoretically protected from violence at the hands of the magistrates by the right of *provocatio*, which enabled the citizens to appeal the charge to the assembly, staying any summary beatings or execution. Slaves, as property, enjoyed no such protections. The only defense the slave had against abuse from their master was the social pressure on the slave owner to not be unduly cruel.[71] Slavery and the attendant attributes

[71] Roller, *Constructing Autocracy*, 226. Of course, setting the limit at "excessive" cruelty to one's slaves was really a pretty low bar. Vedius Pollio was famous for his cruelty; he would throw slaves into pools full of predatory lampreys, which would devour the unfortunate person. While hosting Augustus for dinner, a slave dropped a cup and broke it. As he was ordering the slave thrown to the lampreys, Augustus stopped him, and instead ordered all the other cups to be broken as well, so that he was guilty of the same offense as the slave, and thereby chastising the host while saving the slave. In doing so, he brought great dishonor upon Vedius. However, this kind of protection from a horrible death was unusual, and primarily noted by ancient sources because of the exotic nature of the execution. More conventional punishments elicited little comment. Ronald Syme, "Who was Vedius Pollio?" *The Journal of Roman Studies* 51, (1961): 22-30.

of slavishness were dreaded by Roman aristocratic society. According to the perception of the slave owning classes, the abuses suffered by slaves was indicative of a moral corruption that was a fixed characteristic of all slaves.[72] To be a slave was not only to be subject to various forms of abuse, but on some level to be deserving of that maltreatment for allowing oneself to continue living under those conditions.

Fortunately for Augustus and his successors, the Roman social system offered an alternative. The emperor could rule based on deference to his *auctoritas*, rather than through fear of his *potestas.* The Roman social system instilled a deep deference to the personal dignity of a great man.[73] This is in keeping with the republican senatorial principes, the leading men who spoke first in the *curia.*[74] The distinction is made explicit by Augustus in his *Res Gestae,* when he claims "I surpassed all in respect of my prestige, but I had no more legal authority than any others who were my colleagues."[75] As a matter of communications, the emperor's supremacy in honor meant that he did not need to be explicit in demanding obedience from his aristocratic subordinates, and thus could avoid the stigma of the master-slave paradigm. Indeed, if the restitution of the *res publica* was to be credible, Augustus could not allow himself to be seen as even approximating the figure of the *dominus*. He found the title to be pejorative, and prohibited anyone, even within his own family, from referring to him as such.[76] As a result,

[72] Roller, *Constructing Autocracy*, 226. "Physical and legal degradation corresponded in Roman Society to moral degradation" Roller discusses the biases of the slave-holding class and presents master-slave paradigm as one in which the participants are assumed to be mutually hostile.
[73] Lendon, *Empire of Honour,* 60-61.
[74] Raaflaub, "Aristocracy and Freedom of Speech," 54-55
[75] *Res Gestae* 34.3, translation in J.E.Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 129.
[76] Suetonius, *Divine Augustus,* 53.1-2. "*...dominumque se posthac appellari ne a liberis quidem aut nepotibus suis vel serio vel ioco passus est atque eius modi blanditias etiam inter ipsos prohibuit."*

Augustus, along with his successors Tiberius and Claudius, would adopt alternative linguistic forms to issue commands when dealing with fellow aristocrats.[77]

This self-representation would be consistent throughout his reign, from the assumption of sole power after Actium through his death. Octavian positioned himself not as a revolutionary figure like Caesar, but rather as a traditionalist who had worked to restore the republic to its age-old political and social values. Octavian fought a series of civil wars in order to establish his predominance over the Roman world, culminating in the battle of Actium in 31 BC where he defeated the forces of Mark Antony and the Egyptian queen, Cleopatra. Four years after his victory, he would set aside his triumviral *potestas* and declare the restoration of the republic, returning power to the senate. In doing so, the onus of defining the relationship between the newly reformulated government and himself fell on the shoulders of the aristocracy. [78] Through the restitution of the republic, Augustus positioned himself as the defender of the traditional system, while simultaneously legitimizing his own preeminent position within that system by having it ratified by a newly independent senate.

Augustus was attempting to contextualize his position within the existing social hierarchy, however, to do so he would need the support of the senate. The legitimization offered by senatorial approval came with a price. In seeking their support, Augustus foreclosed the possibility of restructuring the social order. Unlike Julius Caesar, Augustus would maneuver within the republican framework. In the settlement of 27 BCE, when Octavian was given the title Augustus, and *princeps*, he was also offered the emblems of kingship, which he refused.

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[77] Tiberius, like Augustus before him, specifically forbade anyone to call him *dominus.* (Suet. *Tib.* 27.*1*) This tradition did not evidently survive Augustus and Tiberius, and by the time of Trajan we see *Dominus* as a normal form of address in Pliny's correspondence with the emperor. For discussion, see Carlos Norena, "The Social Economy of Pliny's Correspondence with Trajan." *American Journal of Philology* 128, no. 2 (2007): 239-77.
[78] W. Eder, "Augustus and the Power of Tradition: The Augustan Principate as Binding Link" in *Between Republic and Empire,* ed. Kurt Raaflaub and Mark Toher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 72.

Instead, he accepted a wooden civic crown which was hung above the door to his home.[79] Additionally, a golden shield listing his virtues was hung in the curia or senate house. These virtues, *virtus* (courage/manliness), *pietas* (piety), and *clementia* (mercy), were all traditionally associated with Roman magistracy. The acceptance of the various titles and honors associated with the Republic, while refusing those titles and emblems associated with prior kings, sent a clear message; Augustus may be the most preeminent citizen, but he was not a king.[80]

However, nobody would take the "restoration" seriously if Augustus still controlled the entire military. Therefore, the settlement of 27 also saw a redistribution of provincial control, with most of the troubled regions falling under the command of Augustus for a period of 10 years. This resulted in Augustus retaining command of almost half of the Roman territory and many of the most hardened and experienced troops. However, this arrangement was not in and of itself un-republican. Throughout the late republic, there had been a series of extraordinary commands given to men of exceptional ability. G. Marius, L. Lucullus, L. Sulla, Gn. Pompey, and of course Julius Caesar had all held commands that were exceptionally large in scope and definite in tenure, just as Augustus did now.[81] However, despite the resistance that many of these postings received by the senate, it would be a mistake to think that the opposition was solely rooted in senatorial abhorrence of an 'un-republican' or non-traditional quality to these commands. In *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic*, Erich Gruen is able to cite a litany of similar extraordinary commands dating as far back as the Samnite wars of the 4th century

[79] Eder, "Augustus and the Power of Tradition," 105. The *corona civica* was a Republican military award given to a soldier for saving the life of a fellow citizen. It was one of the most honorific awards available in the Roman army.
[80] Roller explores the explicit contrast between the *father* and *master* figures in the Roman social imagination. Part 4 "Competing Paradigms in the early Principate" focuses on these two competing narratives for understanding the princeps. Roller, *Constructing Autocracy*, 254-55.
[81] Robin Seager, *Pompey the Great* 2nd ed. (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 40-41. By the terms of the *Lex Gabinia* which authorized Pompey to exterminate the Cilician pirates, Pompey held imperium 50 miles inland around the entirety of the Mediterranean. This meant that his command superseded that of other proconsular governors even in their own provinces. Comparatively, the command granted to Augustus is far less intrusive.

BCE.[82] So rather than an objection based on traditionalism, it seems that the cause for senatorial displeasure was the monopolization of honor. As Gruen points out, many of those who inveighed against these commands, like the younger Cato, themselves took unusual or extraordinary commands of their own when offered.[83]

In this respect, Augustus was in line with his republican predecessors. His command was greater than almost any that had come before, but it was not wholly aberrant. In 23 BCE, Augustus took steps to reinforce his republican bona fides. He had held the consulship continuously since 31, and in 23 announced he would finally step aside, opening the position for fellow aristocrats who had grown frustrated with his monopoly on one of the two offices.[84] His co-consul for the year would be Cn. Calpurnius Piso, a dedicated Republican who had been an inveterate opponent of Julius Caesar and Octavian throughout the civil wars (Tac. *Ann.* 2.43.2).[85] At this juncture, Augustus fell deathly ill, and thinking that his life was coming to an end, he entrusted all his official documents to his colleague Piso, and his signet ring to Marcus Agrippa. This left Augustus' heir, Marcellus, with nothing except the right to run for office at an earlier age than normal.[86] After his recovery, despite these measures and some level of sincere republicanism that may have accompanied them, Augustus did not follow the model of Sulla and

[82] Erich Gruen, *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 534-538).
[83] Gruen, *Last Generation*, 533-534.
[84] Eder, "Augustus and the Power of Tradition," 107-108.
[85] Piso had fought with the Pompeians against Julius Caesar. He then sided with the tyrannicides after his death, fighting with them against the coalition of Antony and Octavian. After these defeats, he had refused all public offices until approached with this request by Augustus.
[86] Eder, "Augustus and the Power of Tradition," 108. Though certainly against the expectations of the *cursus honorum,* there had been a tradition of powerful young men being exempted from the usual age requirements. Some early famous examples are Scipio Africanus and T. Quinctius Flamininus, the conqueror of Macedon, both of whom reached the consulate well before the appropriate age.

return to private life. He retained power through a grant of the *tribunicia potestas* in perpetuity and continued control of the army.[87]

Augustus remained central in the restored republic, but he took pains to present himself as part of the state, not above it. The Ara Pacis, the great altar to peace that the senate commissioned in 13 BCE to honor Augustus' return from the northern provinces provides an example of how Augustan representation emphasized membership in a civic elite, rather than domination over them. Augustus is prominently represented, along with the imperial family, but they share the space with the other members of the religious colleges.[88] Compare his decidedly unexceptional depiction with those of ancient kings, such as the Behistun relief and inscription detailing the achievements of Darius I of the Achaemenians. Augustus is represented as being the same size as other men; he does not tower above them or as Darius does, nor trod upon those he has defeated. The thematic intentions of the two monuments are complete opposites. Where Darius wants to showcase his subjugation of the various peoples in his empire, Augustus seeks to represent the commonality and assimilation to a unified Roman state.[89] The inclusion of the senators who made up the religious colleges, and thus reflected the highest stratum of the aristocracy, marked out a community of the ruling class. Augustus and the imperial family were honored, but so too were the families of the men who were included in the procession. So long as the figures were identifiable, the descendants of those men would benefit from the public

[87] The *triubunicia potestas* was the power of a Tribune of the plebs. A suite of powers that included a legislative function, the veto, and physical sacrosanctity. Eder, "Augustus and the Power of Tradition," 109. The continued control of the military meant that the honor won in any military victory also was his, furthering his accumulation of honor. Erich Gruen, "The Imperial Policy of Augustus" in *Between Republic and Empire,* ed. Kurt Raaflaub and Mark Toher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 402-404.

[88] Eder, "Augustus and the Power of Tradition" 119.

[89] Differentiating 'assimilation' from 'subjugation': Myles Lavan, Richard Payne, John Weisweiler, "Cosmopolitan Politics: The Assimilation and Subordination of Elite Cultures," in *Cosmopolitanism and Empire* ed. Myles Lavan, Richard Payne, and John Weisweiler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1-28. On the Behistun monument: Bruce Lincoln, *Religion Empire and Torture: The Case of Achaemenian Persia with a Postscript on Abu Grahib* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 21.

honor paid to their ancestors. Honor was a resource that Augustus was content with sharing, so long as it procured him legitimacy and the cooperation of those with whom he shared it.

Augustus' freedom to represent himself as a relatable human being instead of an all-powerful king or god was a luxury. He was unmatched while he lived, and as a result Augustus' position was secure in ways that his successors never could be. Whatever critiques he was subject to, Augustus understood that the claim to legitimacy he crafted required that he not overtly punish his critics; to do so would fly in the face of the image he had so carefully cultivated.[90] Allowing his critics to persist redounded to his benefit, as their continued freedom to speak against him was proof that he was no tyrant. Only a secure ruler could advise his stepson, "My dear Tiberius, you must not...take it to heart if anyone speaks ill of me; let us be satisfied if we can achieve it that nobody is able to *do* us any harm" (Suet. *Aug*. 51.3).[91] Indeed, it would seem that there were few who were able to do Augustus any real harm. There were a few minor conspiracies, but nothing that posed a genuine threat.[92] Certainly none of these conspiracies posed a threat in the way the Pisonian conspiracy against Nero did.[93]

A possible effect of this relative difference in security is a differentiation in the kind of language used by the different generations of rulers when dealing with elite subjects. The more secure an emperor was, the freer he was to represent himself as first among equals.[94] When that security was threatened, an emperor might seek to enhance his personal honor through more

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[90]Kurt Raaflaub and L.J. Samons II, "Opposition to Augustus," in *Between Republic and Empire: Interpretations of Augustus and His Principate*, ed. Kurt Raaflaub, Mark Toher, and G. W Bowersock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 446.

[91]Translation by Raaflaub and Samons II.

[92] Raaflaub and Samons II, "Opposition to Augustus," 422-433.

[93] For the Pisonian conspiracy: Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.48 - 71, Aloys Winterling posits a conspiracy against Caligula in 39 that was similarly dangerous and marked a turning point in Caligula's relationship with the senate.: Winterling *Caligula*, 107-121.

[94] On savvy emperors carefully controlling how much honor to accrue to themselves, see Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 169. "A wise emperor, properly concerned for such rumours (that he loved adulation too much) carefully allowed himself only the honour that aristocratic opinion could bear."

agonistic methods. Lording power over subordinates, humiliating rivals, or choosing to represent himself as larger than life, are all tactics to strengthen his position by dominating his subjects rather than appealing to their common traditions.

The relative security of Augustus allowed him flexibility, which he used to fashion himself and his position as first citizen. The lack of effective opposition to Augustus was partly because his preeminence was not perceived to be radically different than previous generations of exceptional men. While modern observers see a clear delineation between the Republic and the Principate, in which power was consolidated in the hands of the emperor, it is unclear that the Romans were equally aware of the distinction.[95] It is reasonable to believe that the Romans of Augustus' time felt that they were still largely operating within the normal parameters of the republican government as they had known it; they just now had to contend with a man whose *auctoritas* and personal honor outshone everyone else.[96] Having lived through the preeminence of Marius, Sulla, Pompey, and Caesar, Augustus could be viewed as simply the latest in a long line of men with incomparable prestige and power. The relationship Augustus had with the senate and body politic was different than his predecessors, but each of them was different from the others in some way as well. There was not a prescribed "great man" model to which he was necessarily compared. Thus, the ways he differed from these late republican potentates could be attributed as specific to him, rather than recognized as a paradigmatic shift in the form of government.

Hoping to avoid evoking a shame-anger response from his aristocratic subjects, Augustus was not interested in clarifying his position. He instead styled himself as almost entirely reliant

[95] Winterling *Caligula*, 73, and Matthew Roller, "The Difference an Emperor Makes: Notes on the Reception of the Republican Senate in the Imperial Age," *Classical Receptions Journal* 7, no. 1 (2015): 12.
[96] Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 61.

on his Tribunican *potestas* and his own *auctoritas.* His personal honor was such that he was able to situate himself as the latest in a long line of exceptional Romans who led the republic not because of any unique legal powers, but due entirely to the deference due his tremendous prestige. However, this perception could not survive his death. Since his successors lacked the level of acquired honor which could meaningfully augment their ascribed honor, they were disadvantaged when presented with the need to command a population of aristocrats who may have had greater claims to honor than themselves. Given that, it became more difficult and less beneficial to obfuscate the nature of the power dynamic between emperor and senate, as the simplest route to acquiring honor or their own was through zero-sum agonistic interactions, wherein they gained face at the expense of the aristocracy.[97]

The Paradox of Imperial Communication Strategies

When Vespasian attained the principate, he was another dynastic founder who came to the position with the acquired honor of having just won a bloody civil war. But the victory of war over one's countrymen was problematic, and, like Augustus, he worked to obfuscate the nature of his position vis a vis the Republican institutions which retained their cultural power, even though they were long past political relevance. Part of the process of blurring the nature of his role as emperor was codifying his position within the existing legal framework. The *lex de imperio Vespasiani* established a series of powers in articles 1-5 and 7 that Vespasian was

[97] Winterling explores the problem facing the early emperors as being comprised of two separate, but linked paradoxes, which find their roots in the troubled structuring of the Principate that we have previously explored. The first is a constitutional paradox, in which the Principate both requires the existence of republican government norms, yet simultaneously by the virtue of its very existence, subverts and destroys those same foundational elements it uses to support itself. To elucidate the problem, Winterling turns to the *lex de imperio Vespasiani* as evidence for how this paradox played out in practice. Winterling *Politics and Society*, 26-27.

accorded, but then, in article six it granted him the power to do anything which he finds to be to the public advantage.[98] This rendered all the specific allocations of power superfluous. Article 6 alone is sufficient for any purpose an emperor might set to it. And yet, despite the essentially unbounded authority granted in this law, it still must be *granted* by the senate. Without their consent, the emperor would have no legal authority, but as soon as the granting of powers is complete, that same legal authority is rendered moot insofar as it concerns the emperor, for he is now above the law.[99]

The *lex de imperio Vespasiani* is important for our purposes because even though it detailed the authority granted to Vespasian in 69 CE, it established that a number of these powers had been granted to his predecessors Augustus, Tiberius, and Claudius.[100] Based on a careful reading of Tacitus' *Histories*, Aloys Winterling has argued that these powers were probably not novel to Vespasian.[101] If true, then this formatting of the paradoxical need for legal sanction while simultaneously declaring the emperor above the law had been a facet of the Principate at least since Caligula. Augustus and Tiberius had been granted powers more slowly, so the same formulation would not necessarily have applied, though the ultimate nature of the dynamic remains the same.[102] In each case, the emperor needed to make use of a legal framework by which he could supersede the law.

Similarly, the emperor found himself paradoxically above societal norms while simultaneously constrained by them. The emperor could give gifts and bestow honors at an

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[98] *utique quaecunque ex usu rei publicae maiestateque diuinarum | humanarum publicarum priuatarumque rerum esse | censebit, ei agere facere ius potestasque sit...*

[99] In Winterling's words: "The *lex de imperio Vespasiani* thus documents the simultaneous validity and repeal of the legal order as carried by the institutions of the republic, that is, a constitutional paradox." Winterling, *Politics and Society*, 27.

[100] The exclusion of Caligula and Nero from this list of predecessors is telling and is suggestive of the divide that existed between the reception of Tiberius and Claudius, as opposed to Caligula and Nero.

[101] P.A. Brunt, "Lex de Imperio Vespasiani," *The Journal of Roman Studies* Vol. 67 (1977): 102.

[102] Brunt "Lex de Imperio Vespasiani," 97-98.

unparalleled level, and thus could elevate anyone he chose to the topmost echelon of the economic classes. Yet despite the unmatched power to reward his loyalists, he could not change the social apparatus that determined what form those rewards might take. Therefore, the emperor would reinforce the legitimacy of the established social hierarchy by the very act of violating it because it demonstrated that even the most powerful man in the empire had no other social paradigm within which he could operate.[103] Among the most famous examples is Claudius' elevation of his freedmen Pallas and Narcissus by awarding them the ornaments of Praetors and Quaestors (Suet. *Claud*. 28). Pliny the Younger, coming across the grave of Pallas some 60 years after his death, would write in horror in two letters about the discovery (Plin. *Ep.* 7.29 & 8.6). In the second letter, he informs his interlocutor Montanus that he had done some research and uncovered more of the sordid story. His outrage at the elevation of Pallas is explicit. At an uncharacteristic loss for words, Pliny castigates all involved for not only going along with this indignity, but then having the gall to hang up a bronze tablet commemorating the affair on the statue of Gaius Julius Caesar: "as if they intended to set up a record in the sight of all, Pallas of his insolence, the emperor of his complaisance, the senate of its degradation!" (Plin. *Ep.* 8.6).[104]

Politically and socially, the emperor was simultaneously above the system and constrained by it. On their face, these paradoxes would seem an insuperable obstacle to effective governance. But, if the issues are elided rather than confronted, the system could continue to function. The political actors could symbolically contextualize their actions as if the rules that had governed republican elite culture were still valid, while simultaneously abandoning that

[103] Winterling *Politics and Society*, 27-28.
[104] Pliny The Younger, *Epistles*, 8.6. Loeb translation.

model in actuality, instead ceding authority to the emperor. Winterling describes the solution as follows:

> How did emperors and aristocracy deal with this paradoxical situation? The most important tool was...to practice an ambiguous communication differentiated on two planes. On the level of manifest communication they communicated as if the res publica still continued to exist. Yet on the latent information level, it was also implicitly communicated that an emperor existed, to whom everyone looked to guide their behavior.[105]

This offers a possible explanation for the endurance of the Roman Republican government in the early principate, but it does not address the interpersonal issues that were at stake by having an individual elevated above and beyond the traditional social hierarchy. How could an individual senator preserve their own position on the top rung of society while simultaneously agreeing to follow the orders of one who potentially had less claims to honor and *auctoritas* than themselves except for the happenstance of birth?[106] Even if he were to accept the emperor's position as being legitimate based solely on relation to their predecessor, for an aristocrat to follow anyone's orders, emperor or not, carried with it problematic associations. Obedience and slavishness were inextricably linked. However, by incorporating an intentional level of ambiguity into their communications, emperors were able to soften the impact of their commands, allowing the subject to recast the command as something other than what it was.[107]

Not all emperors employed this linguistic strategy, whether because of careful consideration of how to best position themselves against the aristocracy, or because they were

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[105] Winterling, *Politics and Society*, 111.

[106] This is not to suggest that the importance of birthrights and family should be undervalued. Clearly, birth was one of, if not the most important element for social placement within Roman society. However, birth did not guarantee one a magistracy under the republic. A well born candidate still had to canvass for votes and rely on a network of well-placed friends and family.

[107] Lendon acknowledges this difficulty as well: "Even the emperor was extremely tactful, phrasing his directives to his grand officials as suggestions and advice." Lendon *Empire of Honour,* 20.

temperamentally unsuited to it. Caligula most famously and thoroughly abandoned the Augustan model, perhaps seeking legitimacy and security in alternative models of autocracy, in which the monarch exists on a separate plane of existence, akin more to the gods than to his fellow men. In Suetonius' account, many of the actions taken by Caligula are presented as the sadistic acts of a madman. However, this cruelty, if viewed as deliberate attempts to debase and dishonor his political opponents, becomes more intelligible. In a litany of brutalities, Suetonius describes how "men of honorable rank were first disfigured with the marks of branding irons and then condemned to the mines, to work at building roads, or to be thrown to the wild beasts" (Suet. *Calig*. 27.3).[108] These torments are all associated with slavery, and by submitting aristocrats to these types of punishments, Caligula was flattening the social hierarchy. Under his regime, there was simply the emperor, and everyone else.[109]

Much of the cruelty attributable to Caligula involves this theme of honorific degradation. He was known for his inventiveness at insulting his enemies. He ordered all the sculptures of the famous men of the republic removed from the Campus Martius and decreed that no new statues shall be dedicated to any living man. With this action and in one fell swoop, he erased one of the most public forms of honor left to the older families and eliminated the potential for any other man to attain them (Suet. *Calig.* 34.1). Perhaps the most notorious instance of his 'madness' was his decision to award honors to a favored horse, and according to Suetonius, even planned to make him consul (Suet. *Calig.* 55.3). This is certainly the mood of a madman if the intent is for the horse to serve a role in government. But, if the objective is to belittle the entire Roman elite in a single move, it is actually pretty brilliant. Caligula took the highest possible honor that the

[108] Trans. By J.C. Rolfe.
[109] Winterling *Politics and Society*, 117-118.

aristocrats could hope to attain the consulate and made it clear to everyone that it was meaningless, a trifle that could be bestowed on a dumb beast.[110]

Ultimately, Caligula is murdered by two of the men he had insulted, Cassius Chaerea and Cornelius Sabinus, praetorian tribunes who had suffered a number of insults from the emperor (Suet. *Calig.* 56.2). Caligula's failure to maintain amicable communications with the Roman elite through strategic ambiguity is not surprising when one considers that he never saw that system of exchange when it functioned properly. By the time Caligula was old enough to understand and observe how Tiberius communicated with the aristocracy, the dynamic was already breaking down.

Tiberius, though well versed in the Augustan model, was unable to execute it with the same success as his predecessor.[111] Depicted by Tacitus as the most deceptive of all the Julio-Claudians, he would sometimes simply defer from giving an order altogether, which could certainly work to conceal the relations of power, but it could also create confusion. At *Annals* 3.52-55, Tiberius is presented with a call from the senate to reform the overly luxurious spending on comestibles. He, however, decides that doing nothing is preferable to taking action. He writes to the Senate that it is "neither honorable to be silent nor easy to be outspoken, for it is not the part of aedile or praetor or consul that I act. Something greater and more exalted is demanded of a *princeps* (Tac. *Ann.* 3.53.2)."[112] With this passage, Tiberius acknowledges his unique position. He then goes on to make this argument for inaction:

> The many laws devised by our ancestors, the many which divine Augustus carried are inoperative. The former through oblivion, the latter...through contempt...For should you want what is not yet forbidden, there is always fear that it may be forbidden, but if you

[110] Winterling, *Caligula,* 107.
[111] On Tiberius' reliance on Augustan precedent see Eleanor Cowan, "Tacitus, Tiberius and Augustus," *Classical Antiquity* 28, no. 2 (2009): 199.
[112] Loeb translation.

> pass across prohibited areas with impunity, no dread lie beyond shame. Why then was frugality once a force? Because each man restrained himself (Tac.*Ann.*3.54.2).[113]

The answer, as Tiberius presented it, was self-control, not directives from the emperor. Tiberius avoided the potential problems derived from issuing commands to large parts of the aristocratic population, the population that could most readily afford such luxury while simultaneously emphasizing his focus on more the general welfare of the state.[114] In ordering the aristocrats to curb their indulgence, he would have simultaneously given offense and diminished his own power, as this would be an essentially unenforceable law. It was better to do nothing, and through inaction remind everyone of both his potential power and his restraint in its use.[115]

So, unlike Caligula, Tiberius was far more comfortable utilizing strategic ambiguity, perhaps to the point of doing more harm than good. Tiberius prized obscurity of communication throughout his reign. But whereas in the beginning this served as a continuation of the communicative model laid down by Augustus, by the end it created too much confusion, and paralyzed the aristocratic subjects as they were never sure what the emperor actually wanted. The result was a transition from a workable level of ambiguity, which created room for maneuver, to an excess, which did the opposite by creating genuine uncertainty. None of Augustus' successors were able to equal his success as a communicator, but unsurprisingly the

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[113] Trans. Woodman. Tacitus chalks this up to sheer duplicity on the part of Tiberius. However, there is the possibility that Tiberius was genuinely uncomfortable with his power and wished the senate to take a more proactive role. For a discussion of Tacitus' representation of Tiberius at the opening of his reign which goes to the larger issue of Tiberian hypocrisy, see A.J. Woodman, *Tacitus Reviewed* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 40-69.

[114] A.J. Woodman, "Tiberius and the Taste of Power: The Year 33 in Tacitus," *The Classical Quarterly* 56, no. 1. (2006) 182.

[115] This appreciation for autonomy can be found in self-confident, later emperors as well. In the correspondence between Trajan and Pliny, there are at least seven instances where Trajan deferred to Pliny's decision on some issue or another. The respect shown Pliny in these letters served the interests of both parties. For Trajan, it demonstrated that he was no tyrant, he had amicable relations with his subordinates, and let his governors go about their business of governing. For Pliny, the letters served to bolster his own personal honor, as evidence of the trust that Trajan placed in his judgment. The exchange serves to benefit both parties, and in mutually honoring one another, it draws the two actors closer together. Pliny, *Epistles,* Book 10, Letters 40, 50, 62, 76, 84, 117

two who attempted to replicate his communication style were those who had lived through his reign.[116]

The emperors were constrained by the political and social traditions of the republic, despite themselves existing on a level that was outside the bounds of those traditions. Some early emperors, like Tiberius, chose to emphasize the republican facade, while others, like Caligula, cast it aside, gleefully revealing the autocratic nature of the principate for what it was.[117] Because it became abundantly clear to all that the nature of the principate was wholly dependent on the nature of the princeps, the system of legitimacy based upon republican traditions instituted by Augustus became weaker with each new emperor. But while weakened, it retained social resonance. Vespasian still felt he needed senatorial ratification of his powers, and Trajan still felt he was obliged to treat his aristocratic subjects with greater respect than they were accustomed to under Domitian.

Tacitus and the Implications of his Word Choice

Tacitus' political sympathies have been interpreted as republican, monarchist, and everything in between.[118] In the *Agricola*, he claims it is possible for good men to exist and serve bad emperors, which has led some scholars to the understanding that his criticism is of bad principes, rather than the principate itself.[119] However, others read his work as a condemnation of the entire imperial institution, irrespective of the man in power.[120] According to Tacitus,

[116] Winterling *Politics and Society*, 112.
[117] Van Overmeire, "According to the Habit of Foreign Kings," 758.
[118] See for instance John Percival, "Tacitus and the Principate," *Greece and Rome* 27, No.2 (1980), and Thomas Strunk, *History after Liberty*, for two very different understandings of Tacitus' relationship to the principate.
[119] Percival, "Tacitus and the Principate," 121.
[120] Strunk, *History after Liberty*, 179.

Agricola's life was a model for how one could achieve honor under the principate, which he contrasted with "a glory which most men reach only by a perilous career, utterly useless to the state, and closed by an ostentatious death"[121] (Tac. *Ag.* 42). In his praise and obituary of Lepidus, Tacitus argues for a form of personal freedom through living an upright public life (Tac. *Ann.* 4.20 and 6.27). Integrity becomes its own marker of autonomy under the principate, precisely because it becomes so much more difficult. In the Republic, maintaining a basic level of integrity may have made an aristocrat political enemies, but it rarely endangered one's public career or life. Under the principate, the situation has changed. Throughout his work, Tacitus emphasizes how autocracy inevitably corrupts the morality of those who live under it. Because autocracy demands fealty to the man, rather than the state, priorities for the leading class become twisted. Personal advancement is disassociated from traditionally honorable actions. Instead, it is tied to pleasing the ruler. It is possible to withstand this corruptive influence, but moral rectitude in the face of these pressures becomes increasingly rare.

What then are we to make of Tacitus intentionally using ambiguous verbs for certain emperors when he wrote them issuing commands? Does this information help us reevaluate Tacitus' opinions of Tiberius or the other Julio-Claudian emperors? Not really, no. Tacitus gives a very clear assessment of Tiberius in his obituary, where he marks the emperor's decline through four phases of his life: his life as a private citizen and general, his early reign while Germanicus and Drusus still lived, his middle rule with Sejanus, and his final descent to a moral nadir after Sejanus' execution (Tac. *Ann.* 6.51.3). For Tacitus, Tiberius is a tale of moral

[121] Translation Alfred John Church

decline. His immorality was constrained by those around him, and as they died, the shackles that restrained his villainy fell away one by one.[122]

This begs the question why Tacitus chose these equivocal verbs when Tiberius gave a command to an elite subject if the ultimate assessment is so clearly negative. There are two reasons. The first is specific to Tacitus' literary construction of Tiberius. By using these verbs, Tacitus is able to subtly build his portrait of Tiberius as a hypocrite. Dissimulation was part of the Tacitean Tiberius' essential nature, and the use of ambiguous verbs subtly reinforced that characterization to the reader.[123] The emperor's hypocrisy is a recurring theme throughout the Tiberian hexad, as he repeatedly makes rhetorical gestures towards republicanism and aristocratic autonomy, but in practice keeps a firm grip on the levers of power. This dynamic would no doubt have been immediately familiar to Tacitus' contemporaries. Domitian too had made gestures towards aristocratic autonomy and personal humility, but it was (from Tacitus' perspective) a flimsy mask which he soon enough cast aside.[124]

The second reason is that it creates a link between the principate of the Julio-Claudians to that of his own time. Pliny praised Trajan for the respect he showed the senate, and the autonomy he restored to the consuls, and in the *Agricola,* Tacitus himself congratulated Nerva and Trajan for blending the irreconcilable: sovereignty and freedom (Tac. *Ag.* 3). But the *Agricola* was written well before the *Annals,* by which point Tacitus seems to be less optimistic about the true reconciliation of autocracy and freedom.[125] He makes it clear that the principate is

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[122] Tacitus' judgment of Tiberius has been repeatedly assessed and critiqued by modern scholars, see for example Seager, *Tiberius*, 233-235, or Shotter, "Tacitus and Tiberius," 235-236 for varying interpretations of how Tacitus viewed Tiberius. For the generally negative representation of Tiberius by Tacitus and Suetonius see: Edward J. Champlin, "Tiberius the Wise," *Historia* 57, no. 4 (2008): 418-422.

[123] Percival, "Tacitus and the Principate," 120.

[124] K.H. Waters, "The Character of Domitian," *Phoenix* Vol. 18 No. 1 (1964): 51.

[125] Strunk, *History after Liberty*, 28. Mary R. McHugh, "Historiography and Freedom of Speech: The Case of Cremutius Cordus," in *Free Speech in Classical Antiquity,* ed. Ralph Mark (Rosen. Boston: Brill, 2004), 395-96.

a despotism and offers no real hope that it can be otherwise (Tac. *Ann.* 4.33.1).[126] Freedom, as presented in these ambiguous commands, is not real freedom at all; it is merely a linguistic strategy, and one that has been employed by prior rulers. The fact that they are now employed by emperors who are ostensibly "good" does not indicate a paradigmatic shift in the nature of the relationship between the emperor and the aristocratic elite. When a command comes from the emperor, no matter how it is structured, it could not be disobeyed. The emperor remains the master. So, while Nerva and Trajan may be "good", their existence was still diametrically opposed to an idea of political *libertas* that was based on the republican past.[127]

The *simulacra libertatis* is a theme of the Tiberian hexad, wherein Tiberius outwardly respects the autonomy of the senate, but it is always the illusion of freedom (Tac. *Ann.* 1.77.3, 3.32.1). The use of ambiguous verbs in dealing with the Roman elite serves the same function. It creates the illusion of autonomy rather than the real thing. Through his word choice, Tacitus has constructed an image of the emperor carefully attending to how they interact with their elite subjects in order to maintain their sense of independence, while simultaneously reminding his readers of the illusory nature of that personal liberty.

Conclusion

If the emperor were going to claim legitimacy rooted in republican tradition, he needed to avoid injuring the honor of the great men of the empire. He needed to command his subjects, but the Augustan model demanded he do so with tact. The benefit of ambiguous language was that it

[126] In dealing with the aftermath of Augustus' death, Tacitus' composed speeches suggest that his sympathies lie with the critics of his rule rather than the supporters. See Herbert W. Benario, "Tacitus and the Principate," *The Classical Journal*, Vol. 60 No. 3 (Dec. 1964): 98

[127] Strunk, *History after Liberty*, 30.

navigated the social and honor requirements of the Roman elite while allowing the emperor to make his will known. The idea of elite independence was an important element in the model of governance that Augustus had established. The textual analysis presented here demonstrates a temporal distinction in how Roman heads of state were expected to communicate with their elite subjects. While the commands of Republican magistrates and later imperial emperors are almost always explicit, there is a conscious effort on the part of Tacitus and Suetonius to represent an ambiguous communications strategy during the early principate, resulting in the majority of their selected verbs being either equivocal (40%) or indeterminate (21%) when the emperor issued a command to an aristocratic subject. This stands in sharp contrast to the universal use of unequivocal verbs (92%) used by these same writers when the emperor addressed a non-elite subject.

The system of ambiguous communication, while effective for Augustus, was not universally successful. Those emperors who had not seen firsthand the benefits of this system were less confident in it and less convinced of its necessity. Therefore, when faced with a breakdown of communication in the form of conspiracies or studied opposition, they instead defaulted to an alternative communicative model, kingship.[128] To them, the best way to ensure obedience was not to protect the aristocrat's self-image by offering him some level of perceived autonomy, but rather to show him in no uncertain terms that he was the emperor's to command. Embracing an agonistic, and zero-sum vision of Roman honor culture, these emperors would seek to clarify their authority at the expense of their aristocratic subjects. But in doing so these emperors put the lie to the republican facade of the principate. The veneer of republican tradition remained socially powerful. It is unclear that most Romans saw the principate as a

[128] For Caligula, the proposed conspiracy of 39 CE would have been such a turning point. In the case of Nero, the Pisonian conspiracy or the intractable resistance of Thraseus Paetus had the same effect.

radical departure from what came before, so for them, the tradition of the republic was still valid in the principate.[129] This does not mean that there was a rigid adherence to republican political systems, but rather that there was an expectation that social norms would be upheld, and that their honor would be respected.

Tacitus, a highly successful member of the senatorial elite himself, suffered no illusions about the nature of the principate. It was a *dominatio* under Tiberius and would remain one under Trajan. The personal qualities of the emperor could dictate if the relationship between master and subject was cordial or hostile, but it could not change the fundamental nature of that relationship.[130] Throughout the *Annals* he makes clear that while the emperor and the senate both wish to preserve the idea of aristocratic *libertas*, neither can resurrect it. It exists in diametric opposition with the principate. The use of ambiguous verbs is the individualization of the *simulacra libertatis* that Tiberius offers the senate, and is a powerful indictment of the Roman elite, both as a class and individually. Each Roman nobleman would have to decide for himself if that was enough to satisfy the needs of their personal honor. For most, it would suffice. The principate, and autocracy more broadly, could not help but corrupt the society it governed. The expectations and demands of Roman honor were part of that corruption. Men whose ancestors cast out kings, overthrew decemvirs, and fought countless wars to satisfy their honor would now accept the rule of a tyrant, so long as he honored them with the illusion of freedom.

[129] Roller "The Difference an Emperor Makes," 12. Winterling, *Caligula*, 73.
[130] Benedetto Fontana, "Tacitus on Empire and Republic," *History of Political Thought* 14, (1993): 40.

Appendices

Appendix A. Commands located in the Source Texts

Ammianus: Books 14-25

14.2.20	15.5.2	16.8.7	18.2.11	20.9.3	22.5.2	23.5.5
14.5.5	15.5.5	16.11.2	18.2.12	20.9.3	22.9.16	24.1.1
14.7.2	15.5.18	16.12.65	18.6.5	20.9.4	22.9.17	24.1.2
14.7.9	15.5.22	17.1.1	19.6.12	20.9.6	22.13.2	24.1.6
14.7.9	15.5.36	17.2.3	19.11.8	20.11.1	22.14.2	24.2.18
14.7.11	15.7.6	17.9.7	19.12.5	21.4.5	23.1.7	24.4.26
14.7.12	15.7.9	17.10.5	20.2.5	21.6.9	23.2.2	24.6.5
14.7.13	16.2.8	17.10.7	20.4.2	21.12.2	23.2.2	24.8.1
14.7.14	16.5.3	17.12.15	20.4.6	21.12.2	23.3.5	25.8.12
14.7.14	16.5.11	17.12.21	20.4.8	21.12.2	23.3.2	25.9.4
14.11.21	16.5.12	17.13.5	20.4.11	21.12.2	23.3.5	25.10.10
14.11.21	16.7.1	17.13.16	20.8.1	21.13.16	23.3.5	
15.3.11	16.7.3	18.2.9	20.9.2	22.2.2	23.3.6	

Caesar:

1.2.4	1.26.3	1.41.5	1.77.1	2.25.6	3.23.2	3.80.5
1.3.1	1.27.5	1.41.5	1.78.1	2.34.5	3.30.5	3.82.2
1.3.2	1.28.5	1.42.4	1.80.4	2.39.6	3.34.2	3.82.3
1.8.1	1.30.1	1.43.3	1.82.2	2.42.1	3.34.3	3.92.2
1.8.3	1.30.1	1.54.1	1.87.4	2.43.1	3.36.3	3.98.1
1.14.4	1.35.1	1.56.1	2.18.1	3.2.1	3.42.2	3.106.1
1.16.1	1.37.1-3	1.61.4-6	2.19.7	3.13.3	3.42.5	3.109.3
1.23.1	1.37.1-3	1.61.4-6	2.20.6	3.17.2	3.46.1	3.109.3
1.23.5	1.37.1-3	1.66.1	2.21.3	3.18.4	3.62.1	
1.24.1	1.41.1-2	1.70.4	2.22.5	3.19.2	3.76.2	

Sallust: *Catiline*

Cat. 21	Cat. 27	Cat. 45	Cat. 46	Cat. 59	Cat. 60
Cat. 27	Cat. 39	Cat. 46	Cat. 55	Cat. 59	Cat. 60

Suetonius: *Divine Augustus*

13.2	26.1	29.4	37.1	45.3	66.1
14.1	27.3	30.1	40.1	53.1	67.1
17.4	27.4	31.4	44.2	56.1	98.1
24.4	28.1	35.4	44.3	56.4	

Suetonius: *Tiberius*

22.1	27.1	32.2	47.1	53.2	62.1	65.2
25.2	27.1	33.1	50.3	55.1	62.2	71.1
26.1	30.1	34.2	52.1	56.1	63.1	
26.2	31.1	36.1	52.1	57.2	65.1	

Suetonius: *Gaius*

15.3	25.2	27.2	34.1	49.1
20.1	26.5	28.1	41.2	54.2
23.1	27.1	30.1	48.2	55.3

Suetonius: *Divine Claudius*

11.3	16.1	25.1	27.1	34.1	37.2
12.2	18.1	26.3	29.2	34.2	

Suetonius: *Nero*

8.1	23.1	32.3	34.3	35.5	39.2
12.1	24.2	34.1	34.4	37.2	

Tacitus: *Annals* (Augustus)

1.3.5	1.6.1	2.4.1	2.37.2	12.61.1

Tacitus: *Annals* (Tiberius)

1.6.3	1.75.4	2.50.3	3.22.2	3.76.2	4.37.3	6.19.2
1.7.2	1.76.1	2.59.3	3.29.1	4.8.2	4.57.1	6.20.1
1.8.5	2.26.5	2.65.1	3.32.1	4.8.3	4.70.1	6.23.2
1.11.3	2.30.3	3.2.1	3.48.1	4.13.1	4.75.1	6.24.1
1.14.1	2.34.3	3.12.5	3.53.1	4.15.2	5.5.1	6.26.1

1.14.3	2.40.2	3.14.4	3.56.1	4.19.2	6.7.2	6.38.3
1.72.1	2.50.1	3.18.2	3.68.1	4.23.2	6.9.2	6.40.2
1.75.4	2.50.2	3.19.1	3.70.1	4.30.1	6.15.3	6.50.3

Tacitus: *Annals* (Gaius)
11.8.1

Tacitus: *Annals* (Claudius)

11.3.1	11.19.3	11.35.3	12.7.2	12.61.1
11.13.1	11.19.4	11.37.2	12.49.2	12.63.3
11.15.1	11.25.3	12.1.2	12.53.1	13.27.3

Tacitus: *Annals* (Nero)

13.7.1	13.15.3	14.23.3	14.64.1	15.46.2	15.66.2	16.17.5
13.8.2	13.18.3	14.39.3	15.17.2	15.49.2	15.68.1	16.24.1
13.9.3	13.31.2	14.45.2	15.22.1	15.55.1	15.69.1	16.24.2
13.10.1	13.47.3	14.49.2	15.23.4	15.57.1	15.70.1	
13.10.2	13.54.4	14.50.2	15.35.2	15.60.4	15.74.3	
13.11.1	14.7.6	14.51.1	15.44.2	15.61.2	16.7.1	
13.15.2	14.14.4	14.62.4	15.45.3	15.64.1	16.12.1	

Livy: *Ab Urbe Condita* (Books 1-30)

1.4.4	3.38.13	6.15.1	9.14.5	21.63.1	26.10.5	28.9.2
1.4.5	3.40.5	6.15.2	9.16.17	22.1.19	26.14.6	28.9.7
1.9.7	3.41.3	6.15.6	9.16.17	22.1.20	26.14.7	28.10.16
1.14.7	3.42.6	6.16.1	9.18.3	22.3.10	26.14.8	28.11.8
1.26.1	3.43.3	6.16.1	9.23.14	22.9.11	26.15.6	28.14.14
1.26.12	3.44.7	6.22.8	9.29.4	22.11.7	26.15.7	28.19.4
1.27.8	3.45.8	6.26.1	9.32.4	22.12.1	26.15.7	28.19.16
1.27.8	3.48.6	6.28.4	9.32.5	22.18.8	26.15.9	28.25.10
1.27.9	3.49.2	7.3.4	9.34.24	22.18.9	26.16.2	28.33.1
1.28.1	3.49.2	7.6.12	9.34.26	22.24.12	26.16.3	28.33.3
1.28.2	3.49.5	7.11.5	9.36.9	22.30.4	26.19.12	28.33.3

1.28.5	3.49.6	7.14.5	9.36.14	22.36.6	26.21.4	28.33.11
1.32.2	3.57.10	7.14.8	9.37.5	22.42.8	26.21.13	29.1.14
1.40.6	3.64.9	7.23.3	9.37.10	22.49.3	26.27.15	29.2.8
1.44.1	3.71.4	7.23.3	9.42.10	22.53.12	26.28.9	29.9.2
1.47.8	4.1.5	7.23.4	9.43.13	22.57.4	26.28.13	29.9.4
2.8.8	4.9.13	7.25.5	9.43.21	22.57.9	26.30.12	29.9.10
2.11.5	4.12.4	7.26.7	9.45.8	22.57.10	26.35.2	29.13.8
2.11.7	4.14.4	7.27.1	9.46.9	22.58.9	26.41.1	29.14.10
2.20.5	4.15.1	7.28.5	10.5.1	23.6.7	26.41.1	29.15.9
2.20.9	4.16.1	7.32.2	10.13.8	23.14.3	26.43.1	29.15.11
2.27.5	4.22.1	7.33.11	10.14.10	23.23.7	26.44.6	29.15.14
2.27.12	4.26.12	7.36.3	10.14.14	23.30.13	26.48.2	29.19.3
2.28.9	4.26.12	7.36.11	10.14.17	23.31.5	26.49.1	29.20.5
2.29.2	4.27.9	7.37.13	10.16.1	23.31.5	26.49.16	29.20.5
2.30.13	4.27.12	7.37.13	10.19.12	23.32.4	26.50.12	29.21.3
2.32.1	4.31.3	8.3.4	10.21.3	23.38.4	27.3.5	29.21.5
2.35.2	4.32.9	8.6.7	10.21.6	23.38.7	27.3.7	29.21.10
2.41.8	4.33.3	8.6.16	10.28.14	23.38.9	27.5.17	29.22.1
2.45.8	4.33.7	8.7.14	10.29.5	23.43.8	27.7.4	29.22.10
2.55.1	4.34.5	8.7.20	10.29.9	23.48.2	27.8.13	29.24.3
2.55.5	4.46.9	8.10.2	10.29.12	23.48.3	27.10.10	29.24.8
2.55.10	4.47.2	8.11.15	10.29.13	24.9.1	27.12.6	29.25.13
2.56.10	4.48.7	8.12.12	10.33.1	24.10.3	27.13.9	29.27.9
2.56.11	4.49.9	8.13.1	10.33.9	24.11.7	27.13.9	29.34.8
2.59.6	4.50.4	8.14.5	10.34.7	24.12.6	27.13.13	29.37.9
2.64.10	4.53.10	8..15.5	10.34.9	24.12.6	27.15.17	29.37.10
2.64.10	4.56.8	8.15.8	10.34.11	24.14.7	27.16.8	30.2.4
3.1.7	4.57.9	8.16.5	10.35.5	24.15.6	27.18.15	30.2.7
3.7.7	5.13.5	8.16.11	10.35.5	24.16.19	27.18.15	30.5.1

3.10.9	5.21.1	8.18.9	10.36.5	24.17.3	27.19.2	30.5.1
3.10.9	5.21.13	8.20.3	10.40.6	24.44.10	27.19.3	30.15.11
3.11.2	5.23.3	8.22.8	10.40.8	24.45.9	27.19.11	30.17.2
3.11.2	5.28.10	8.30.2	10.40.12	24.46.2	27.19.12	30.17.6
3.11.4	5.48.5	8.32.10	10.40.14	24.46.3	27.24.2	30.18.5
3.20.4	5.49.1	8.33.1	10.41.8	24.46.7	27.24.2	30.27.3
3.22.4	5.49.3	8.33.3	10.42.3	24.47.11	27.24.3	30.29.2
3.22.6	5.50.5	8.33.5	10.43.3	24.47.13	27.24.6	30.34.11
3.25.9	5.50.6	8.33.9	10.43.5	25.4.8	27.24.9	30.36.3
3.27.2	6.1.10	8.33.10	21.17.1	25.4.10	27.26.5	30.38.1
3.27.2	6.1.12	8.35.5	21.19.6	25.9.6	27.29.1	30.38.6
3.27.2	6.2.8	8.36.10	21.26.2	25.13.11	27.29.5	30.40.3
3.27.4	6.2.10	8.38.7	21.47.2	25.16.17	27.36.10	30.41.9
3.28.1	6.3.5	8.38.7	21.49.6	25.23.15	27.40.14	
3.28.2	6.3.7	9.3.11	21.49.7	25.23.16	27.41.9	
3.28.6	6.8.3	9.3.13	21.51.	25.25.2	27.42.8	
3.28.10	6.9.9	9.4.5	21.53.7	25.30.	27.42.12	
3.29.3	6.10.5	9.5.12	21.57.7	25.41.1	27.43.5	
3.30.3	6.11.3	9.5.13	21.62.6	26.1.12	27.51.8	
3.38.4	6.12.7	9.13.1	21.62.10	26.10.4	27.51.11	

Appendix B. Verbs by Author

	Ammianus	Caesar	Livy	Sallust	Suetonius	Tacitus	Total
iubeo	52	44	305	8	18	53	480
impero	4	7	26	1	5	1	44
edico	2	0	31	0	0	0	33
prohibeo	1	3	1		7	17	29
moneo	3	0	7	0	3	8	21
veto	1	0	5	0	6	0	12
mitto	0	6	4	0	1	1	12
postulo	1	2	3	0	0	4	10
mando	7	0	0	0	1	2	10
praecipio	5	0	0	0	3	0	8
peto	0	0	0	0	1	6	7
decerno	2	0	4	0	0	1	7
admoneo	0	1	0	0	2	2	5
hortor	1	1	0	2	1	0	5
nuntio	0	0	3	0	1	1	5
consulto	0	0	2	0	1	1	4
dico	0	0	1	0	3	0	4
posco	1	0	2	0	0	1	4
suadeo	1	0	0	0	1	1	3
deposco	0	1	0	0	2	0	3
cogo	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
voco	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
refero	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
evoco	0	2	0	0	1	0	3
compello	1	0	0	0	1	0	2
consulo	1	0	0	0	0	1	2
animadverto	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
exigo	0	0	0	0	2	0	2

accio	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
suborno	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
oro	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
tracto	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
intercedo	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
ordino	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
cohortor	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
adigo	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
ago	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
distribuo	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
perrogo	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
assigno	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
concesso	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
exoro	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
libero	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
precor	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
censeo	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
quaeso	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
denuntio	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
convoco	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
induco	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
recuso	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
demando	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
permitto	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
sancio	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
renuo	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
adversor	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
coerceo	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
noun	2	0	2	0	7	5	16

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