Empire of virtue? normative language and the legitimation of power in Roman North Africa

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INTRODUCTION

From Augustus to Augustulus, the Roman Empire was characterized by a remarkable longevity. For several centuries, Rome ruled over an extensive and – for a considerable part of its existence – more or less stable empire. The question of how Rome managed to not just keep the inhabitants of its territories in check, but compliant to Roman rule, has been one of the integral questions driving the Romanization debate which took up so much scholarly attention in the twentieth century. The pendulum of the Romanization debate has swung back and forth between embrace and opposition, between acquiescing provincials and colonized subjects that offered resistance. The debate on the usefulness of Romanization, as a term and a concept, has reached a dead end. Opinions differ whether there is a way forward for the concept, and if so how.[1] Despite the impasse and the fatigue, even otherwise antagonistic historiographical movements agree that to some extent Rome employed a web of ideological persuasion to rule its empire. This could take the form of certain aspects of material culture that we now consider typical of imperial society: the monuments, dwellings and everyday items that make up the archaeological landscape. But it also took on a more intangible form through changes in the social, economic, political and religious organization of imperial society, such as the distinct political practices, including civic magistracies and the imperial cult, which served to bring provincial communities into the fold. Naturally, the material and the mental spheres in which Roman imperialism was active were deeply intertwined, for example in the epigraphic texts that graced monuments and public spaces, commemorating civic magistrates, priests and wealthy benefactors in a language and with phrasing derived from Roman examples.

Behind the transformation of conquered territories into (more or less) peaceful provinces, looms an even more difficult question: why did provincials accept Roman rule? Part of the answer undoubtedly lies with the military force the Roman state could yield to further its goals. As Mattingly notes: "the facade of civil government was underpinned by violence, both real and latent".[2] The Roman state could rely on its soldiers and administrators to punish disobedience and quell rebellion, using a variety of 'hard' and 'soft' approaches to pacify territories.[3] That various provincial rebellions and uprisings did occur across the empire is historical fact – from the Batavian Revolt in the west to the Jewish Wars in the east. Although some of these booked considerable short-term successes, revolts usually ended with Roman forces exacting brutal retribution. Coercion, in others words, was an integral part of imperial authority. The *potential* threat of violence was undoubtedly a motivating factor for provincial behaviour and Roman administrators had a keen eye for possible sources of unrest.[4] Yet despite the importance of violence, the empire was incapable of policing its subjects in the manner of a modern totalitarian state. Heavily populated provinces such as North Africa and Spain were guarded by a single legion, with Roman military forces being largely concentrated along

[1] Mattingly 2011: 38–41; Woolf 2014; Revell 2009: 5–10.
[2] Mattingly 2011: 4. See also Morley 2010: 41–48.
[3] Gambash 2015: 20–61.
[4] See for example the well-known exchange by Pliny and Trajan on the founding of an association of firemen, *Letters* 10.33-34. On policing and keeping order in the provinces in general, see Fuhrmann 2011: 147–238.

the frontiers in the north and east. If the Roman state rested solely on coercion, we would expect to see breakaway states as soon as the coercive capacity of the Roman state was sufficiently diminished, for example in times of crisis or civil war. The fact that this happened only once, with imperial authority at its absolute nadir in the mid-third century, suggests that Rome's provincial subjects were usually motivated by more than just the fear of violence. Placing too much emphasis on the coercive capabilities of the Roman state furthermore uncritically accepts the Roman state's self-representation as an unconquered and unconquerable military superpower.

The reality on the ground was that Roman administrators depended on military force but, to some extent at least, also on the collaboration of provincials. The situation is neatly illustrated by the frustrated letters of a late third-century *strategos* from Panopolis, who complained to his superiors about the crippling lack of cooperation from the local city council.[5] The repeated complaints of the *strategos* and the implication that the city council of Panopolis evidently did not feel overly worried about refusing his demands is telling of the limited influence of lower-ranking Roman administrators. Local assistance, particularly by the elites that played a dominant role in their respective communities, was a necessity. As an otherwise critical account of Roman imperialism acknowledges: "Roman government would have been entirely impossible without such local assistance."[6] As the Panopolis case highlights, military threats are not a sufficient explanation of Roman imperial rule. The Roman imperial state was to some extent considered legitimate by its subjects. Provincials accepted their place in the imperial power structure to such a degree that they usually paid their taxes and obeyed requests without the necessity of direct threats of violence. But some provincials – and by no means only the 'local elites' – went further than that, voluntarily erecting statues to the emperor, dedicating temples to his well-being, decorating everyday items with images of Victoria Augusta or participating in rituals of the imperial cult. This behaviour makes little sense if we hold on to the idea that the empire ran solely on coercion and violence. There was no reasonable expectation that the emperor would ever see the multitude of statues and temples dedicated to him across the empire, nor did the Roman state ever demand such honours from its subjects. In the day-to-day functioning of the empire, the Roman state was perceived by some provincials at least to make legitimate claims to the money, time, energy and occasionally even adulation of its subjects.

For imperial rule to be considered legitimate does not imply that it met with approval – that much is evinced by the rebellions and uprisings mentioned above. But if not full approval, what does legitimacy entail? Here we tread on well-worn though complex ground. Most common definitions of legitimacy are influenced in some way or other by Weber's *Legitimitätsglaube*. For Weber, belief is the decisive factor in the legitimation of power. These beliefs are dependent on their cultural context, but can generally be categorized into a number of 'archetypes': traditional, charismatic and rational-legal *Herrschaft*.[7] Each one of these types of dominion entails a different type of belief and a different role for belief in strategies of legitimation. Traditional authority derives its legitimacy from the strength of custom and tradition, thus binding would-be rulers in a society based on traditional authority to follow existing power structure and safeguard the status quo. Authority of the rational-legal type on the other hand depends on rules that are perceived by subjects as

[5] See P.Panop.Beatty 1.170–179, 1.230-240, 1.264-271; Adams 2010.

[6] Morley 2010: 48.

[7] Weber 1976: 124ff.

'rational', as well as state actors that display a level of professional competence. Most interesting to Weber – and much subsequent scholarship since – is the third form of legitimate authority: charismatic authority. This form of authority is made possible by a special personal gift of a leader-figure (*"als außeralltäglich (…) geltende Qualität einer Persönlichkeit"*) which not only attracts followers but also forms the basis for the charismatic leader's authority.[8]

A point of particular interest is Weber's assertion that charismatic leadership is based on some form of consent. Of course, a certain measure of consent is present in all three forms of archetypical authority by virtue of Weber's definition of legitimacy as a form of belief. Belief after all implies a relationship between those in power and those ruled over which is not set in stone but can, potentially, break down. Even the staunchest traditionalist or rational-legalistic regime depends on some form of acquiescence through uncompelled belief in its legitimacy. Yet the aspect of consent is far more explicitly present in the case of charismatic authority. By its very nature, the charisma on which the legitimacy of charismatic leaders depends cannot be claimed or appropriated. It has to be recognized by followers and subjects, and this recognition in turn is based on the leader's display of his or her unique *Gnadengabe*.[9] Without recognition, charismatic authority quickly crumbles. Adding to the instability of charismatic regimes is that Weber envisioned them as based on personal bonds of loyalty, a lack of administrative or bureaucratic rules and a redistribution of resources on the basis of donations, war gains and other temporary forms of income. Charismatic leadership offers little in the way of long-term, multi-generational prospects. Because of this, charismatic leadership will naturally seek to transform itself into a more stable, rule-bound system by the 'routinization' (*Veralltäglichung*) of charisma.[10] The consent of subjects and followers retains its important position but is no longer based on the unique qualities of a singular individual, but rather on institutionalized expressions of charisma. Weber himself remarked on the transformative role of the charismatic leadership of Augustus, even though he did not explicitly typify the empire as a form of charismatic *Herrschaft*.[11]

As Weber himself notes, the traditional-legal-charismatic divide is a strictly theoretical one, and does not reflect the actual functioning of different historical states.[12] Rather they are tools to define structures of power and critically observe strategies of legitimation. The Roman Empire can easily be said to share elements of all three forms of power legitimation. Of particular interest here, however, is the figure of the emperor, who comes closest to Weber's conceptualization of charismatic *Herrschaft.* The fit is by no means perfect. For Weber, the element that separates charismatic leaders from traditionalist or legalistic ones is the strong emotional relationship with their subordinates, without formal hierarchy or command structure: "*Es gibt keine "Anstellung" oder "Absetzung", keine "Laufbahn" und kein "Aufrücken"".*[13] This is a description more suitable to a warlord and his warband or a prophet and his followers than the leader of an empire stretching across continents. Yet there is some overlap to be found here with Rome. Although the emperor hardly had a personal bond with all members of his administration – let alone all of his subjects –

[8] Weber 1976: 140.
[9] Weber 1976: 140-142.
[10] Weber 1976: 142-148.
[11] Cited and discussed in Ando 2000: 29–33.
[12] Weber 1976: 124 n.2.
[13] Weber 1976: 141.

our sources nevertheless betray a keen interest in imperial character and behaviour as a measure of legitimate rule. As the attention in ancient sources for imperial behaviour attests – from the theatre to the Senate floor to the imperial bedroom – the emperor's personal actions and behaviour mattered to his contemporaries and subjects. And although the empire had ranks and hierarchies, the emperor's authority could lift up or demote individuals on the basis of sometimes arbitrary judgement.[14]

As noted above, charismatic leadership depends on consent. Although a charismatic leader might claim to be full of *pietas* or *virtus*, such a claim has to both be displayed and recognized as truthful by the followers and subjects of said leader. Here Weber's argument on consent intersects with my points in the beginning of this chapter on the practicalities of Roman rule. Although the imperial state had a powerful arsenal at its disposal to coerce provincial subjects into compliance, ubiquitous use of military force was impractical and costly. At the same time, the transition of power from Republic to empire institutionalized a type of *Herrschaft* with strong charismatic elements that demanded some form of consent, if not by provincial subjects than at least by influential factions such as the army or the Senate. This is not to imply that emperors – and by extension, their governors, commanders and courtiers – ever envisioned themselves as jostling for the approval of target audiences in the sense of modern campaign strategists. Rather, Roman emperors since Augustus made claims to the legitimacy of their rule on the basis of their charismatic qualities - in the Weberian sense of qualities that went well beyond the *alltäglich*. These qualities demanded some form of recognition and agreement to be considered true. Failing to gain lasting consent from at least some powerful groups in imperial society could have dire consequences for imperial authority, as the assassinations of Nero, Caligula, Domitian and others suggest. Of course, what bodies constituted 'powerful groups' in imperial society shifted over time. Provincial elites never formed as direct a threat to the emperor as the army and its generals or the Senate. Rather than focussing on whether or not provincial subjects were ever an intended audience for imperial claims to legitimacy, we can simply note that the same claims to legitimacy directed towards the army or the Senate eventually also made their way to the provinces through coinage, oratory, administrative documents, literature, sculptural trends and other media – a point that we shall delve into deeper in the next chapter.

Weber's ideas on charisma and legitimation are useful analytical tools, but they can be further refined. For all its interplay between leader and followers, Weber's treatment of charismatic rulership is still relatively static and one-dimensional. Belief in the legitimacy of charismatic leadership is something of a binary choice: subjects and followers recognize the legitimacy of the charismatic leadership of a given leader, or they do not. Yet Weber does not describe how leaders may accrue (charismatic) legitimacy, or how it erodes over time. The beliefs that underpin legitimate rule shift and change, something which Weber's typology has difficulty mapping. This begs the question how subjects and followers give form to their relationship with a charismatic *Herrschaft* in a landscape of changing beliefs and values.

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[14] On the emperor's *droit subjectif*, see Veyne 1976: 553.

0.1 – Towards a new definition of legitimacy

Weber's concept of legitimacy has come under criticism by political philosophers and social scientists alike. Among a wide range of critiques and re-evaluations, the work of the Beetham is of particular interest to this research. Beetham has attempted to lay a stronger theoretical foundation for the concept of legitimacy, arguing against the Weberian notion of legitimacy as being both too static and lacking in explanatory power.[15] Legitimacy may crumble even when the beliefs about what constitutes legitimate authority remain the same. To take one modern example: the widespread distrust of established political parties and the rise of populism does not necessarily signal a change in beliefs about the legitimacy of representative democracy. In fact, it is precisely because parts of the electorate perceive a gap between reality on the one hand and their ideals of legitimacy on the other that established parties have come in for intense criticism. Clearly then, there is more to legitimacy than only belief. Beetham argues for a definition of legitimacy as a continuously morphing relationship between powerholders and subordinates, which are expressed on three distinct levels: rules, normative beliefs and actions.[16] Each element of this 'trinity of legitimation' exists in a different dimension from the others, taking different forms and working on different levels of a given power relationship. The result is a more nuanced and complex notion of legitimation than Weber's strict focus on belief. Firstly, legitimate power must uphold the rules of power current in a society, whether codified in law or based on time-held informal agreements. In the Roman context, those rules of power could be expressed in a very broad way: the emperor (and more generally still, 'Rome') was supposed to protect the empire from hostile incursion and provide a measure of internal stability and peace. These were the kind of assumptions about Roman rule that we find in for example Aristides' *On Rome*. But beyond such 'agreements' between emperor and provincial elites, the empire could also count on its laws to provide a more specific, defined set of rules to govern power relationships. When these were broken, for example by a negligent governor or a corrupt tax collector, provincials could theoretically take recourse to judicial courts or, in exceptional cases, the emperor. This is not to paint an overly rosy image of the Roman judicial system: access to justice was far from universal and with the odds stacked heavily in favour of the wealthy and the well-connected. Yet in general, the system was believed to work well-enough for emperors to continue to create laws and for provincial communities to continue to resort to courts and petitions to claim justice.

Rules alone are not enough to constitute legitimate power. Normative beliefs form essential ingredients for legitimacy, for they justify sources of authority. Naturally, society is never monolithic. 'Proper authority' is always open to interpretation and furthermore prone to change – even if normative beliefs usually act on a deep, systemic level. But in a functioning system of power, there will usually be some level of agreement between the majority of powerholders and subordinates on what constitutes a legitimate form of power. This agreement is important since – barring systems of pure exploitation such as slavery – normative beliefs explain and justify exclusion and appropriation and thus induce cooperation. In Beetham's words: "The simple answer is that power relations involve negative features – of exclusion, restriction, compulsion, etc. – which stand in need of justification if the powerful are to enjoy moral authority as opposed to merely de facto power, or validity under a given system of law."[17]

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[15] Beetham 2013: 8–12, 23–24.

[16] Beetham 2013: 15–16.

[17] Beetham 2013: 57.

In the Roman context, the emperor's authority was not based on a singular claim to authority but rather a variety of interlocking claims. The emperor could point to his illustrious ancestry – real or fictitious – or a direct hereditary claim to the throne; he courted success on the battlefield, thereby protecting and expanding the empire; he dutifully fulfilled prestigious civic offices that ensured the security of the state; he enjoyed the favour of the gods which in turned safeguarded the prosperity of the empire; last but not least, the emperor was believed to possess a virtuous character which was not only a source of prestige in its own right but helped him to fulfil his duties as a ruler. Underlying these various claims are concerns for prestige and protection: the emperor was supposed to live up to ideals of aristocratic character, while also ensuring the protection and prosperity of his subjects. The crucial aspect for Beetham is that these normative beliefs are shared by subordinates. Imperial literature certainly echoes many of these claims, either in the praise of 'good' emperors or inverted as a form of chastisement for 'bad' emperors, who are portrayed as the negative image of legitimate authority. Imperial claims to legitimate authority were also repeated in honorific dedications set up by provincial elites across the empire. Though such public texts tell us little about the private opinions of their dedicators, the repetition of imperial claims to authority by influential members of provincial communities in and of itself conferred legitimacy.

This brings us to the final aspect of Beetham's theory: actions. Subordinates need to show some form of consent to the power relationship with a given powerholder for it to be considered legitimate, specifically through actions visible to others. This should not be confused with a modern, democratic definition of consent. Consent here is shaped both by cultural context and by existing power relationships.[18] Despite the sometimes arbitrary despotic power of the emperor, consent and the related concept of consensus were a political necessity.[19] Acclamations and other shows of vocal support in public settings were an integral part of imperial politics, not only for the emperor but also for governors and other administrators. It was the Senate that, officially at least, bestowed honours upon the emperor and built monuments in his name in Rome.[20] And throughout the provinces statues, monuments and cults were dedicated to the emperor, often naming or incorporating explicit elements of the normative beliefs mentioned above. Weber of course also pointed to the importance of consent, particularly in his charismatic *Herrschaft*. Yet Weberian consent is to be found in the inwards beliefs of subordinates. For Beetham on the other hand, consent lies in outward action expressed through the public deeds of a subordinate rather than his or her inward beliefs. Subordinates may of course hold their own opinions on the normative beliefs underpinning their political system, but these opinions only matter for the study of legitimacy when expressed in public actions. This is a more fruitful approach than Weber's, since it frees us of the need to read historical minds. What a Roman provincial *really* thought of his emperor is to some extent inconsequential: a statue placed on the forum in the emperor's honour contributed to the legitimacy of the empire, regardless of the inward beliefs of the dedicator.

0.2 – Imperial ideology and propaganda

Beetham's analysis of legitimacy is helpful in that it presents legitimacy as a diachronic entity that is to be situated in the shifting relations between powerholders and subordinates, rather than the

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[18] Beetham 2013: 90–97.

[19] For the creation on the imperial ideal of rule by consent and consensus, see Lobur 2008.

[20] De Jong 2006: 92; Mayer 2010.

more static Weberian notion of belief in legitimacy. Yet it is precisely the latter interpretation that has been common in the interpretation of 'imperial ideology'. Imperial ideology is, broadly speaking, understood by scholars as the collective of ideas, rituals and images employed by the imperial court to foster loyalty to individual emperors and imperial rule, as expressed by imperial coinage, sculpture, pageants, panegyrics and more. The persuasive powers of the media originating close to the imperial court have long been recognized (famously so in Syme's *The Roman Revolution*). But this aspect of imperial power was brought into sharper relief by the works of Niels Hannestad (*Roman Art and Imperial Policy*) and Paul Zanker (*Augustus und die Macht der Bilder*), both of whom subjected the idea of 'imperial propaganda' to a more sustained examination and both of whom placed particular emphasis on the visual arts. Well-received and influential as both works have been, the idea of persuasive imperial propaganda has not been greeted with the universal agreement.[21] In the social sciences, the hypodermic needle theory of propaganda – suggesting that individuals can simply be 'injected' with propagandistic ideas which take an immediate effect – has long since been rejected.[22] The scepticism surrounding the concept of imperial propaganda specifically can be summed up in two broad strands of criticism: the technological and the cultural-political. On the one hand, sceptics argue that the empire never possessed the technological means necessary to produce and spread propagandistic messages. Unlike the Nazi or Soviet regime, the Roman imperial court did not have a large state apparatus or mass media at its beck and call. The limited control over information and media that the imperial court did have, was furthermore constrained by turgid travel times and dependent on the cooperation of state officials and provincial subjects 'on the ground'. The second line of critique questions the ability of the Roman state to envision something akin to a modern propaganda campaign. Beyond the reactive nature of the imperial administration – intervening only when pressed by external factors, rather than proactively trying to steer Roman society towards the fulfilment of a given goal or policy – the empire lacked the political ideologies that necessitated the employment of persuasive or even deceptive messaging. Some have even wondered whether the Roman emperor ever felt a need to legitimise his rule and whether the various images and objects we associate with imperial rule were intended to convey any sort of persuasive message.[23]

Although the idea of imperial propaganda has beaten something of a retreat, that does not mean that we should abandon the notion that the Roman state projected a positive, even persuasive, self-image towards its subjects. Following Beetham's theoretical model, powerholders almost universally rely on normative beliefs to justify their superiority and by extension states usually rely on some form of cooperation between subordinates and powerholders to function effectively.[24] Normative beliefs can be expressed in more or less coherent ideologies, which are distinctly different from propaganda. Ideologies can of course make use of propaganda to fulfil their goals, while propaganda is unthinkable without some form of ideology behind it. Yet there is a subtle though important distinction between the two. Propaganda is considered *intentionally* manipulative, to the point of being deceitful. It is also usually envisioned as part of a top-down, orchestrated campaign to persuade or manipulate a population. Ideological expressions on the

[21] Wallace-Hadrill 1986; Veyne 1990; Galinsky 1996: 20–41; Cumberland-Jacobsen 1999; Weber and Zimmermann 2003: 12–40; Eich 2003; Seelentag 2004: 18–21.
[22] McCombs 2014: 88.
[23] Veyne 1990; Veyne 2002.
[24] Beetham 2013: 28–31.

other hand may be skewed but need not be intentionally manipulative or deceitful, nor are they always part of a larger, concerted effort by powerholders to persuade large swaths of citizens. The dividing lines between ideological expressions and propaganda become decidedly more blurry when the ideology in question is closely tied to the ruling power.[25] Some have therefore argued for a more nuanced evaluation of imperial propaganda, noting that critics have too often employed a simplistic, rigid and state-focussed understanding of the nature of propaganda, both in the modern and the ancient world.[26]

The last two decades have seen a blossoming of interest in ancient expressions of imperial ideology. One of the most expansive and persuasive treatments of the topic is Clifford Ando's *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire*. For Ando, the combined forces of imperial images, textual resources, provincial administration and communicative acts between government and public created a charismatic tradition which allowed successive emperors to acquire, display and transfer the charisma on which the legitimacy of their rule depended.[27] Text and image work in tandem to spread imperial values and to create a culture of loyalty to the emperor. Ando cites the law books, inscribed decrees, copies of senatorial acts, written petitions, urban archives and monumental calendars as key tools which not only allowed the Roman administration to govern effectively but, more importantly, reshaped provincial ideas about time, place and society.[28] Communicative acts such as acclamations, shows of imperial munificence or the public punishment of corrupt governors helped cement the ideological image of the emperor as an omnipresent and neutral arbiter who laboured for the good of the empire with his subjects' consent. The flip side of the coin, Ando argues, is the destruction of old, pre-imperial identities. Such identities – which might have included cooperation between various socio-economic groups or between cities in unified resistance to Rome – were broken down while competition for the attention of the emperor and his administration were encouraged. Around the figure of the emperor a new society congealed, functioning according to Rome's political and normative script.[29]

Where Ando takes a fairly broad interpretation of ideology, Carlos Noreña more explicitly focuses on the persuasive nature of imperial images. In *Imperial Ideals in the Roman West: Representation, Circulation, Power* Noreña argues for an expansive ideological system of ideas and values harnessed to legitimise Roman rule, again centring around the person of the emperor. For Noreña, local elites were the primary supporters and adopters of imperial ideology, using it as a tool to strengthen their own positions within provincial communities, thereby entrenching Roman imperial hegemony.[30] Noreña constructs his arguments on the basis of a large database of imperial coinage, but takes into account a much wider program including sculpture, inscriptions and other forms of ancient media.[31] Using this visual and textual program, (personified) imperial virtues and benefits could be expressed to a wide provincial audience.[32] Noreña argues that imperial virtues played a crucial role in binding local elites to imperial authority by giving them a more or less circumscribed set of values to repeat

[25] On the blurriness of propaganda and ideological expressions: Lobur 2008: 6–7.
[26] Enenkel and Pfeijffer 2005: 1–9; Noreña 2011a: 17–18.
[27] Ando here subscribes to Weber's interpretation of charisma, Ando 2000: 27.
[28] Ando 2000: 73–130.
[29] An idea developed more explicitly in a later article, see Ando 2013.
[30] Noreña 2011a: 8.
[31] Noreña 2011a: 199.
[32] Noreña 2011a: 102–105.

and adopt to meet the demands of a new political status quo.[33] By taking part in the semiotics of imperial virtues and ideals, provincial elites gave themselves a place within the Roman landscape of power by blurring the lines between divine, imperial and local authority, using both honorific language and imagery.[34]

Ando and Noreña are but two prominent examples in a much longer list of scholars studying imperial ideology from a wide variety of specializations. Hekster has written repeatedly about the importance of various legitimising tools for imperial power, from the emperor-as-military-commander to imperial ancestors[35]; Manders, Claes and Kemmers have each done extensive work on the importance of imperial coin motifs[36]; Seelentag has compared the claims of Trajanic media to reality[37]; De Jong has called attention to the importance of imperial titulature in papyri[38]; Rowan has explored Severan ideology from a numismatic perspective[39]; Rees focussed on the world of late antique panegyrics[40]; Lobur analysed the value of *concordia* for Augustan ideology through literature[41]; Fishwick carried out a grand survey of the imperial cult in three multi-part volumes; several edited volumes have appeared delving deeper into aspects of imperial ideology while the individual papers on the subjects are too numerous to mention.[42] As these diverse examples show, the study of imperial ideology can hardly be called a 'field'. Given the omnipresence of the figure of the emperor in Rome art and textual sources and the nebulous nature of imperial ideology itself, imperial ideology may entail anything from subtle word play in the work of Augustan court poets to epigraphic evidence for the rites of the imperial cult in third-century Spain.

Perhaps given the vast range of possible sources and approaches, there is little in the way of an overarching consensus on the workings of imperial ideology – and some would argue that such a consensus would be unhelpful. Where some scholars place heavy emphasis on the role of the imperial court as creator and sender of messages[43], others suggest that we should envision imperial (self-)representation rather as an exchange between emperors and various groups in imperial society, such as the Senate, the army or the provincial elites.[44] Likewise, while some scholars almost exclusively focus on the media output of the imperial court or those closely tied to it, others place their work in the context of provincial society and the broader impact of Roman imperialism. This fragmented approach is understandable given that 'imperial ideology' is a modern label, and the concepts and symbols modern scholars gather under this label, persuasive though they might have been to an ancient audience, never formed a unified theory of imperial legitimacy. It is also understandable given the nature of a source material. Whereas the numismatist focusing on the

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[33] Noreña stresses the various layers of communication between imperial court and provincials and sees a decisive role for governors and other bureaucrats in spreading ideas from the capital to various regions of the empire, Noreña 2011a: 240; see also Noreña 2011a: 251–266.

[34] Noreña 2011a: 273–275.

[35] Hekster 2007; Hekster 2011; Hekster et al. 2014; Hekster 2015.

[36] Manders 2007; Manders 2012; Claes 2015; Kemmers 2006.

[37] Seelentag 2004.

[38] De Jong 2003; De Jong 2006; De Jong 2007.

[39] Rowan 2011; Rowan 2012.

[40] Rees 2002; Rees 2012.

[41] Lobur 2008.

[42] *Edited vollumes*: Weber and Zimmermann 2003; Blois et al 2003; Enenkel and Pfeijffer 2005.

[43] Noreña 2011a; Manders 2012.

[44] For the latter, see for example Seelentag 2004: 18–21; Mayer 2010; Rowan 2012: 84–107; Hekster et al. 2014.

output of the imperial mint will invariably lay heavy emphasis on the imperial representation from the perspective of the centre of power, the archaeologist in Asia Minor will logically focus on the adaptation of imperial models to local monuments.[45]

Considering Beetham's model of legitimacy, however, several lines of criticism open up. In focussing on either court culture or the provincial reception on their own, we lose sight of the diachronic relationship between powerholder and subordinate that formed the basis of legitimate power. Both Ando and Noreña explicitly incorporate provincials in their accounts of imperial ideology but do so from a macro approach, placing a large share of the formative agency behind imperial ideology in the hands of the Roman state. For both scholars, provincials interacted with imperial ideology mainly through a process of reception: adopting images, symbols and customs rather than being part of an ideological exchange between emperors and subjects. Noreña's suggestion that scholars have been too quick to dismiss the notion of imperial propaganda is telling in this regard.[46] Although the macro approach is valuable and informative in studying the broader structures and systems of empire and imperial ideology, this type of analysis tells us little about local and regional contexts. A case in point is Noreña's catalogue of inscriptions which is used to gauge provincial reactions to key ideological concepts. Though informative, Noreña only selects those texts that fit his argument for effective ideological communication, leaving out the many local variations, quirks or absences that would have considerably nuanced his narrative.[47]

I would argue that it is precisely these local variations and 'mistakes' that shine a valuable light on provincial responses to imperial ideology. Outside of Egypt – where papyri are abundant – epigraphic material is one of the few remaining media which offer any detailed information on provincial attitudes towards both Roman and local rule. Dedications to emperors, imperial officials and local powerholders give expression to the normative beliefs that form the basis of legitimate authority. Although taking an empire-wide approach might seem like taking full advantage of the occasionally fragmentary epigraphic material, I would argue that the opposite is in fact true. By focussing on broad patterns in Roman epigraphy, we lose sight of the local deviations that do not easily fit in with empire-wide developments. And it is exactly the dedication that does *not* include a common honorific phrase, that praises a virtue not usually associated with a given emperor or that utilizes recherché wording, that is as valuable to the study of imperial ideology as a dedication that neatly follows expectations. This current research therefore focuses on a smaller area than the empire-wide approach of for example Noreña. Although I am far from the first to study the appearance and changes of honorifics in epigraphy[48] the focus on local epigraphic variations within the context of imperial rule and legitimacy offers a fresh perspective on the provincial experience of empire.

0.3 – Contextualising imperial power

A key element of my research revolves around the question of how we should envision the relationship between powerholders and their subjects. To what extent can powerholders set the rules of power, define normative beliefs on legitimacy and enforce consent? Ando, Noreña and

[45] On the latter, see for example the papers by Smith on the Sebasteum of Aphrodisias Smith 1987; Smith 1988.
[46] Noreña 2011a: 17–18, though nuanced on p.300.
[47] Noreña 2011a: 245–297.
[48] See for example Neri 1981; Chastagnol 1988; Salomies 1994; Salomies 2000.

others adopt a centrist perspective where the emperor and his court have a dominant influence. But there are other ways to envision the formation of legitimacy. Scholars have started to explore the space of exchange between the imperial court and a large number of stakeholders – "*Herrscherdarstellung*" in the words of Seelentag.[49] Extending the formative forces of imperial ideology beyond the court alone allows us to see provincial representations of the emperor as more than variations on a fixed theme. Dedicators eager to proclaim their loyalty to the emperor and the imperial family in communities throughout the empire may have turned to 'official' imperial media, such as imperial coinage, to find the correct phrases and images. But they are just as likely to have considered dedications by their contemporaries, conferred with their fellow-decurions or even turned to a governor or other official for advice. It is on the level of the civic community that provincials can be said to have shaped imperial ideology, by reinforcing particular ideological beliefs or adopting particular epigraphic customs. By taking the local civic context into account we gain a more nuanced understanding of the expressions of consent which helped shape ancient ideals of legitimate power.

The flip side of a very strong focus on local contextualisation of imperial power is that we again risk losing sight of the dynamic between Rome and the provinces. Although provincials had some freedom and flexibility in how imperial power could be represented, the imperial court had an outsize voice in the ideological conversation. It was capable, via the state apparatus, of making its wishes known and of punishing transgressions, if only occasionally. Local contextualisation of imperial power was furthermore not conceived in a vacuum, but sprang from the everyday realities of imperial rule – from the collecting of taxes to the enforcement of imperial edicts. Although provincial experiences of imperial rule may have greatly differed, the forces of imperialism and the normative beliefs that underpinned them originated, in large part, from Rome. Only in considering the connection between the nodes of 'Rome' and 'local community' can we more fully appreciate the impact of imperialism on the provinces; not just in material culture or political institutions, but also in ideals of legitimacy and power.

Beetham's interpretation of legitimacy as an aspect of continuously evolving power relationships also opens up the study of imperial ideology, allowing us to find relevant connections and parallels with other power relationships in the empire. Hitherto I have mostly spoken of provincials as a unified group for the sake of convenience. Yet it bears little arguing that provincial communities had complex social hierarchies of their own.[50] In the western provinces at least, the top of the community was usually formed by the decurions, members of the town's socio-economic elite who through their membership of the city council also controlled most of its magistracies. Groups such as the *Augustales* and the *apparitores* claimed a position in the liminal area between elite and non-elite; the former often consisting of upwardly mobile freedman, the latter supporting magistrates in a variety of roles.[51] Beyond that, the *plebs*: the majority of the inhabitants of a given community. Although usually presented in Roman literary sources as a faceless mob, the *plebs* had its own social distinctions and hierarchies – between freeborn, freedmen and slaves, between citizens and non-

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[49] Seelentag 2004: 18–21; see also Hekster 2011.

[50] For a basic overview, see Edmondson 2010: 272–278.

[51] Edmondson 2010: 273, although Mouritsen warns against treating the *Augustales* as a 'middleclass' and points to considerable local variety, see Mouritsen 2011: 249–261. But, as noted by Mouritsen, one of the few shared features among the local variants is that the *Augustales* commonly acted as benefactors to their communities, thus suggesting wealth and economic influence above that of the common *plebs*.

citizens and between various types of professions. Naturally, such a schematic overview does not do justice to the social mobility within provincial communities. It only serves to give an impression of the various microcosms of power and hierarchy present in every community across the empire. Complicating matters further are the many ways in which the communal bubble was penetrated and influenced by outside forces. Regional forms of cooperation and interaction – such as the various 'leagues' in the Greek-speaking east, provincial assemblies or important provincial cult centres – cut across communities. Roman administrators cajoled and coerced city councils to collect taxes or meet the demands of the imperial state, despite pretensions to local autonomy. And wealthy and well-connected members of a given community could try to make the leap from civic politics to regional priesthoods, the army or the imperial administration – or alternatively, to extradite themselves from civic and fiscal responsibilities altogether.

The legitimation of imperial power has usually been studied in isolation from other forms of power in the Roman Empire, but I would argue that it is much more fruitful to study it as part of a far larger chain of interlocking and interdependent power relationships. Although the emperor on rare occasions directly intervened in local politics, the bulk of the actual governing of the empire was done by imperial administrators in cooperation with civic authorities. As the representatives of the state, governors, army commanders, procurators and other officials were tasked with overseeing the more negative aspects of the imperial power structure: Beetham's "exclusion, restriction, compulsion", to which list we may add the extraction of resources or labour in service of the imperial state. As representatives of the emperor, Roman administrators had a mandate to perform their duties without a need to legitimise their position within the Roman administrative apparatus. Or, to put it differently, we may say that governorship as such was rarely questioned. Yet the legitimacy and authority of individual governors was a different matter. A governor's authority (and standing) could be badly damaged by going over his head to the emperor or by indulging in foot-dragging in the fulfilment of obligations.[52] Together with their relatively short terms of office and lack of local expertise, this made governors to some extent dependent on cooperation with influential provincials.[53] Naturally, through their connections and the forces under their command, governors had the upper-hand in such power relationships. Yet a governor who was completely at odds with his subjects risked imperial displeasure as well as potentially damaging lawsuits.[54]

Legitimacy also mattered on the local level. Noreña notes that it was above all the elites of various provincial communities that showed a strong attachment to imperial ideology. It provided them with "a useful vehicle for class cohesion and social differentiation".[55] This conclusion certainly is part of the explanation why provincial elites set up countless dedications to their emperors without direct inducement by imperial authorities. By publicly aligning themselves with a legitimate system of power, members of the local elite also legitimised their own position within that system. For Noreña, the question whether non-elites accepted this discourse is ultimately an irrelevant one, since they were in no position to object.[56] But, as we shall see in the following chapters, the elite reception of imperial ideology was not straightforward. Not all aspects of imperial ideology received

[52] Referring to the emperor: Kokkinia 2004: 53-55.
[53] Kokkinia 2004: 55-58.
[54] Fuhrmann 2011: 177–178.
[55] Noreña 2011a: 311.
[56] Noreña 2011a: 312.

endorsement on a provincial level. Instead, provincial epigraphy betrays a more complex and nuanced reality that gave expression to local concerns and preoccupations as much as it reflected imperial claims to power.

As the representatives of their communities, local elites were held responsible by Roman authorities for keeping the peace and fulfilling the demands of the Roman state. This privileged access to the Roman authorities not only pushed out other voices further down in the communal hierarchy, but also had some more practical perks. As long as they kept their communities under control, Roman authorities were not overly concerned with local elites profiting from their privileged positions, for example by an unfair distribution of the tax burden. Yet this dominant role was a double-edged sword. As we shall see in greater detail in later chapters, there is copious evidence for the often troubled relationship between elites and their fellow-citizens over fiscal mismanagement, forced labour and taxation. Elites that did not manage to keep their communities in check could count on Roman authorities stripping their privileges and employing other sanctions as forms of punishment. Nor were city councils always the unified and harmonious civic bodies that we find in epigraphic texts, implied by stock phrases such as *decreto decurionum* or *ordo splendidissimus*. Such language hides the starker realities of elite differentiation and rivalry, with some members of the city council barely meeting the entry requirements, while others towered far above their fellow-decurions in terms of wealth, status or connections. Provincial elites were neither an omnipotent force within their own communities, nor a unified political body. Although provincial elites did not directly copy imperial forms of legitimation, they did draw from some of the same normative beliefs and consent actions to legitimise their position at the head of communities.

0.4 – Legitimacy and honour

The focus of this book shall be on the normative beliefs that underpinned these imperial roles and their appearance in consent actions. One way to fruitfully approach this topic is through the study of the honorific language used to praise or commemorate certain imperial character traits or actions. Roman ideals of legitimate power were deeply entwined with Roman ideals of honour. For ancient elite audiences, honour played a crucial role within all dimensions of Beetham's definition of legitimacy. Honour and praise not only formed the basis of interaction between the Roman state and its subjects but also between subjects themselves, as an all-embracing cultural outlook which, as Lendon has phrased it, "saw a world where all human affairs and interactions breathed with glory and disgrace".[57] The expression of honour encompassed, among others, personal behaviour, political offices, ancestry, education, and social relationships.[58] Honour was not limited to individuals. Collectives such as city councils, *curiae* or *collegia* were also considered moral agents: behaving (dis)honourably of their own accord, recognizing honourable behaviour in others and 'giving' honour to those worthy of it through statues and inscriptions, festivities, orations and the like.[59]

The praise of virtues offers a prime example of the legitimising force of honour in action. In Roman political thinking, virtues were both deeply tied to generalized roles that legitimate rulers were expected to fulfil and to the unique character of the individual acting as emperor. The emperor's

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[57] Lendon 1997: 267.
[58] Lendon 1997: 36–52.
[59] Lendon 1997: 73–90.

martial success depended on his bravery (*virtus*) as well as his far-sightedness (*providentia*); as a civic leader and judge he should display moderation (*moderatio*), clemency (*clementia*) and generosity (*liberalitas, munificentia, indulgentia*) towards his subjects; towards the gods the emperor had to act with the correct display of piety (*pietas*) or risk divine anger; his illustrious ancestry was made evident not only in all of the above virtues, but also in his noble character (*nobilitas*) and his comportment (*humanitas*). The emperor's virtues could be explicitly called attention to, for example by depicting a personified *pietas* on the reverse of an imperial coin. Or they could remain implicit, for example in depictions of the emperor at sacrifice, *capite velato*.

Imperial virtues fulfilled a legitimising role. When praising an emperor for his *virtus* or *pietas*, the individual or group expressing praise also expressed their belief that the emperor in question fulfilled (some) of his expected duties, and thus formed a legitimate leader. It is in these reflections of imperial claims to legitimacy that we find a meaningful sense of consent – not necessarily in full or enthusiastic agreement with Roman imperial rule, but in underwriting the basic presumptions or normative beliefs on which legitimate power rested. In the words of Beetham, "[i]t is in the sense of the public actions of the subordinate, expressive of consent, that we can properly talk about the 'legitimation' of power, not the propaganda or public relations campaigns, the 'legitimations' generated by the powerful themselves."[60] Whether or not a dedicator truly believed in the unique connection between Antoninus Pius and *pietas*, his or her dedication to the *pietas* of the emperor – accompanied by a personified image of that virtue – nevertheless underlined the importance of publicly recognizing and commemorating such virtues. The status of the one praising the emperor mattered, as did the context. Praise from the Senate might generally be said to have carried more weight and prestige than the praise of a provincial magistrate; although it could be argued that in the magistrate's own community, the situation may have been different. Imperial virtues did not form a fixed corpus: although some virtues received clear emphasis in imperial media, the emperor could theoretically be praised for a vast range of positive qualities. This allowed for a certain level of flexibility and even preference within a realm of otherwise highly formulaic texts. The choice of which virtues or qualities to include in a dedication was likely determined by a range of factors – the context of the dedication, the dedicators involved and previous dedications in the community. Although they may not help us in discovering deeply-rooted private opinions on imperial rule, they do offer a reflection of what was expected and acceptable within the public sphere of a given community.

Measuring the impact of ideas and ideals in the ancient world is always an undertaking fraught with potential missteps. Literary sources written from a provincial perspective are scarce, at least for the western provinces of the empire. Statues and other forms of sculpture have been found in large quantities, but are often damaged, fragmented or without archaeological context. Given the more or less fixed portraits and body types it is furthermore not always clear to what extent they convey a provincial perspective. Epigraphy, however, does offer such a perspective. In epigraphic texts virtues are present in abundance, appearing regularly in connection to the emperor, imperial administrators and local powerholders. Naturally, epigraphic evidence has its own restrictions: texts are often highly formulaic, bound by conventions and almost exclusively produced by members of the elite. And, as noted above, these texts are unlikely to be accurate reflections of the complex, contradictory and ambivalent provincial attitudes towards imperial rule. Yet there is also much to

[60] Beetham 2013: 19.

be said for these souces. Epigraphic texts were often highly visible within the community. Many epigraphic texts bearing virtues are inscribed on statue bases and were placed in prominent, high-prestige locations in the community. The high costs, prestigious honorand and relative permanence of these statues also suggest that the wording of their inscriptions was carefully selected.

Despite the prominence of virtues, it would be a mistake to focus solely on virtues as defined in the narrow sense of personal character traits of the honorand. Firstly, the Roman understanding of virtue was not limited to praiseworthy character traits but encompassed a much wider range of meaning. Of particular note is the worship of deified virtues from the period of the Middle Republic onwards, receiving cultic worship throughout Rome.[61] The founding of such cults was often the result of *vota* and connected to episodes of social tension or war.[62] Because Pietas, Honos or Mens expressed the fears and desires of the entire Roman community, appropriating such qualities became a powerful tool in political struggles between various individuals and groups, as argued by Clark.[63] Far from emphasizing the difference between the private and the communal, or between personal attributes and non-personal qualities, the political struggles around deified virtues highlight the blurry boundaries between such concepts. Those blurry boundaries were maintained, at least to some extent, in the empire. An episode from Tacitus illustrates my point. During the height of Sejanus' power and influence, the Senate erected a number of altars to the emperor and his favourite:

> *Neque senatus in eo cura, an imperii extrema dehonestarentur: pavor internus occupaverat animos, cui remedium adulatione quaerebatur. Ita quamquam diversis super rebus consulerentur, aram clementiae, aram amicitiae effigiesque circum Caesaris ac Seiani censuere, crebrisque precibus efflagitabant visendi sui copiam facerent.*
>
> "The Senate, too, had other anxieties than a question of national dishonour on the confines of the empire: an internal panic had preoccupied all minds, and the antidote was being sought in sycophancy. Thus, although their opinion was being taken on totally unrelated subjects, they voted an altar of Mercy (*Clementia*) and an altar of Friendship (*Amicitia*) with statues of the Caesar and Sejanus on either hand, and with reiterated petitions conjured the pair to vouchsafe themselves to sight."[64]

The deified virtues invoked are not directly ascribed to Tiberius or Sejanus, but rather both men are placed in an explicit relationship with Clementia and Amicita by the Senate at a point of political crisis. Although the general gist of the Senate's gesture is clear, the precise nature of the bond between Amicitia/Clementia (the goddesses), *amicitia*/*clementia* (the virtues), the statues of

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[61] This tradition might have been inspired by similar Greek cults of personified concepts through early contact with the Greek cities in Italy, but their ultimate origin remains unclear. Fears 1981: 846–848 n.76 for more extensive discussion; Clark 2007: 30 emphasizes the complex and vague origins of these cults and warns against reading them as either a purely Roman invention or as Greek imports. Among the first virtues to be worshipped was Concordia (367 B.C.), followed by Spes and Fides (264-241 B.C.), Honos (233 B.C.), Fortuna Primigenia (204 B.C.), Pietas (191 B.C.) and Felicitas (after 146 B.C.). For a full chronology and testimonia, Fears 1981: 833–835.

[62] Fears 1981: 835–837.

[63] See for example Clark 2007: *Pudicitia*: 39–49; *Concordia*: 170–174; *Libertas*: 150–153. Cognomina: Fear (1981) 877-878. And these virtues were not only the domain of the elite, see Clark 2007: 84; 197; see also 19-20.

[64] Tacitus, *Annals* 4.74. Translation: Jackson 1937.

Sejanus and Tiberius, and Sejanus and Tiberius themselves is left ambiguous. Are we to envision Sejanus and Tiberius having a particularly close bond to Amicitia and Clementia or to possess a noteworthy measure of *amicitia* and *clementia* in their relationship to each other and to the state? Although virtues as a personal characteristic and as deified concepts were differentiated, both could be exploited for their ideological potential.

A second argument against too strict a focus on personal virtues is the wider field of Roman ethical thinking. This is illustrated by the appearance of the adjective *Augustus* and the genitive *Augusti* which becomes increasingly common from the reign of Augustus onwards. As Fishwick has argued, there are subtleties at play between the two, the former marking the relationship between the virtue and the reigning emperor indirectly, the latter making the association much more explicit.[65] Both *Augustus* and *Augusti* were attached to personal virtues, for example on coinage and in dedications. But the label *Augustus*/*Augusti* was also attached to a host of positive ethical concepts, ranging from goddesses such as Victoria Augusta to favourable concepts such as harmony (*concordia*) or felicity (*felicitas*), or to positive effects of imperial rule such as peace (*pax*). Some scholars have argued for a separation of these ethical concepts and personal virtues proper.[66] From the perspective of classification this is entirely understandable. Yet my argument throughout this thesis is concerned with the legitimation of imperial power. Although *concordia* was not a personal virtue, the fact that it was commonly employed on imperial coinage legends and in provincial dedications reflects the value *concordia* held as a normative belief underpinning legitimate imperial power.

From the Roman perspective furthermore the categories of 'personal virtue' and 'ethical concept' were far from distinct. On Roman coinage both virtues and imperial blessings appear in the same, personified visual format; in cult, both are worshipped in personified form through familiar cultic means; in Roman literature, both are considered closely linked to the person of the emperor and the success of his reign; in epigraphy, both appear in honorific texts without clear delineations between the personal and the impersonal qualities of an emperor's reign. The dividing line between personal virtues and impersonal qualities could also change on the basis of context in which the virtue in question was employed. Imperial *felicitas* may be an abstract notion on some occasions – such as Severan coinage bearing the reverse legend FELICITAS SAECULI[67] – but can become a personal quality on others – such as dedications to Septimius Severus lauding him as *felicissimus princeps*. Clark's research on Republican virtues is helpful in this regard. Instead of overtly schematic divisions between virtues, deified virtues and ethical concepts, it is more fruitful to envision them as broad ethical qualities which political actors could lay claim to, ascribe to others or contest. That is not to say that there was no difference in the Roman mind between these different categories, but rather that it was a difference of gradations rather than absolutes. The imperial mint might decide to place images of the personified *pietas* on imperial coinage; the emperor might finance a lavish refurbishment of a temple to Concordia; a wealthy African benefactor might praise an emperor as *felicissimus princeps*. Disparate though these actions may be, each nevertheless

[65] Fishwick 2016: 78–80.

[66] Noreña 2011a: 59; following Wallace-Hadrill 1981a: 308–310; Fishwick 1993: 85–86; see also Kousser 2006: 222–229; Ando 2000: 292–296.

[67] See for example RIC IV Septimius Severus 175. The coin also bears images of the imperial family on its reverse, linking the new golden age to the imperial family.

associates the emperor with desirable ethical qualities in a public setting. These ethical qualities betray normative beliefs about legitimate power, regardless of whether they were considered a part of the emperor's character.

All the more reason therefore to include not only personal virtues but also a number of ethical concepts that are not personal qualities. The downside of this approach is that it would open up the present study to a huge range of legitimising ideas, including the victory titles or *cognomina ex virtute* which appear in almost every dedication to the emperor. Given my professed aims, a much more fruitful approach would be to focus on unique or at least non-standardized expressions of praise that betray some of the perceptions and choices of provincial dedicators. Although imperial titles were far from uniformly applied throughout the empire, they nevertheless were standardized to a degree that the praise of individual virtues or ethical concepts was not. Or to put it differently: the praise of imperial *pietas* in a given dedication is generally speaking more telling of the preferences of a dedicator than the inclusion of *Germanicus* or *Pater Patriae* among the emperor's titles. In the remainder of this work, therefore, I will focus on a variety of non-standardized virtues, honorifics and others items of praise that explicitly refer to individual powerholders (or specific groups of powerholders, such as the imperial family) while simultaneously illustrating local choices in what aspects of legitimate rule to praise. The focus on individual powerholders will allow us to create some order in the otherwise chaotic landscape of personal virtues, deified concepts, honorific titles and imperial benefits. As noted, some ethical concepts or imperial benefits were broadly associated with imperial rule. A dedication to Pax Augusta may of course have been intended to praise the reigning emperor but might also have been construed as praise for the imperial family, the reigning dynasty, or imperial rule in the broadest sense of the word. This is not to argue that the praise of imperial benefits did not have a role in legitimising the status quo. Yet the vagueness of imperial benefits leaves considerable room for interpretation in determining the recipient of praise. By limiting my sources to only include instances of epigraphic texts explicitly associating powerholders with various virtues, honorifics and ethical concepts, we gain a clearer understanding of how these tools of legitimation were employed.

In my wording thus far I have chosen to use a variety of terms: virtues, ethical concepts, honorifics. These terms are not interchangeable. As noted, the dividing lines between these terms could often be blurry and change depending on context. Yet that does not mean that ancient audiences could not differentiate between, for example, Concordia as a goddess and *concordia* as a quality existing between two co-emperors. Some concepts, such as *pietas* and *virtus* were quite clearly character traits belonging to an individual person. Others, such as *felicitas* or the aforementioned *concordia* stood in relationship to an individual, but were not strictly speaking personal qualities. The aim of this thesis, however, is to shed light on the legitimation of power on a provincial level. Given this aim, he differences between *pietas* as a personal virtue and *felicitas* as an ethical concept ascribed to the imperial family or to a governor are ultimately of a lesser importance than the fact that they both serve to give voice to normative beliefs about legitimate rule and both act as a form of consent to existing power relationships. For this reason, I have chosen to use the moniker 'normative language' to encompass both personal virtues and ethical concepts ascribed to others. The motivation is in part a practical one, intended to promote the readability of the text. But it also serves a methodological purpose, in moving beyond too strict a divide between 'virtue' and 'ethical concept' and allowing me to include a wider range of phrases, terms and concepts.

0.5 – Praise in practice

My main research question has so far been defined as an investigation into the formation of shared normative beliefs of legitimate power in the empire. Before pursuing this line of argument further, the epigraphic texts merit a short contextualisation. The importance of epigraphic material for the study of the ancient world needs no further discussion. Yet what of the actual language employed in inscriptions? As one handbook of Latin epigraphy helpfully points out, it was the honorific statue – not the inscription – that formed the source of honour.[68] The point has been duly noted by scholars in the last decades. The spatial turn in epigraphic studies has focussed strongly on the placement of statues and statue bases within the civic context, occasionally at the cost of an in-depth study of the actual wording of the dedications.[69] This might lead us to assume that the wording of the inscription was perhaps of lesser importance. An impression that, given the measure of repetition and – to modern ears – empty praise inherent in many inscriptions, seems at first sight to be confirmed. Yet the inscriptions mattered to ancient (elite) audiences. The wealth of surviving honorific inscriptions – only a fraction of the total number of honorific inscriptions erected in antiquity – in and of itself attests to the continued importance that ancient communities attached to them. With statues often adopting a highly similar visual language, the explanatory information offered by inscriptions was vital to the identification of the honorand but also served as more than simply a label, often containing additional praise of the honorand and some sort of motivation for the honours, from munificent activity to just governance to lengthy stints in local politics. Both praise and motivation were often encased in elaborate encomiastic clauses.

The normative language employed on statue bases furthermore had direct links with the vocabulary of praise present in literary culture including philosophical tracts, poetry, history writing, political theorizing and more – a point treated at length in the next chapter. Importantly, normative language was not an ossified element of literary culture, but also a mainstay of elite rhetoric on a far more common basis. From private letters to superiors to discussions in the *curia*, normative language found its way into daily communications. A prime example is offered by a third-century statue base from Lepcis Magna, honouring local benefactor Plautius Lupus. The inscription is particularly interesting because it reports in some detail on the discussions in the municipal council of Lepcis Magna. Though set in a context that all but obligates normative language (and undoubtedly edited before being transcribed to the statue base), the inscription is nevertheless suggestive of the pervasive role of honour and praise in elite communications. The inscription records the words of one Lucius Cassius Longinus, *duumvir* designate, who made the following motion before the city council:

> "Since Plautius Lupus, **one of the best men of our city council** (*o(ptimo) o(rdinis) n(ostri) uir(o)*), willingly undertook the flaminate which was offered to him by universal agreement, and gave very splendid games, and, most remarkably, also served with **magnificent liberality** (*magnificentissima liberalitate*) in the office of the duumvirate in accordance with the **splendid tradition of his family** (*splendorem natalium [s]uorum*) and the status of our colony, and with **lavish disposition** (*[e]ffusissimis adfectibus*) again

[68] Cooley 2012: 145.

[69] Zimmer 1989; Zimmer 1992 are fundamental in this regard. Among the many possible examples, Cordon 1998; Kleinwächter 2001; Boschung 2002; Gilhaus 2013; Gilhaus 2015. For a good 'thick description' of wording, placement, sculpture and historical context, see Smith 1999.

> gave most splendid games; moreover, not content with this **generosity** (*liberalitatibus*), he ornamented the bathhouse *cella* with Numidian marbles and mosaic work; subsequently on every occasion he was **unusually meritorious** (*singuḷ(ariter) [p]romeruerit*), and most recently, when he had been elected as a *curator* to give a public show in accordance with the bequest of Junius Afer, deceased, splendid man, he was **unsparing of his care and omitted no effort** (*sollicitudini laboriq(ue) suo non pepercerit*), and having observed the wishes of the honourable council, ensured that the games given were of the most splendid (…).”[70]

Not all of the positive words expended on Plautius Lupus necessarily fall into the category of personal virtues, but they do unequivocally count as normative language. Longinus, the speaker of the above text, employed a variety of praise to build up an idealized portrait of Lupus before the gathered city council. Given Lupus' actions, generosity naturally forms a recurring feature. But note also praise for Lupus' family history, his zeal in his public duties as *curator* and his general excellence as member of the city council. Elsewhere in the text, Lupus is furthermore praised for his blamelessness (*integritas*) and modesty (*modestia*), while Lupus himself speaks highly of the dedication of the city council and the people of Lepcis Magna towards him (*ne oneraret urbem cuius pubes fid(em) stadium in[··· d]ecurionum adoraret*).

Normative language was pervasive in elite circles, at least in the 'genres' highlighted in the above inscription: public rhetoric and commemorative inscriptions. The function of normative language however went deeper than only rhetorical convention. To erect a statue to a benefactor, governor or emperor is to publicly proclaim consent with the political and social hierarchy. Although ancient dedicators lacked modern theorizing on consent actions, the idea is not wholly alien to the ancient mindset. By placing a statue of a local benefactor, an emperor or an imperial official on the forum, dedicators both public and private expressed their approval of the honorand. And yet, such honours could be enforced under threat of violence or be retracted at a later date for reasons of political or economic expediency.[71] Worse yet were the honours awarded to the patently unworthy, as in Pliny's well-known critique of the honours awarded to the imperial freedman Pallas.[72] Normative language added an additional motivation to the consent action, acting as a rhetorical proof of both the sincerity of the dedicator and the deservedness of the honours. Indirectly it also highlighted the elevated position of the dedicator. A dedicator praising a magistrate or emperor for a given virtue or other laudable quality not only showed himself capable of discerning virtue but also willing to expend material resources and personal effort in publicly acknowledging it. Normative language played to several different levels of the ancient 'honour economy', being a suitable rhetorical device to address one's elite equals and superiors, a way to highlight one's sincerity and a means of indirectly casting light on oneself as a worthy moral agent. This makes normative language not simply an interesting angle of research, but a necessary one if we wish to grasp the complexities of political legitimacy in the Roman Empire.

An additional advantage of the study of normative language – as already shown by the dedication to Plautius Lupus – is that it was never solely the reserve of emperors. Earlier I expressed my desire

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[70] IRT 601a, translation Reynolds et al. 2009.

[71] *Threat*: Cassius Dio, 58.5.2-3. *Removal*: Dio Chrysostomos, *Orations* 31.

[72] Pliny the Younger, *Letters* 8.6.

to not only study the responses to imperial power, but also to the various levels of power with which it was deeply intertwined. Emperors, governors and local magistrates were all honoured through the same means: honorific statues. Although there are clear differences between these statues, they operate on the same underlying honorific logic. Likewise, powerholders of various stature were all praised with normative language in honorific inscriptions. The use of normative language in reference to political actors is certainly not exclusive to Roman political thought. However, Roman imperialism presented this idea in a new political context, and was accompanied in some regions by a new cultural phenomenon – the aforementioned dedicatory inscription. Studying normative language not only allows us to track imperial representation in the provinces, but also allows us to contextualise and compare it with other power relationships within a given provincial community. In doing so, we not only gain a better understanding of the shifting concepts of legitimacy within these communities, but also a better understanding of the impact of imperial ideology on civic life and politics.

Many scholars have focussed on the formation and change of these various claims to imperial legitimacy across some five centuries of imperial rule. Yet as has hopefully become clear by now, my interest lies not with the imperial court but rather with the relationship between the court and its subjects, both in a direct sense as well as in the many intertwining links of power and authority. Using normative language as a guideline, I will take a closer look at the way in which various levels of power were legitimised through honours and dedications in the provinces. Although a special role will be reserved for the emperor and imperial ideology, I also propose to look at other power relationships within the community. This study will take a closer look at both governors and benefactors, military patrons and magistrates, and a number of key questions will give shape to the disparate material:

- To what extent did key imperial virtues and other forms of legitimising normative language find their way into provincial dedications?
- Did normative language play a role in the legitimation of other power relationships within provincial communities?
- And what does the appearance of certain encomiastic phrases in dedications tell us of the legitimation of power relationships and the ideals of power in provincial communities?

To explore these questions further, I propose to focus on a region of the empire with a dense urban network, active civic politics and a wealth of surviving epigraphy. The Roman provinces in North Africa, notably Africa Proconsularis, Mauretania Caesariensis and, from the early third century onwards, Numidia fit all of these criteria. Despite the similarities in monumental build-up or municipal organization, the civic landscape of North Africa was heterogeneous. Cities such as Lepcis Magna, Cirta or Dougga existed before the arrival of Roman imperial rule and had a Punic heritage; Thamugadi, Cuicul and other communities were either founded on orders of the emperor or benefited greatly from the settlement of Roman veterans; Lambaesis formed a category of its own as an army camp with a particularly large *vicus* and monumental embellishments. And in matters of size, imperial patronage and the influence of its elite, cities such as Carthage dwarfed settlements such as Bulla Regia or Oea. It is not surprising to find numerous epigraphic and ideological differences between such diverse communities. What interests us here is not so much that there are differences between the epigraphic conventions of cities, but rather the forms those differences

took and what they tell us of the way in which power relationships were linguistically embedded within various cities.

In the next chapter I begin by taking a closer look at the relationship between normative language and legitimate power, not only to strengthen my argument that normative language is a valuable avenue of research, but also to argue that we might reasonably assume that African provincials were familiar with Roman ideals of virtue, honour and power. In chapter two, three and four I will shift my attention to three distinct layers of power – emperors, governors and local elites – and the ways in which their relationships with both communities and private individuals are represented in the epigraphic record. In chapter five I will provide a comparison with a distinct cultural group with its own epigraphic traditions within North Africa: Legio III Augusta. Lastly, I will attempt to draw a number of comparisons between these various chapters and to arrive at some broader conclusions on the role of normative language in legitimising power relationships as well as providing a means of self-representation and even empowerment.