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

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CHAPTER I

MEDIA AND IDEOLOGY

A study of the relationship between legitimacy and normative language in the Roman Empire invariably must start in Rome itself. This is not to imply that the Romans were the first to develop a system of political legitimacy which rested on normative beliefs about honour and virtue. Nor does it imply that the peoples conquered by Rome had no normative beliefs about the legitimacy of their local rulers before their incorporation into the empire. Rather, I would argue that the emergence of the Roman Empire as an imperial power under the leadership of a single monarch fundamentally altered all three levels of legitimacy as identified by Beetham. Roman emperors subtly but determinedly rewrote the rules of power and propagated new normative beliefs of legitimate power; provincials responded with new types of consent actions adopted after Roman models – notably statues, monumental dedications and the imperial cult. The innovative nature of this change differed from region to region. In the Greek East, honorific statues and ruler cults were a mainstay of political culture long before the advent of the empire and as such influenced the ways in which Roman imperial legitimation took shape. Nor should we envision the change in beliefs on legitimacy as a revolution, but rather as a drawn-out process with considerable local variations. Despite the slow and disparate pace, this transformation was predominantly shaped by the imperial court and the political developments in Rome.

To take Rome as a point of departure for the study of North African beliefs on legitimate power may seem counterintuitive. Given the limited reach of the Roman state and the continued vitality of local cultures under its banner, pre-Roman concepts of legitimacy in the region may seem a more sensible place to start. But here we run into a two-fold problem. Firstly, some areas of the empire have an extensively documented political culture stretching back well before Roman rule. Greece and Egypt are key examples, both providing us with a great many sources on political ideals, beliefs and forms of consent. Yet for many areas of the empire, including North Africa, we are far less well-informed. African archaeological sources provide limited evidence for ideals of political legitimacy, while literary accounts of pre-Roman North African political history are almost universally written from a later Greco-Roman point of view.

Secondly, the Latin epigraphic material that constitutes my main evidence is a defining feature of Roman imperial culture, both in its choice of language and its format. It is true that Punic remained a popular language throughout the region well into Late Antiquity and a modest corpus of inscriptions employ Punic in their writing.[73] Most Late Punic inscriptions – erected following the fall of Carthage in 146 B.C. and continuing until the fourth century A.D. – fall into the realm of votive offerings, epitaphs and building dedications.[74] Although votive offerings and epitaphs could of course be on full display within public spaces, of the above three categories only building inscriptions fall securely within the realm of the public inscriptions that form the basis of this study. It is noteworthy that from the Roman imperial era onwards, Punic building dedications often include

[73] Jongeling 2005: 2–6.
[74] Jongeling 2005: 9.

a Latin version of the same dedication, particularly when making reference to the emperor.[75] Statue bases – whether dedicated to the emperor or local powerholders – are almost ubiquitously inscribed in Latin, and consistently so from the reign of Augustus onwards. The spread of Latin, the rise of public inscriptions and the changed political realities of Roman imperial rule were intrinsically linked, at least in North Africa. This is not intended to deny the influence of locally held cultural beliefs on power and its legitimacy. I would argue, however, that the honorific inscriptions featuring normative language were, in part at least, a new development deeply affected by Roman imperial power. From this perspective, Rome is both a necessary and logical point of departure if we wish to understand why North African provincials cited the emperor's *pietas* or the governor's *integritas* in their public dedications.

The continued importance of (spoken) Punic brings us to a last important caveat. The focus of this thesis will be on the written rather than the spoken word – and by extension on elite expressions rather than those of all North African provincials. Written sources rarely take into account the many oral expressions of normative beliefs and consent. The words spoken during a sacrifice to the emperor, an panegyric by a little-known provincial orator on the occasion of the emperor's birthday or the advice given by a governor on the preferable words of praise to be included in a dedication: all may have played a decisive role in provincial perceptions of imperial legitimacy, but they have left few traces in our source material. This is an important caveat, since it highlights the variety of dynamics at play on the local level of a given community. Written sources are imperfect substitutes for these lost oral expressions and in many cases the elite Latin of a public inscription was likely far removed from the local Punic dialect of the region. Nevertheless, the spoken and written word were not wholly disconnected. The importance of rhetoric in the development of Latin literature, the publishing and circulation of speeches by famous orators, the recording of acclamations and other oral expressions of 'the people' by Greek and Roman historians: there are points of contact between the literary and oral world, at least within elite culture. More importantly perhaps, the spoken and the written word both drew from shared (elite) ideals of power and legitimacy, although those ideals may have been given different expression depending on genre, context and speaker. Although epigraphic evidence alone can never offer us a full overview of the panoply of ancient opinions and beliefs on legitimate authority, it also is unlikely to have been disconnected from lived reality in the ancient world.

1.1. – A prince of purity and virtue: the literary tradition

Latin and Greek literature offer us many examples of theorizing about political legitimacy, in which ideals of honourable behaviour often play a dominant role. Since the emperor and members of the imperial family were praised in one way or another in a vast number of texts, I shall limit myself to a select number of illustrative genres: panegyrics, prince's mirrors and works of political philosophy. Although these texts were sometimes written in direct praise of a specific emperor, they often moved beyond the reigning emperor to include historical examples or to expound on the concept of the ideal ruler. As such, these genres offer an explicit and systematic treatment of the normative beliefs of power. An added benefit is that many of the writers maintained close connections to the imperial court. Although they did not necessarily adopt the perspective of the court, their works

[75] Particularly so in Lepcis Magna, see IRT 318, 319, 321, 322, 323.

nevertheless suggest something of the range of normative concepts that were considered acceptable in courtly circles.

Intellectuals of the imperial era could look back to a long and varied Greek literary tradition on the virtues and benefits of monarchy.[76] With the rise of virtue ethics in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. we see the first critical efforts to define the nature of virtue and, in its wake, the characteristics of good rulers and legitimate political systems. It may be tempting to link the rise of this intellectual trend to the intrusion of new, powerful entities into the political life of the polis, particularly such figures as Mausolus of Caria and Philip II of Macedon. Yet the Greek world had always known monarchs and other sole rulers, and the earliest examples of the princes' mirror genre unsurprisingly predate the Hellenistic era. They are to be found in the works of Isocrates (*Evagoras*, *Nicocles*) and Xenophon (*Cyropaedia, Agesilaus*) both writing in the late fifth century and the first half of the fourth century B.C. Isocrates and Xenophon played a pioneering role in their exploration of the relationship between personal virtues and political legitimation. Though their support for monarchical systems was perhaps an oddity at the time of writing, the basis that they laid – together with Plato's and Aristotle's more systematic and influential endorsements of the importance of virtue within political systems – proved persuasive in a Greek world that saw a dramatic rise in monarchical states.[77]

Although the connection between normative language and the legitimacy of leadership is prominent throughout Hellenistic theories on kingship, its development over time remains somewhat unclear. Many systematic treatises on kingship – by Epicurus; the Peripatetics Theophrastus, Demetrius of Phalerum and Strato; the Stoics Zenon, Cleanthes, Sphairus and Persaius – have been lost and are only known through references in the third-century work of Diogenes Laertius.[78] Extant works – including some passages in Diodorus Siculus which may have been based on the early Hellenistic author Hecataeus of Abdera[79], as well as the more complete *Letter of Aristeas to Philocrates* from the second century B.C. – show a clear preoccupation with morality-based normative beliefs about good rulership and legitimate power. Typical royal qualities include piety (*eusebia*), magnanimity (*megalopsyche*), self-control (*enkrateia*) and justice (*dikaiosyne*), among others.[80] This is not to suggest that virtues were the sole source of legitimacy in Hellenistic political thinking. Great deeds and actions – usually of a military nature – received equal, if not greater, emphasis in literature, royal documents and art.[81] Yet normative language nevertheless remained an important legitimising force. As argued by Eckstein, mirrors of princes were deeply responsive in nature.[82] Rather than direct expressions of royal ideology, such texts are a reaction to the presence of monarchies, attempting to mould kingly behaviour. As such, they are

[76] For a compact overview, see Noreña 2011a: 37–55.

[77] Isocrates' two works on Nicocles in particular are quoted extensively in Greek works until the Byzantine era while *Evagoras* is cited as late as Menander Rhetor's third-century guide to imperial orations (see below), see Walbank 1984: 75. For a general introduction to Hellenistic political theory, Dvorník 1966: 205–277; Balot 2006: 266–297; Hellenistic monarchies in general: Walbank 1984.

[78] Hadot 1972: 586; Noreña 2011a: 42; though in complete agreement that Hellenistic works on kingship may have existed in abundance, Walbank is sceptical of their impact: see Walbank 1984: 77.

[79] Murray 1970: 143, 153; Walbank 1984: 77.

[80] Diodorus Siculus, *History*, 1.70.5-6; Anonymous, *Letter of Aristeas*, 229; 211; 189; 225; 226; 190; 188.

[81] See in general Eckstein 2009; Balot 2006: 271.

[82] Eckstein 2009.

part of a delicate literary construct, both teaching the monarch to live up to certain normative ideals about good rulership while also lauding him for already acting out these ideals. Far from being a piece of propaganda in the traditional sense, Hellenistic mirrors of princes are not straightforward in their praise for monarchs. By writing a guide to virtue, or by lauding the kings' actions in general, the author implicitly claims to be a capable judge and advisor; the praise for a king is also implicitly a form of praise for the author. At times, Hellenistic kings took an active part in the shaping of their own image, for example through their decrees or monuments. But monarchs were never alone in representing royal power, relying – willingly or not – on courtiers, poets and others to shape the royal image.

Greek normative beliefs about legitimacy made their way to Rome in a piecemeal fashion over several centuries of military, diplomatic and cultural contact.[83] Roman military leaders, administrators, diplomats and private individuals had intimate contacts with Hellenistic courts and Greek cities. A select number of Romans received honours from Greek communities[84] and Greek intellectuals – such as Timagenes and Philodemos in the Late Republic – found their way into the households of the Roman elite. But it would be a mistake to envision the connection between normative language and legitimacy as a purely Greek transplant to Rome, through Greek ideas may certainly have influenced the development of Roman concepts of virtue and legitimacy.[85] As noted in the introduction, Rome had a vibrant tradition of deifying virtues and ethical concepts and contesting their meaning in the political arena. Claims of having a special relationship to a certain deified virtue, or any other normative standard of behaviour and action for that matter, had to be recognized by others to be effective. This left room for a variety of individuals – from courtiers to clients – to participate in the representation of political actors.

With the closing of the Republican period and the early years of empire, political power was increasingly concentrated within a small subset of Rome's elite. Though leaders such as Pompey or Caesar may have laid an outsize claim to certain virtues and ethical concepts, it would be wrong to envision them as monopolising the discourse.[86] What does appear to be the case, however, is that the use of normative language seems to expand, showing clear overlap with the normative language found in praise of Hellenistic monarchs. Cicero offers two telling examples.[87] In *De imperio Cn.*

[83] For several centuries the Republic was deeply involved with Hellenistic states, through war, alliances and protectorates. Following friendly contact with Egypt in (273 B.C.) and an alliance with Syracuse during the Punic Wars (264 B.C.), Rome came into ever closer contact with Macedon and the Greek cities after defeating the Illyrian pirates in 228 B.C. What followed were two centuries of regular wars and conflicts, including a series of protracted struggles with Macedon (between 215-205, 200-197 and 171-168 B.C.), a war with the Seleucid Empire (190-188 B.C.), the formation of the Roman provinces of Macedonia and other provinces in the Greek heartland (148 B.C. onwards), the incorporation of Pergamon (133 B.C.), the Mithridatic Wars (89-63 B.C.) and finally the events of the civil wars, extensive parts of which were fought out in the Greek world and which ended with the incorporation of Egypt (49-30 B.C.).

[84] Wallace-Hadrill 1990: 155; in general Price 1984: 40–47. See for example Syll.[3] 616, 607; IG 11.4.712; IDelos 1520.

[85] See Wallace-Hadrill 2008: 3–37, especially 7 on the hazards of natural metaphors for cultural change. For a discussion on the introduction of Republican cults, Beard et al. 1998: 61–66, 87–90.

[86] Clark 2007: 263–264.

[87] For other examples of virtues and politics, *De Re Publica* is particularly insightful. Cicero continually touches on the relationship between (monarchical) power and virtue throughout the treatise: I.2; I.33; I.42-43; I.47; I.55; II.24; II.43; II.69. For virtues and aristocratic character more generally, Cicero's judicial speeches are insightful: Cicero, *Pro Caelio*, 3-5 (the virtuous character of Caelius' father as a defence of the son) and 9-14 (the high-standing character and moral qualities of Caelius, even in his friendship with Catilina); *Pro Milone*, 36-38, and especially 95-98, noting that Milo is

Pompei, delivered before the Senate in 66 B.C., Pompey is praised for his *virtutes imperatoriae* including his hard work (*labor*), bravery (*fortitudo*) and zeal (*industria*); beyond such martial qualities Cicero also presents him as having a unique claim to blamelessness (*innocentia*), temperance (*temperantia*), faithfulness (*fides*) and cultivation (*humanitas*).[88] In the *Pro Marcello* of 46 B.C., also delivered before the Senate, Caesar is lauded for his gentleness (*mansuetudo*), clemency (*clementia*), wisdom (*sapientia*), fairness (*aequitas*), compassion (*misericordia*), magnanimity (*magnitudo animi*) and generosity (*liberalitas*).[89] The differences between the two orations are noticeable. Many of Pompey's virtues appear closely tied to his roles as senator and general, emphasizing his dutiful fulfilment of both roles. Caesar's virtues on the other hand appear of a different nature altogether, emphasizing hierarchy and power and more akin to the kingly virtues we see in Hellenistic tracts. Unsurprisingly, the *Pro Marcello* draws heavily upon Hellenistic encomiastic literature, particularly panegyrics.[90] That Cicero consciously drew from such literature, particularly in front of the Senate, suggests that Hellenistic normative language was becoming increasingly common, possibly as a result of the rise of a select group of domineering political actors in the Late Republic. Yet it must also be emphasized here that this is not a case of *self*-representation: it is Cicero, rather than Pompey or Caesar, who attributes these qualities to both Republican leaders. Both *De imperio Cn. Pompei* and *Pro Marcello* therefore not only hold up a mirror to their respective recipients, suggesting ideals of behaviour to which both leaders should strive, but also underline Cicero's own role as a political actor and moral arbiter.

Greek influence (particularly Hellenistic literature on kingship and political theory), the importance of deified virtues in Republican political culture, and the rise of ever more dominant political actors in the Late Republic: all worked in tandem to lay the groundwork for an imperial ideology that placed great emphasis on the normative qualities of a given ruler. As the sole ruler at the head of the Roman state, the emperor had an outsized claim on virtue – at least when compared to other political actors. The theme was picked up repeatedly by imperial literary figures, both in Latin and Greek. Like their Hellenistic predecessors, these authors helped mould imperial representation. Yet this process did not start in earnest until well into the first century. Personified virtues appear on Augustan imperial coinage and normative language abounds in 'official' documents such as the *Senatus consultum de Cn. Pisone patre* of 20 A.D., both of which we shall explore in greater detail below. Yet panegyrics and prince's mirrors appear to be absent. This absence may possibly be explained in the unease felt in moulding the new dynasty along the lines of Hellenistic monarchies, by both authors and emperors. It is in Seneca's *On Clemency* that we find the first Roman equivalent of the Hellenistic princes' mirror. In this treatise, Seneca envisions the emperor not just as a model to his subjects but the *spiritus vitalis* of the empire, the *mens imperii* that leads the Roman body and the *vinculum* that keeps its many disparate parts together.[91] Seneca carefully turns his laudatory prose about Nero into imperial self-representation by making the emperor himself state his virtuous character and near omnipotence in the introduction to the work.[92] This clever literary technique is added praise for the emperor: whereas in Greek treatises on royal virtue the author implicitly acted

brave (*fortis*), wise (*sapiens*) and seeks only glory (*gloria*) through his defence of the state; *Pro Rege Deiotaro*, 26 (citing the kingly virtues of Deiotarus).

[88] Cicero, *De imperio Cn. Pompei*, 29; 36.

[89] Cicero, *Pro Marcello*, 1-2, 12, 19.

[90] Tempest 2013 in general, on virtues specifically p.309.

[91] Seneca, *On Clemency*, 4.1.

[92] Seneca, *On Clemency*, 1.2-4.

as judge of character, Seneca disavows any such role and merely hold up his mirror to the emperor, who is already virtuous.[93] Seneca stresses that all men are capable of virtuous qualities, though some virtues are more suited and more accessible to certain people. Thus while *magnanimitas* is open even to the lowliest of men, *clementia* is far better suited to princes for "when princes rage there is war."[94] Clemency sets the king far above women, beasts and lowly men, for "[c]ruel and inexorable anger is not seemly for a king, for thus he does not rise much above the other man, toward whose own level he descends by being angry at him."[95] Although the gods had a hand in appointing Nero *deorum vice*[96], the clear implication is that Nero stands above others through his own virtuous behaviour, and that his conduct is linked to the fate of the empire as a whole. In *On Clemency* legitimate power is clearly and inextricably connected with personal virtues and normative qualities – an idea widely echoed in other media, as we shall see below. It would, however, be wrong to consider *On Clemency* as simply a neutral rendition of widely-shared beliefs. Seneca approaches questions of power from a Stoic perspective, explaining the great emphasis on mildness and tranquillity versus violent emotions such as anger throughout *On Clemency*. More importantly still, the text is as much a statement about Seneca as it is about Nero. Although Seneca might employ literary techniques to conceal his authorial voice in *On Clemency*, the philosopher nevertheless positions himself not just as a moral agent but as a moral authority, of such status and standing as to be able to advise an emperor.

The same mechanism of explicit praise for the emperor and implicit self-praise of the author can be found in Pliny the Younger's *Panegyric*, dedicated to Trajan. Pliny's expressive and excessive praise for the personal virtues of the emperor make the oration a key example of the political importance of normative language under the Principate. The *Panegyric* was composed in gratitude for awarding Pliny the suffect consulship in the year 100. Like Seneca, Pliny is keen to open his panegyric with a declaration of Trajan's unique position. Trajan is put on equal footing with the gods themselves through his virtue: "For what gift of the gods could be greater and more glorious than a prince whose purity and virtue make him their own equal?".[97] *Moderatio* forms the key theme throughout the *Panegyric*. With the rise and fall of two consecutive dynasties – the members of which were also lauded for their virtues – Pliny sees himself confronted with a challenge: his panegyric must be filled with independence, sincerity and truth (*libertas, fides, veritas*), can contain no signs of flattery or constraint and must break with the past in which such sincerity was not commonplace.[98] This not-so-subtle reference to Domitian casts a long shadow over the *Panegyric* and is continued throughout the text. *Moderatio* is consistently defined in opposition to the actions of Domitian. Where Domitian was a spendthrift whose endless building endeavours made the walls of the city shudder, Trajan is praised for his lack of building activities; where Domitian dedicated endless statues to himself, Trajan is satisfied with but a few; where Domitian placed himself above the law, Trajan places the

[93] See also the comments by Hales 2010: 237: "The real power (and indeed danger) of the mirror was precisely the opportunity it afforded to change the image of whoever stepped in its sights under the protest that it merely offered a true reflection. In this sense, they could not only reflect but actually aid in the creation, manipulation and *memoria* of *personae*."

[94] Seneca, *On Clemency*, 5.2-3. See also 7.2; 9.1.; 7.2; 5.4.; 5.5; 5.5-5.6 for further definitions of *clementia*.

[95] Seneca, *On Clemency* 5.6, see also 5.5, 7.4. Translation: Basore 1928.

[96] Seneca, *On Clemency*, 1.1.

[97] Pliny the Younger, *Panegyric*, 1.4.

[98] Pliny the Younger, *Panegyric*, 1.6, 2.

law above himself.[99] Although *moderatio* forms a red thread throughout the oration, Pliny goes on to list some thirty other virtues which he ascribes to Trajan, from his sense of duty (*pietas*) to his restraint (*abstinentia*); from his modesty (*modestia)* to his generosity (*liberalitas*); from his truthfulness (*veritas*) to his kindness (*benignitas*) and his bravery (*fortitudo*).[100] It is through his impeccable virtuous character that Trajan is capable of being a model for his citizens, where previous emperors ("with the exception of your father and one or two more (and that is saying too much)") preferred the vices of their subjects over their own virtues.[101] The *Panegyric* uses both critical remarks on Trajan's predecessors as well as a colourful array of different personal qualities to make the emperor stand out, thereby creating an ethical imperial profile that continuously stresses the individuality of these virtues in Trajan. However, like Seneca, Pliny uses his panegyric as a way of defining his own position in relation to the emperor and the court. His emphasis on the virtue of friendship (*amicitia*) – here once more defined in opposition to the feigned affection (*amoris simulatio*) under Domitian – hints strongly at the personal friendship between emperor and Pliny.[102] By discussing and rating the emperor's various policies[103], Pliny is not only lauding the emperor but, like Seneca, positioning himself as a political actor capable and worthy of making judgements on virtues or matters of state.

Both Pliny and Seneca were writing from the direct environs of the court. Contemporary Greek literature provides us with a number of authors more rooted in provincial life. Although they too consistently couch legitimate power in normative terms, there are nevertheless a number of interesting differences. Working around the same time as Seneca, the philosopher Musonius Rufus, whose work betrays a keen interest in ethics and virtue, dedicated one of his lectures to the theme *That Kings Also Should Study Philosophy*. In this short lecture, Musonius refers to the Platonic virtues of justice (*dikaiosyne*), self-control (*sophrosyne*), courage (*andreia*), though instead of wisdom or foresight, he prefers to add reason (*logos*) as the fourth virtue in the canon.[104] In addition to these virtues, Musonius cites a host of supplementary virtues which define a good king: intelligence, patience, beneficence, helpfulness and humanity, among other qualities.[105] What stands out in the work of Musonius, however, is his conception that these kingly virtues are not necessarily limited to kings but available to all men, to such an extent that any man who acts in this virtuous manner might call himself a king.[106] At first sight this may seem a strikingly 'democratic' re-interpretation of the normative language usually applied to rulers. But for Musonius it is the virtuous subject who becomes statesman-like – not the other way around. Virtues remain a royal prerogative and uniquely associated with monarchs.

Normative treatments of power also have a strong presence in the works of Dio Chrysostomos, who wrote a number of orations *On Kingship*. These are traditionally attributed to the reign of Trajan, with whom Dio seems to have been fairly close. All four of these orations return time and again to royal virtues as the basis of a prosperous reign, including justice, bravery, moderation, prudence,

[99] Pliny the Younger, *Panegyric*, 51.1, 52.1-5, 65.1-2. See also Hadot 1972: 609–610; Roche 2011a: 48–50.
[100] Pliny the Younger, *Panegyric*, 2.6-7, 3.2, 33.2, 54.5, 3.4.
[101] Pliny the Younger, *Panegyric*, 45.
[102] Pliny the Younger, *Panegyric*, 85, Noreña 2011b: 31–32.
[103] Particularly his fiscal policies: Pliny the Younger, *Panegyric*, 37-41.
[104] Lutz 1947: 60 (l.25-26), 62 (l.10-13), 62 (l.24), 62 (l.32).
[105] Lutz 1947: 66 (l.7–11).
[106] Lutz 1947: 66 (l.13–26).

and gentleness.[107] Dio is more explicit about his role as arbiter, emphasizing the role of the wise man to instruct kings on virtue.[108] In his first oration on kingship, Dio uses Homer to stress the essential role of moral worthiness in successful rule.[109] This moral worthiness takes the form of piety, love of fellow men, love of work and toil, benefactions, sincerity and truthfulness, love of honour, being measured in peace and war, and showing kindness to soldiers and subjects.[110] Key terms from Hellenistic treaties on kingship such as *eusebeia, philanthropia* or the variations on *megalomereia* and *megalopsychia* are lacking; virtues such *sophrosyne*, *dikaiosyne* or *andreia* are wholly missing. Rather interesting in this regard is the emphasis on toil, which stands in contrast to the types of virtues traditionally propagated in Hellenistic panegyric. In the second oration *On Kingship*, Dio again emphasizes kingly character as the foundation of good rule, as opposed to the trappings of kingship.[111] In this oration, taking the form of a dialogue between Alexander and Philip II, Alexander argues:

> *οὐδ᾽ αὖ φιλοσοφίας ἅπτεσθαι πρὸς τὸ ἀκριβέστατον, ἁπλάστως δὲ καὶ ἁπλῶς βιοῦν ἐνδεικνύμενον αὐτοῖς τοῖς ἔργοις φιλάνθρωπον ἦθος καὶ πρᾷον καὶ δίκαιον, ἔτι δὲ ὑψηλὸν καὶ ἀνδρεῖον, καὶ μάλιστα δὴ χαίροντα εὐεργεσίαις, ὅπερ ἐστὶν ἐγγυτάτω τῆς τῶν θεῶν φύσεως*.
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> "Nor, again, is it necessary that he study philosophy to the point of perfecting himself in it; he need only live simply and without affectation, to give proof by his very conduct of a character that is humane, gentle, just, lofty, and brave as well, and, above all, one that takes delight in bestowing benefits—a trait which approaches most nearly to the nature divine."[112]

As in the first oration on kingship, Dio continually invokes Homer as a standard for kingly virtue. When Alexander once more identifies courage (*andreia*) and justice (*dikaiosyne*) as the two prime kingly virtues, he does so with explicit reference to Homer, as in many other topics throughout the oration.[113] These virtues and their grouping are much closer to the kind of virtues that appear in earlier Hellenistic sources. In both these orations – most likely written under Trajan – the emperor is only alluded to. In his third oration, Dio is much more direct. Whereas the first two orations dealt with the general ideals of virtuous kingship, in this third oration Dio sees himself confronted with the same problem as Pliny. The issue of flattery is treated extensively, with Dio at pains to denounce the practice and free himself from any suspicion of it.[114] Whereas Pliny tried to evade charges of flattery by formulating new virtues for Trajan and emphasizing differences between Trajan and Domitian, Dio looks to both Homer and Socrates for an image of the ideal king and strongly implies that Trajan meets this 'objective' standard. Besides virtues such as equity, diligence and kindness, Dio also makes explicit reference to the Platonic virtues of wisdom (here in the practical sense of

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[107] *Piety*: Dio Chrystomos, *Discourses*, 1.15-16; *justice*: 2.26, 3.32-33, 4.24-25; *bravery*: 2.26, 3.32-33, 3.58, 4.24-25; *moderation*: 2.54, 3.58; *prudence*: 3.7, 3.58; *gentleness and humanity*: 1.17, 1.20, 2.26, 4.24-4.25.

[108] Dio Chrystomos, *Discourses*, 1.8.

[109] Dio Chrystomos, *Discourses*, 1.14.

[110] Dio Chrystomos, *Discourses*, 1.15-32.

[111] See for example *Discourses*, 2.34-43 against material display in palaces or 2.49-51 against excessive costumes and armour.

[112] Dio Chrystomos, *Discourses*, 2.26, translation Cohoon 1932. Note also the list of 'anti-virtues' in 2.75.

[113] Dio Chrystomos, *Discourses*, 2.54.

[114] Dio Chrystomos, *Discourses*, 3.17-26.

prudence, or *phronesis*), justice (*dikaiosyne*), temperance (*sophrosyne*) and courage (*andreia*) and their political necessity, for "[an ideal king] considers virtue a fair possession for others but an absolute necessity for himself".[115] The ideal of the virtuous king is not only a form of praise for the individual ruler, but forms the bedrock of a just monarchy. As Dio states, the dividing line between tyranny and legitimate kingship is the virtue and good judgment of the ruler.[116] For Dio, the virtues of the king not only lead to a happy reign but also flow from the king to find those that lack in virtue:

> *τοῦ γὰρ πάντων ἄρχοντος καὶ κρατοῦντος ἡ μὲν φρόνησις ἱκανὴ καὶ τοὺς ἄφρονας ὠφελεῖν· βουλεύεται γὰρ ὁμοίως ὑπὲρ πάντων. ἡ δὲ σωφροσύνη καὶ τοὺς ἀκολαστοτέρους σωφρονεστέρους ποιεῖ· ἐφορᾷ γὰρ ὁμοίως ἅπαντας. ἡ δὲ δικαιοσύνη καὶ τοῖς ἀδίκοις αὐτῆς μεταδίδωσιν· ἡ δὲ ἀνδρεία καὶ τοὺς ἧττον εὐψύχους οὐ μόνον σῴζειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ θαρραλεωτέρους ποιεῖν δύναται.*
>
> "For when a man governs and holds sway over all mankind, his prudence avails to help even the imprudent, since he takes thought for all alike; his temperance serves to restrain even the intemperate, since his eye is over all alike; his justice gives of itself even to the unjust; and his courage is able, not only to save the less valiant, but even to fire them with greater courage."[117]

The fourth oration on kingship, taking the form of a dialogue between Alexander and Diogenes, expands on the theme of the innateness of virtue. Again, the virtuous character of the monarch is singled out as the defining aspect of a legitimate monarchy.[118] For the fictional Diogenes, the recognition of legitimate kingship not only rests on the observer's ability to recognize virtue, but also sets that observer apart from "all the Greeks and barbarians" who lack an understanding of legitimate kingship and by extension, proper virtue. It is questionable whether we should directly equate Diogenes and Alexander with Dio and Trajan. Yet the implicit conclusion here nevertheless seems to be that the recognition of virtue and legitimate kingship is in itself noteworthy and even laudatory; something that sets the author apart from his peers. The role of the orator/teacher shifts across the four orations, with Dio implicitly taking the role of tutor, but also adopting elements of the prince's mirror genre. Dio lists a range of virtues, at times in direct association with Trajan such as in the third oration. But his list is far more limited than Pliny's *Panegyric* and in several instances directly harkens back to Plato's virtues. The never-ending toil which Dio mentions in several of his orations is to some extent alien to Hellenistic literature on virtues and kingship. For the most part, however, Dio seems to present a steady continuation of earlier Greek theories on kingship. The king sets himself apart from his followers through virtue, and virtue acts as an important means of monarchical legitimation. At the same time, Dio's role as an orator comes close to that of Pliny in his panegyric. Dio's virtuous parables and references to Homeric models not only underline his abilities as a judge of character and an ethical thinker, but also emphasize the importance of ancient Greek models for contemporary politics.

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[115] Dio Chrystomos, *Discourses*, 3.5-8, 10-11, 9.
[116] Dio Chrystomos, *Discourses*, 3.45-46.
[117] Dio Chrystomos, *Discourses*, 3.7-8, translation Cohoon 1932.
[118] Dio Chrystomos, *Discourses*, 4.24-25.

Dio Chrysostomos was at the vanguard of a new surge in Greek works on kingship, all falling within the broader cultural movement of the Second Sophistic. A prime example are to be found in the works of Plutarch. In his *To an Uneducated Ruler*, Plutarch compares bad rulers to statues which have "a heroic and godlike form on the outside, but inside are full of clay, stone, and lead — except that in the case of the statues the weight of those substances keeps them permanently upright without leaning, whereas uneducated generals and rulers are often rocked and capsized by the ignorance within them."[119] Through this unusual metaphor, Plutarch describes familiar sentiments: the character of the ruler is the essential factor for a successful reign. The king should fashion himself – like a statue – in the likeness of a god through his virtue[120], while vices are immediately apparent in the powerful and Fortune makes sure to punish them.[121] Though justice and law play an important role in this divine likeness, Plutarch is much less explicit about other virtues. The same can also be said for Aelius Aristides' oration *On Rome*. The oration is more a panegyric on imperial rule in general, rather than on an individual emperor, and therefore strictly speaking falls outside the purview of this chapter. It is nevertheless interesting to note that references to imperial character are continuously described, directly or indirectly, in normative language.[122]

Two examples of imperial orations from the third century are more explicit in the way they relate legitimate rule with normative concepts. First is Pseudo-Aristides, whose oration *On the Emperor* has been dated to the reign of Philip the Arab on the basis of circumstantial biographical information presented in the text.[123] By all accounts, the work of Pseudo-Aristides seems to be by an unremarkable author, whose work found its way, by accident or confusion, into a collection of orations by Aristides.[124] Far from being detrimental to its value as a source, the very mediocrity of *On the Emperor* makes its particularly interesting as an example of the more run-of-the-mill oratory, compared to such leading lights as Dio Chrysostomosus or Aelius Aristides. The emperor's sense of justice in both financial and judiciary matters is praised by Pseudo-Aristides: "he has a precise knowledge of justice (*dikaiosyne*), as if he himself were its legislator and discoverer."[125] The emperor's generosity, gentleness and accessibility are treated with due reverence, as are his moderation and self-control when it comes to pleasures, in which he outshines Homeric monarchs such as Agamemnon.[126] His wisdom and foresight find their expression in his dealings with the Parthians, while his conquest of the Celts is a sure sign of his courage.[127] Pseudo-Aristides stuck close to tradition in his praise for the emperor, although his approach is far more schematic than for example the works of Dio Chrysostomosus or the actual Aristides. One remarkable feature of Pseudo-Aristides is his explicit treatment of the tension between orator, emperor and the object of

[119] Plutarch, *Moralia*, 780A-B. Translation: North Fowler 1936.

[120] Plutarch, *Moralia*, 780E-F.

[121] Plutarch, *Moralia*, 782E-F.

[122] See Aelius Aristides, *On Rome*, 38 (the emperor as the greatest of judges), 51 (the emperor is wise enough to have invented the correct way to govern), 72-74 (the emperor is an expert in military matters), 90 (the emperor stands high above his officials in worth and virtue), 92 (the emperor is generous), 96 (the emperor guides the Greeks with moderation and great care).

[123] Other candidates include Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, Pertinax, Macrinus, Decius, Gallienus, see Behr 1981: 185, n.1.

[124] See Behr 1981: 185 n.1 for a short critique and commentary on the piece.

[125] Pseudo-Aristides, *On the Emperor*, 17. Translation here and following: Behr 1981.

[126] Pseudo-Aristides, *On the Emperor*, 21-23; 26-28.

[127] If Philip the Arab is indeed the intended emperor, this could refer to his Germanic wars in 246. Pseudo-Aristides, *On the Emperor*, 32-34; 35.

praise. According to Pseudo-Aristides, the magnitude of imperial virtue is too great to describe. He berates those orators who make excuses about their limited capabilities and preparation, which suggests that with due time and effort they could have matched the magnitude of the imperial deeds: "[w]hen they grant this, they claim for themselves the ability to speak on the greatest matters, and they bestow on themselves this excessive praise."[128] Pseudo-Aristides emphasizes that no oration can ever be worthy of the emperor, and thus he toils to the best of his abilities without shame. We find the same tension in Seneca, Pliny and Dio. Each tried to mask or resolve this tension differently, from the literary construct of a mirror to the use of parables from Greek myth and legend. The orator is elevated above others in his ability to properly praise the emperor, but in this very ability also lurks the danger of usurping that praise, especially in the case of a great orator or a particularly brilliant oration.

The schematic nature of Pseudo-Aristides' use of virtues, is also reflected in the rhetoric manual by Menander Rhetor, possibly written in the late third century. Menander's work provides (amongst other texts) a manual for writing panegyrics to visiting emperors. It serves as a fitting illustration of the pervasiveness of normative language in the third century, further underlined by the matter-of-factly, schematic approach of *The Imperial Oration*. Normative appraisals of imperial rule are not the only element in Menander's rhetorical treatise, yet it infuses the entirety of the guide: from the emperor's birthplace ("you must inquire whether his nation as a whole is considered brave and valiant, or is devoted to literature or the possession of virtues, like the Greek race"[129]), to his virtuous character in youth (at which point Menander explicitly cites Isocrates' *Evagoras*)[130], to imperial actions in times of war and peace, which should form the bulk of the oration. For Menander, the source of great deeds is ultimately to be found in the imperial character. He thus advises to "always divide the actions of those you are going to praise into virtues (there are four virtues: courage (*andreia*), justice (*dikaiosyne*), temperance (*sophrosyne*), and prudence (*phronesis*)) and see to what virtues the action belongs (…)".[131] Courage, prudence and justice are wartime virtues for Menander ("Then add: "Through your prudence, you discovered their traps and ambushes (…)""[132]); peace is better suited for temperance, wisdom and justice, which should each receive separate treatment.[133] The connection between virtue and imperial legitimacy is so commonplace it needs no further comment or explanation; Menander expects his readers to understand the link.

Roughly contemporaneous with Menander is a collection of panegyrics in Latin, simply known as the *Panegyrici Latini*. The eleven orations in the collection are usually dated from 289 to 313 A.D., chronicling the tetrarchy and the rise of Constantine as sole emperor, and written by a variety of orators mostly of Gallic origin.[134] Curiously, the collection also includes Pliny's *Panegyric* which seems to have served as a source of inspiration for the authors of the *Panegyrici Latini.*[135] It is not

[128] Pseudo-Aristides, *On the Emperor*, 2.
[129] Menander Rhetor, *The Imperial Oration*, 369.27-30, translation here and following (with small adjustments): Russell and Wilson 1981.
[130] Menander Rhetor, *The Imperial Oration*, 372.1-12.
[131] Menander Rhetor, *The Imperial Oration*, 373.5-9.
[132] Menander Rhetor, *The Imperial Oration*, 373.23-24.
[133] Menander Rhetor, *The Imperial Oration*, 375.5-376.23
[134] Nixon and Rodgers 1994: 3-10.
[135] Nixon and Rodgers 1994: 18.

my goal to delve too deeply in the nuances of each oration or their various interconnections, but rather the expanded normative language on display throughout the *Panegyrici Latini*. Ware claims to have found some ninety virtues and virtue-like qualities throughout the eleven orations.[136] Among these we repeatedly find variations on the four Platonic virtues which also appear in Menander: military strength or courage, justice, prudence or providence, and temperance.[137] These include classic imperial virtues such as *providentia*, *virtus* and *fortitudo*, *temperantia* and *patientia*, *iustitia* and *sapientia*. The imperial virtues of *pietas* and *felicitas* likewise appear side by side.[138] But the *Panegyrici Latini* go much further than only typical imperial virtues. In the *Panegyric of Maximian and Constantine* the latter's youth (*pueritia/adulescentia*), sexual purity (*continentia*) and bashfulness (*verecundia*) are praised in order to act as a contrast with the aged and powerful Maximian.[139] In the later *Panegyric of Constantine*, it is the emperor's *severitas* and ferocious slaughtering of barbarians that come in for praise, to highlight both his military profile and his service to the well-being of the state.[140] The orators of the *Panegyrici Latini* show clear signs of the changing ideals of power under the tetrarchy, for example in stressing the *concordia* present among the emperors[141], repeatedly pointing to the inability of the orator to do justice to the greatness of the emperor[142], or emphasizing the insurmountable power differences between civilians and the emperor[143]. A far more wide-ranging lexicon of virtues is employed to give expression to this new power balance, but we should not overestimate such rhetorical devices. The orations still share fundamental similarities with earlier panegyrics and prince's mirrors: the flexibility of virtues to suit the rhetorical needs of orator, the role of the panegyric in setting out ideals of imperial behaviour and, despite the authors' protestations, the role of the orator as moral arbiter. Other fourth-century texts, such as Themistius' *Letter to Julian*[144] and Synesius' *On Kingship*[145], attest to the continued vitality of the virtue discourse in Late Antiquity which, in the case of Synesius, could easily be adopted to a Christian context.

A number of key themes have continued to pop up under very different cultural and political circumstances. The most obvious perhaps is the continued normative belief that legitimate rulers are also virtuous rulers, following aristocratic precepts of honourable behaviour. Although this may not be a particularly surprising conclusion, the persistence with which this idea was ingrained into elite rhetoric and literature suggests something of the fundamental importance attached to honourable behaviour within Greco-Roman political cultures. By praising imperial virtues or recognizing imperial honour, writers and orators tacitly gave their consent to the reigning regime and to imperial rule in a more general sense. But this should not be interpreted as simply passive agreement. Orators, philosophers and authors adapted a flexible normative language to their immediate political context and personal needs. The sneaking suspicion that panegyrics and prince's mirrors might implicitly contain as much praise for the author as for the one being praised, is keenly

[136] Ware 2014: 89.
[137] *Panegyrici Latini* 11.19.2; 7.3.4; 4.1-5; 6.6.1-4; 3.5.4; 3.21.4; 2.40.3; cited in Nixon and Rodgers 1994: 23 n.85.
[138] *Panegyrici Latini* 11.6.1; 6.8.6.
[139] Ware 2014: 91-92.
[140] Ware 2014: 95-96, on *severitas* as a virtue: 102-106.
[141] For example *Panegyrici Latini* 10, with commentary Rees 2002: 60–66.
[142] See for example *Panegyrici Latini* 3.1.1, 8.1.1-4, 9.1.1-2, 6.1.1-5.
[143] See for example the repeated references to the emperor as *numen*, *Panegyrici Latini* 10.1.1, 9.8.1, 7.8.3, 5.1.3, 6.1.1.
[144] Themistius, *Letter to Julian*, 33-34.
[145] Fitzgerald 1930: 110 (l.20)-113 (l.10).

felt and mentioned in a number of texts. And by arguing for the importance of certain values and virtues, authors and orators also helped shift beliefs of legitimate rule over time. The creation of legitimacy was not a one-way street, but rather a complex interaction between author, subject and audience. Although ancient literature had only a fraction of the reach of modern-day media, we should not discount ancient audiences altogether. These texts were in some cases performed before elite audiences, such as in the case of Pliny's *Panegyric* or Aristides' *On Rome*. And they were preserved and read well beyond the immediate context of their creation, as suggested by the various echoes of the *Panegyric* in the *Panegyrici Latini*, or the citations from Isocrates in Menander Rhetor. Although written for a specific event or context, literary texts reverberated among elite audiences. They were accessed, discussed and copied, shaping the normative beliefs of legitimate power along the way.[146]

1.2. – Paperwork: administrative documents and normative language

Literature was not a direct mode of communication between Rome and the provinces. For that purpose, the imperial court had other forms of communication available to it. From private letters from the emperor to his governors, to imperial edicts promulgated across the empire: the Roman state produced large quantities of 'paperwork'.[147] Both the range and the surviving quantities of this material are vast.[148] These documents were usually created from practical incentives: to instruct, to share information or to codify into law. Yet they also had a pervasive ideological influence. For Ando that ideological influence can be found in the demands it made on provincial civic governments, which in turn adopted a range of Roman documentary practices.[149] Beyond this meta-level, we see clear traces of another kind of legitimation in the actual wording of documents. Imperial letters to governors, senatorial edicts, official communication between administrators: all employed strikingly normative language to motivate, threaten and enforce. These administrative documents existed in a very different realm from the literary texts we saw earlier. Although not devoid of literary considerations, they were not written in a highly-polished literary style or primarily concerned with following the rules and expectations of literary genre. It should also be noted that personal praise was rarely the main purpose of these documents. It is therefore unsurprising that the type of normative language employed in non-literary documents differs from that of, for example, Pliny or Seneca. Yet below the surface-level differences we can see the same commonplace notion within the imperial administrative system that legitimate authority depends on certain standards of honourable behaviour.

Possibly the most important way in which Rome – in the sense of both the emperor and major political organs such as the Senate – communicated with the provinces was through the promulgation of various types of regulatory texts. These usually took the form of edicts or imperial letters setting out new laws or civic privileges. Not all correspondence took such form however. In the year 20 A.D. the Senate passed a decree following the indictment of Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso for sedition. The *Senatus consultum de Cn. Pisone patre* was ordered by the Senate to be set up in the winter quarters of each legion and in the most frequented (*celeberrimus*) places of the busiest city

[146] On the spread of ancient literature through libraries and private collections: Nicholls 2017: 33–40.
[147] For a general overview, Corcoran 2014.
[148] Corcoran 2014: 173.
[149] Ando 2000: 73–130.

of each province.[150] The proconsul of Baetica, Vibius Serenus, went one step further and ensured that copies of the text were placed in every town in his province.[151] In and of itself, this is a remarkable intervention by the Roman state into the provincial civic landscape. What makes this decree of particular interest is its deeply normative language; "moral didacticism on a grand scale", in the words of Cooley.[152] Among the many virtues that are named and praised, Tiberius is lauded for his fairness (*aequitas*) and forbearance (*patientia*) during the trial of Piso, his piety towards both Livia and Germanicus (*pietas*) as well as his justice (*iustitia*)[153]; Germanicus for his moderation (*moderatio*) and forbearance (*patientia*)[154]; Livia for her kindness to others and her moderation (*moderatio*)[155] while the Senate describes itself as "mindful of its own clemency, justice, and magnanimity, which virtues it learned from its forebears and especially from the deified Augustus and Tiberius Caesar Augustus"[156]. The equestrian order, the people of Rome and the emperor's soldiers are furthermore singled out and praised for their virtuous behaviour during the crisis.[157] Reading the text, the virtuous nature of the imperial family – particularly in contrast to the lengthy list of Piso's vices – is inescapable and positioned as a model to follow, not only by the Senate, but all ranks of Roman society.[158]

With its lavish praise for imperial conduct, the political value of the decree seems clear. As with the literary texts discussed above, however, we are not dealing with a direct form of imperial self-representation. Rather it is the Senate demarcating its own position in Rome's moral landscape by singling out and praising individual members of the imperial family. The direct praise for the equestrian order, the people of Rome and the army, as well as the decision to publish the decree throughout the empire, leave little doubt regarding the intended audience of the decree. In a similar fashion to many of the literary authors cited earlier, the decree speaks of expectations for future imperial behaviour while underlining the moral and political authority of the Senate. Despite the occasionally subservient language, it is the Senate which appears as an active agent in the text: praising, condemning and calling upon the people of the empire to follow the imperial lead.

This type of normative language was not limited to senatorial decrees. An example (slightly) down the administrative ladder can be gleaned from the imperial regulation of various *saltus* in North Africa. The inscriptions – amended and re-published on several occasions – record a number of imperial decrees pertaining to the *lex Manciana* and a *lex Hadriana de rudibus agris*, both concerned with the use of vacant lands. Copies of the Hadrianic document and later amendments under Commodus have been found at a number of locations in the Bagradas Valley.[159] The dossier has proven immensely valuable for the study of land use and ownership on imperial estates; the laws themselves have been interpreted as the driving force behind Africa's economic success in the

[150] *Senatus consultum de Cn. Pisone patre* 171-173.
[151] Cooley 1998: 209.
[152] Cooley 1998: 209.
[153] *Senatus consultum de Cn. Pisone patre* 17; 119; 124; 133.
[154] *Senatus consultum de Cn. Pisone patre* 26.
[155] *Senatus consultum de Cn. Pisone patre* 116-117; 132-133.
[156] *Senatus consultum de Cn. Pisone patre* 90-92, translation Potter and Damon 1999.
[157] *Senatus consultum de Cn. Pisone patre* 151-165.
[158] Cooley 1998: 207–208.
[159] See also CIL VIII 25902, 25943, 26416, 14428; for full testimonia on the inscriptions and their implication, see Erdkamp, Verboven, and Zuiderhoek 2015: 228 n.70.

second and early-third century.[160] Often overlooked is its value documenting the language prevalent in Rome's imperial administration. Of particular interest are the fragments of a procuratorial speech (*sermo*) which appear in two of the inscriptions and in a later Severan copy of the document. One version of this *sermo* comes from an inscription (CIL VIII 25934) set up in Lella Dreblia, some thirteen kilometers south-west of Aïn el-Djemala, close to the city of Dougga:

> *sermo procurato*[*rum Im*]*p(eratoris) (C)aes(aris) Hadriani Aug(usti) quia Cae*[*sar n(oster) pro*] *infatigabili cura sua per qu*[*am adsi*]*due humanis utili(ta)tibus excu*[*bat om*]*nes partes agrorum quae tam oleis au*[*t*] *vineis quam frumentis aptae sunt e*[*x*]*coli iubet i(d)circo permissu{m} prov*[*iden*]*tiae eius potestas fit omnibus e*[*tia*]*m eas partes occupandi quae in c*[*entu*]*ri(i)s elocatis saltus Blandiani e*[*t Ude*]*nsis (et) in* [*illi*]*s partibus sunt q*[*uae ex saltu Lamiano et Domitiano iunctae Tuzritano sunt nec a conductoribus exercentur*] (…)
>
> "Speech of the procurators of the emperor Caesar Trajanus Hadrianus Augustus: because our Caesar [in keeping with] his tireless diligence, because of which he is assiduously vigilant for the interests of humankind, orders all of the fields that are suited for both olives and wines as well as cereals to be brought under cultivation; therefore by the permission of his providence the authority accrues to everyone to occupy even those parts which are in the leased out centuries of the estate of Blandus and Udens and in those parts which have been joined to the Tuzritan estate from the Lamian and Domitian estate, and are not being worked by the lessees (...)."[161]

Hadrian's diligence, his unwavering commitment to human prosperity and his providence give the impression of an ever-watchful and energetic emperor. Through the use of *quia*/*quam* the imperial decree is presented by the procurators as conceived and enacted through Hadrian's virtuous disposition. Normative language here plays a legitimising role after the fact, but it could likewise be used to motivate (or perhaps threaten) others into action. In a later addition to the dossier, the emperor Commodus himself instructs his procurators to "contemplate my discipline and my practice" (*contemplatione discipulinae et instituti mei)* in making sure that the *coloni* are not overworked.[162]

1.2.1. – Imperial correspondence

Beyond laws and decrees, emperors communicated with their staff and subjects through letters, taking the forms of answers to petitions, letters of appointment, instructions to officeholders and general items of legislation.[163] A telling example has been preserved in an inscription from Bulla Regia. The letter in question is a letter of appointment sent by Marcus Aurelius to his new procurator Quintus Domitius Marsianus. Given the prestige attached to a personal, laudatory letter by the emperor, the brother of Marsianus had the document appended to a statue base set up in Marsianus' honour. The text of the letter is clear about the emperor's expectations of his procurator:

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[160] Erdkamp, Verboven, and Zuiderhoek 2015: 229–230, who are however sceptical of such claims.

[161] Translation: Kehoe 1988: 89.

[162] CIL VIII 10570, CIL VIII 14464 IV, l.4-5; translation Kehoe 1988.

[163] Corcoran 2014: 175–176.

> (…) *Caesar Antoninus Aug(ustus) Domitio Marsiano suo salut(em) ad ducenariae procurationis splendorem iamdudum te provehere studens utor opportunitate quae nunc [o]btegit succede igitur Mario Pudenti tanta cum spe perpetui favoris mei quantam conscientiam retinueris innocentiae diligentiae experientiae vale mi Marsiane karissime mihi*[164]
>
> "(…) Caesar Antoninus Augustus sends greetings to his friend Domitius Marsianus. I have long been eager to advance you to the distinction of a procuratorship of two hundred thousand sesterces and take advantage of the opportunity that now presents itself. Succeed then to the post of Marius Pudens, with a hope of enjoying my uninterrupted favour proportionate to the scrupulous regard that you will pay to the need for integrity, diligence and experience. Farewell, Marsianus, my dearest friend."[165]

Innocentia and *diligentia* are fortified by Marsianus' *experientia*; the emperor furthermore suggests that Marsianus possesses the right *conscientia* to bring his virtues into practice. However, this is not straightforward praise. The clear suggestion is that Marsianus' position is dependent on his continued good behaviour in office. In a similar fashion to the edict of Commodus, Marcus Aurelius employs normative language to motivate and enforce.

Imperial correspondence in Greek shows a similar employment of normative language. Because of the far greater body of surviving material, we also find numerous examples of rather terse imperial documents, particularly when dealing with legislation.[166] Yet others indulge in the same normative language as the letter to Marsianus, often as a way of motivating imperial favours shown to certain high-ranking individuals. Antoninus Pius for example speaks of the noble character of a local benefactor from Ephesus named Vedius Antoninus and of the zealous public spirit of Opramoas in a lengthy series of inscriptions from Rhodiapolis.[167] Marcus Aurelius likewise lauds Herodes Atticus for his cultural zeal and munificence.[168] Septimius Severus and Caracalla in their turn offer high praise for the sophist Claudius Rufinus, a citizen of Smyrna, "because of his ever present concern for education and his life continously spent in practice and study of disciplines" (*ὁ διὰ τὴν προαίρεσιν ᾗ σύνεστιν ἐπὶ παιδείᾳ, καὶ τὸν ἐν λόγοις συνεχῆ βίον*).[169] Normative language was not limited to individuals, but could also be applied to communities that had served the Roman state well. In a letter to the city of Bubon in Lycia, Commodus commends the city "for its bravery and zeal" (*τῆς προθυμίας καὶ τῆς ἀνδρείας*) in bringing local bandits to justice, an act which the emperor believes will entice other cities to follow the same virtuous course of action.[170]

It was not only the emperor who employed normative language in official correspondence. Unsurprisingly, we find the same language both in petitions and in exchanges with the court. When the former *strategos* and *archidikastes* of Alexandria, Aurelius Horion, petitioned the emperors

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[164] AE 1960, +167 = AE 1962, 183 = AE 1971, 491 = AE 1972, +687 = AE 2005, +25.
[165] Translation, with slight changes, Levick 2002: 148.
[166] Kokkinia 2003: 200.
[167] IEph 1491, Oliver 1989: 300–303, 138 and TAM II 905, Oliver 1989: 307-320, 142-153.
[168] Oliver 1989: 366–388, no.184.
[169] ISmyrn 602 = IG II2 p. 376; Oliver 1989: 485–488, no.255.
[170] Schindler 1972, no. 2 = BullÉp 1973, 451= AE 1979, 624 = Milner 1998: 2, 1.18.

Septimius Severus and Caracalla, he addressed his petition "To the most beneficent emperors, Severus and Caracalla, saviours and benefactors of all mankind" ([*τοῖς εὐμενεστάτοις Αὐ*]*τοκράτορσιν* [*Σ*]*εο*[*υή*]*ρῳ* [*καὶ Ἀντωνίνῳ τοῖς*] *πάν*[*τ*]*ων* [*ἀ*]*νθρώπων* [*σωτῆρσι καὶ εὐερ*]*γέταις*).[171] Both Severus and Caracalla are further on in the letter named "most humane emperors" ([*ὦ φιλανθρωπ*]*ότατοι Αὐτοκράτορες*).[172] The city of Alexandria also receives due praise in the petition: Aurelius presents it as a place of "goodwill, reliability and friendship to the Romans" (*ἡ πρὸς Ῥωμαίους εὔν*[*οι-*]*ά τε καὶ πίστις καὶ φιλία*) and one that has "the best and most generous spirit and most conscientious [in dealing with the] fiscus" (*τοῖς καλλίσ[το]ις καὶ ἐλε*[*υθερω*]*τάτους ἔχουσαν τοὺς ἐνοικο*[*ῦν*]*τ*[*ας κα*]*ὶ π*[*ερι τα*] *μεῖ*[*ν*] *ἐπιεικεστάτους*).[173] Pliny's letters offer an additional glimpse of correspondence directly addressed to the emperor. In the very first letter of the collection, Pliny praises Trajan for his filial piety and his *virtus* and calls him *optimus princeps*.[174] Elsewhere, Trajan's *indulgentia* is repeatedly lauded for various services rendered.[175] His reign is described as "most fortuitous" (*felicissimus*) and Trajan as an excellent (*bonus*) prince.[176] Trajan's answers are famously terse in comparison, but he too occasionally couches his subordinate's conduct in strongly normative terms.[177]

Interestingly, we find normative language not just in direct correspondence with the emperor, but also in the correspondence between administrators. In a well-known inscription, the military engineer Nonius Datus recounts his travails in supervising the construction of an aqueduct.[178] The long inscription was found re-used in a later construction a few hundred meters outside of Lambaesis.[179] We will treat the case of Nonius Datus in more detail in a later chapter; what concerns us here are the two letters from high-ranking members of the imperial administration which were included in the inscription, dating to the late 140's and early 150's. In the longest of the two letters, the equestrian procurator Quintus Porcius Vetustines addresses Lucius Novius Crispinus, senator, legate of Numidia and commander of Legio III Augusta. Virtuous language appears in Vetustines' address to Crispinus: "My lord, you acted most benignant and from your kindness and benevolence in sending me Nonius Datus (...)" (*Benignissime, domine, fecisti et pro cetera humanitate ac benivolentia tua, quod misisti ad me Nonium Datum evocatum*).[180] Both Vetustines and Crispinus were aristocrats and high-ranking officials in their respective provinces. Egyptian papyri offer an interesting counterpoint in this regard. Second- and third-century documents such as a petition to a local prefect, petitions to *strategoi* and communications between a prefect and a *strategos* make no use of normative language or elaborate praise, instead preferring a rather sober, matter-of-fact style even when addressing superiors.[181] Only in the much later Panopolis papyri, dating to the closing years of the third century, do we see some normative language appear in the communication between officials. Among the documents, the local *strategos* of the Panopolite nome addresses his

[171] P. Oxy. 4.705 l.15-17.
[172] P. Oxy. 4.705 21; Oliver 1989: 475–481, nos. 246–247.
[173] P. Oxy. 4.705 l.31-32, 40-42.
[174] Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, 10.1.1-2. See also 10.14.
[175] Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, 10.3a.1., 10.4.1, 10.13.
[176] Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, 10.2.2, 10.13.
[177] See for example Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, 10.9 or 10.16.
[178] CIL VIII 2728.
[179] Lassère and Griffe 1997: 14.
[180] Translation here and below (with small adjustments) after Oleson 2008: 331.
[181] See BGU XV 2460, 2461, 2463, 2467.

procurator with titles such as Your Diligence (ὁ σός ἐπιμέλειος) and Your Clemency (ὁ σός ἐπιείκειος).[182]

These few examples only serve to highlight a more general trend. Different though these various documents may be in their intentions and their contexts, they all reflect basic Roman beliefs on how the state functioned. Emperors and officials considered themselves first and foremost to be moral agents, rather than cogs in an administrative system. The Roman state believed it could motivate its agents not primarily through force or material goods, but through appeals to honour.[183] The fulfilment of administrative duties was on the one hand envisioned as a burden of honour which imperial aristocrats were to take upon themselves in the service of the state, and on the other hand contributed to individual honour if suitably prestigious.[184] Naturally, such an envisioning of the Roman imperial apparatus also tied in deeply with normative beliefs about the legitimacy of power. By employing normative language in everything from edicts to state correspondence, the imperial administration presented itself as a system based on considerations of (aristocratic) honour and virtue. The extent to which provincials shared this view of the Roman state is another matter altogether. However, I would argue that by acknowledging the honourable qualities of a community or of high-ranking members of the local elite, the imperial court fostered loyalty to the state by co-opting provincials in the honour-based project of empire. It should be noted here that state correspondence – particularly when in favour of a local community – was rarely confined to the archives. Favourable letters from the emperors, grants of special rights or recognition of age-old privileges: these types of documents could be inscribed and displayed in public settings. A well-known example is to be found in Aphrodisias, where in the year 230 the city council had a curated selection of sixteen documents pertaining to the city's privileges and status inscribed upon a theatre wall.[185] The imperial administration believed itself to operate on the basis of honour, and this belief spread beyond the immediate environs of the court and the Roman aristocracy.

1.2.2. – Imperial titulature

Imperial titles were inextricably a part of 'official' communications.[186] Because they are so ubiquitous in ancient sources and often of a highly formulaic nature, it is easy to underestimate their persuasive nature. Yet imperial titles were important signifiers of honour, prestige and power. The imperial titulature consisted of several set elements, including the emperor's imperial titles, personal names, *cognomina ex virtute*, honorific epithets, dynastic references and political offices. Each of these elements neatly encapsulated imperial claims to legitimacy: illustrious ancestry (through the inclusion of lines of descent from previous emperors), military successes (through the inclusion of *cognomina ex virtute* commemorating the emperors' campaigns) and civic leadership (through the naming of the emperor's prestigious civic offices). Of particular interest to us, however, are titles referring to the emperor's character and honourable behaviour, often appearing in the form of virtue-epithets. These epithets are a relatively late development, starting with Antoninus

[182] See for example P.Panop.Beatty 1.85, 1.88. Translations Skeat 1964.

[183] Lendon 1997: 13–29.

[184] Lendon 1997: 176–236.

[185] Chaniotis 2003: 251.

[186] For official imperial titulature, see Hammond 1957; Syme 1958; Peachin 1990. Beyond the official titulature of the emperor, imperial subjects also occasionally adopted a host of unofficial titles, on which Frei-Stolba 1969; Scheithauer 1988; De Jong 2003. The 'correct' implementation of titles was far from universal however: see the wavering use of *nobilissimus Caesar* for Geta, Mastino 1992: 154–157.

being awarded the epithet *Pius* by the Senate and followed by Commodus' adoption of the titles *Felix* and (later) *Pius.*[187] After Commodus, the inclusion of *Pius Felix* became a more regular feature of the imperial titulature, though it was far from universal. Septimius Severus adopted *Pius* but not *Felix*; while Caracalla and Elagabalus adopted both. After Elagabalus the titles do not reappear until the coinage of Philip the Arab, though from Philip onwards they become commonplace elements of the imperial titulature, a situation lasting until the reign of Valentinian III.[188] Other titles were more short-lived but nevertheless telling in their ideological implications. Early Hadrianic coinage adopted the Trajanic title *Optimus*, for example, while Pescennius Niger employed the title *Justus* ("The Just/Rightful") in his titulature.[189]

The exact process of conferring or claiming imperial titles is not recorded in our sources.[190] In the first and second centuries the Senate appears to have been the political institution that, officially at least, bestowed titles upon the emperor. The Senate is explicitly named as offering the title of *Optimus* to Trajan and *Pius* to Antoninus.[191] Peachin has suggested that third-century emperors simply adopted titles, to be confirmed by the Senate at a later date.[192] Although the authority of the Senate may have suffered, it nevertheless appears to have retained its importance as a legitimising institution. Again, it was political actors close to the emperor which helped shape imperial representation, though naturally the succession of emperors also created strong precedents for what kind of imperial titles should be awarded at specific points in an emperor's reign. Neither should we forget the unofficial titles and nicknames bestowed upon emperors which played as much a role in imperial representation as the official titles awarded by the Senate.[193]

Though many provincial sources follow the set elements of imperial titulature in a manner that closely resembles 'official' usage, there was room for considerable flexibility. The space available in a given document likely played a role, as did the context of the document.[194] A large honorific inscription paid for by the community and placed on the forum would likely have included much lengthier imperial titles than a piece of tax documentation. Beyond such ad hoc choices, imperial titulature also shows more long-term changes across time in the provinces. Imperial titles grew in length between the first and third centuries, reaching their maximum length – in absolute numbers as well as percentage of the total inscription – under Septimius Severus and Caracalla, after which they became dramatically shortened.[195] Honorific epithets added an additional element of flexibility to the imperial titulature. Working with third-century Egyptian papyri, De Jong has argued that the linguistic choices made by scribes in Roman Egypt were not simply erroneous or random, but reflect both the communication of 'official' honorifics by the imperial court and the small but meaningful 'unofficial' choices which gave form to imperial power in a provincial context.[196] In both cases virtues and virtue-like honorifics appear with regularity, praising the emperor as 'invincible'

[187] Hammond 1957: 46–47.
[188] Hammond 1957: 49–50; Chastagnol 1988: 16–17.
[189] Hammond 1957: 44–45, 34.
[190] De Jong 2006: 92.
[191] Pliny the Younger, *Panegyric*, 2.7-8, 88.4; Cassius Dio, 70.1.2.
[192] Peachin 1990: 3; De Jong 2006: 92–93.
[193] Frei-Stolba 1969; Scheithauer 1988; Bruun 2003.
[194] De Jong 2006: 91.
[195] Saastamoinen 2010: 79–85.
[196] De Jong 2006: 98–135.

(*aettetos*/*aniketos*), 'most godloving' (*theophilestatos*) or 'most manifest' (*epiphanestatos*), among others. Some of these terms are likely Greek translations or interpretations of Latin titles such as *invictus* or *nobilissimus*, but others appear to be wholly local creations. Although such titles did not receive official backing, they nevertheless suggest the strong association throughout the empire between legitimate power and honorific titulature.

1.3. – What belongs to Caesar: imperial coinage

Imperial correspondence and other forms of administrative writing were an important way for the imperial court to communicate with its subjects in the provinces. But it would be wrong to see the written word as the sole medium of communication between Rome and the provinces. Combining words and images, imperial coinage has long played an important role in debates on the spread of imperial ideology and, more specifically, ancient notions of propaganda. The interest is easily explained. With time-consuming production methods and relatively low literacy rates, the direct impact of literature or administrative documentation is generally considered to have been fairly limited. Visual media such as sculptures or monuments were costly, time-consuming to produce and tied to a single location. Coinage on the other could be produced in bulk and could travel with relative ease between persons, cities and regions. And unlike panegyrists or provincial sculptors, the mint appears to have been under direct court control. While the obverse of imperial coinage traditionally bore the portrait of the emperor, the reverse could be filled with imagery, text or both. It is precisely the reverse which is usually interpreted as the canvas where individual rulers could propagate specific messages about their character, achievements and reign. The propagandistic potential of coinage has been the subject of fierce debate. Where scholars in the past have been highly critical of the propagandistic impact of imperial coins[197], the debate has moved to a more nuanced interpretation of their ideological potential.

At the core of this debate are two seemingly simple questions: who was responsible for the design of imperial coinage? And how were imperial coins interpreted, if at all? Both questions are, to some extent, irresolvable. Where agency is concerned, there are a number of cases where we might suspect a direct imperial interference in the coin design. One prominent example is the IMPER(ATOR) RECEPT(VS) PRAETOR(IANIS) RECEPT(IS) series, dated to the early days of the reign of Claudius. The coin series highlighted the reliance of Claudius on the Praetorian Guard in a direct and, to the emperor at least, somewhat unflattering way. As Reinhard Wolters notes, given the politically delicate nature of the image it is hard to conceive of such a coin being minted and distributed – possibly to the soldiers of the Praetorian Guard whom Claudius supposedly promised some fifteen thousand sesterces per person for their support[198] – without some form of imperial consent.[199] Such scenarios are, however, quite rare and involve a-typical issues. The responsibility for routine coinage designs are usually placed with the imperial mint and the mint officials[200], or the imperial court.[201] The two categories might well overlap. We know of various mint officials: *triumviri monetales* from Augustus (when their title appears on coinage) up until the Severan era, as well as the *procurator monetae* who appears from the time of Trajan onwards. How these various offices

[197] Jones 1974; Wallace-Hadrill 1981a.
[198] Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars V, The Divine Claudius*, X.4.
[199] Wolters 2003: 187.
[200] Levick 1999: 48–49.
[201] Noreña 2011a: 240.

differed from one another, and how they might have been involved in the design of coinage, unfortunately remains a mystery given our limited evidence. But although the emperor may not have personally approved of each and every coin type – let alone design them – it at least seems reasonable to presume that the mint or court officials responsible for coin types would both be aware of the general expectations of good imperial rule, as well as the ideological trends in and around the imperial court.[202]

A short-lived provincial branch of the imperial mint was active in Lugdunum, though mostly following the types set out by the master-mint in Rome.[203] Western provincial coinage was equally short-lived. Under the Julio-Claudians, especially Augustus, an attempt was made to kindle a western tradition of civic coinage which had the most impact in Spain.[204] By the mid-first century, however, the western provinces more or less exclusively used imperial coinage minted in Rome.[205] It would be wrong to envision the coins produced there as being disseminated into a provincial vacuum. Once released, new issues would have joined a host of older coin issues that remained in circulation. Coinage had a slow turnover rate in the Roman world, as evinced by numerous hoards containing coins of one or two centuries old. Taxation and state expenditure – primarily through the payment of troops and large-scale building projects – have been suggested as important mechanisms behind the distribution of coinage.[206] It is unlikely that the Roman administration solely or even primarily used newly minted coins to pay for the salaries, building projects and other expenditures it incurred, instead paying with 'old' coinage which had ended up back in the treasury through taxes collected in the provinces.[207] If the army – by far the largest point of expenditure for the Roman state – had been paid in newly-minted coinage, this would have resulted in a massive expenditure in precious metals for the Roman state.[208] The necessary continuous production of new coinage would have been untenable. This is not to suggest that topical messages found no home on imperial coinage. The IVDEA CAPTA types of Vespasian were minted in large quantities in May, June and July of 71, to coincide with the triumph of Vespasian and Titus in June of that year.[209] Cassius Dio also mentions the coinage minted by Brutus depicting two daggers and the freedom cap to commemorate his assassination of Caesar.[210] These types are however the exceptions that prove the rule. Generally speaking, imperial coinage was better suited to the slow dissemination of broad imperial ideals about just and legitimate power.

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[202] Manders 2012: 32–33.

[203] For the east the picture is very different: mints under direct control of the (local) Roman administration are attested in Pergamon, Caesarea in Cappadocia, Ephesus, Nikomedia, Antioch and Alexandria, see Wolters 1999: 48; Heuchert 2005: 30.

[204] Spanish elites seem to have issued coin series with some gusto in various *coloniae* and *municipia*, often staying very close in their imagery to imperial issues, see Ripollès 2005.

[205] The reasons for this shift from civic to solely imperial coinage, and the reasons why a similar development did not take place in the eastern provinces, are complex. Placing coinage within a wider societal spectrum, Burnett has noted that the reason for this change might have its root in rather practical considerations, arguing that most civic coinage would not have been freely exchangeable with other denominations (see Burnett 2005: 174–176). Beyond such practical considerations, Burnett also argues that it was the general outlook and aspirations of various civic communities in east and west which made for such different patterns of imperial coin usage (Burnett 2005: 176–179).

[206] Hopkins 1980.

[207] Noreña 2011a: 194.

[208] Duncan-Jones 1994: 176.

[209] Kraay 1978.

[210] Cassius Dio, 47.25.3.

The slow turnover of imperial coinage was further compounded by its methods of dissemination. Most imperial coinage found its way to the provinces via government expenditure and redirection through provincial and civic treasuries, and above all by soldiers who received their payment from these treasuries and subsequently spread coinage through local communities in the form of various transactions. Money-changers, bankers and other financial figures also played their part in the circulation of newly minted coinage through the empire. In none of these cases was the distribution of coinage evenly spread across the empire. Rather, coins most likely 'pooled' in those places where they were used most: army camps and urban environments.[211] Their mobility was limited, with a high heterogeneity between coin hoards even within the same regions, suggesting that coin issues did not spread evenly across (areas of) the empire.[212] This does not necessarily mean that audience targeting was unfeasible in the ancient world: clearly, the inhabitants of Rome or the various army communities were important elements for any emperor to placate, as well as conveniently in reach of imperial coinage distribution. Yet the distribution patterns of imperial coinage, much like the relatively low production of new coinage, set limits on the ability of coins to have a direct political impact throughout a wide area of the empire.

Far from weakening the ideological power of coinage, the slow turnover and non-topical imagery may in fact have been its greatest strength as a medium. Coins have been titled 'monuments in miniature' because of their commemorative potential, depicting imperial virtues and achievements in much the same way as a triumphal arch or some other imperial monument, although at a fraction of the cost and effort.[213] On a deeper level, the repetition of imagery between different emperors contributed to the legitimacy of the system as a whole, suggesting it functioned on a rational and moral basis.[214]

Imperial virtues in particular are a common motif on imperial coinage throughout the first three centuries A.D. That much is corroborated by the large database collected by Noreña, containing a sample of 179.285 coins, 142.798 of which are silver coinage and 36.487 bronze coinage, all dating from 69 to 235 A.D.[215] Noreña's database is problematic in some regards: his coin hoards are strongly skewed towards specific regions in the empire. His collection of silver coinage for example shows a geographical distribution lopsided towards the Balkans, where the majority of the silver coins (71%) on which his analysis is based were found.[216] His bronze sample on the other hand is most heavily focused on what Noreña terms "the West Continent", incorporating the vast area of Hispania, Gaul and both Germania Inferior and Superior.[217] Nevertheless, the data collected by Noreña is immensely valuable for gaining an understanding of the long-term pictorial trends in Roman imperial coinage. On the basis of his data, Noreña concludes that personified virtues were generally speaking a mainstay of imperial coinage, appearing on around 13% of all silver types and 11% of all bronze types. His conclusions grow stronger when we consider that coin legends – not

[211] Noreña 2011a: 195.
[212] Duncan-Jones 1994: 174–177.
[213] Cheung 1998: 56–58.
[214] One of the main arguments throughout Noreña 2011a: 101–177.
[215] Noreña 2011a: 30.
[216] Noreña 2011a: 30–32.
[217] Noreña 2011a: 32.

taken into account by Noreña – could also make explicit reference to the emperor's virtues independent of a personification on the reverse. Noreña divides his virtues in the following types:

Personifications of virtues on imperial coinage[218]			
Silver (Sample: 18,187)		**Bronze (Sample: 4,141)**	
Aequitas	24%	Pietas	26%
Pietas	20%	Virtus	23%
Virtus	13%	Aequitas	19%
Liberalitas	12%	Providentia	12%
Providentia	12%	Liberalitas	6%
Pudicitia	11%	Pudicitia	3%
Indulgentia	4%	Indulgentia	3%
Clementia	2%	Clementia	3%
Iustitia	2%	Iustitia	3%
Munificentia	<1%	Munificentia	2%
Patientia	<1%	Patientia	0%

Beyond personal virtues, Noreña also traces the development of a large number of normative concepts on imperial coinage.[219] As rightly emphasized by Noreña, these normative concepts were not considered personal virtues but were nevertheless intended to reflect positively on both the individual reign of the current emperor and the empire more generally. Naturally, there were changes from reign to reign. Moneta, the personification of the mint and a fair-handed monetary policy in general, comes in at 4% of all bronze coinage in the western provinces in Noreña's calculations. A closer look at Noreña's data, however, reveals that the majority of the finds (497 out of a total of 781) are not evenly distributed over time but originate from the reign of Domitian, who instigated widespread monetary reform in Rome. The Moneta issues can therefore be seen in a similar vein to other 'topical' coin issues, propagated during a single reign. Other normative ideals equally go through peaks and valleys, changing importance from one reign to the other. Yet beyond such shifts and changes on a reign-by-reign basis, the general picture is clear: normative ideals of power played an important pictorial role on coinage.

The subtle differences between bronze coinage and silver coinage, if reflective of actual minting practices, have interesting implications. Possibly, different values were systematically broadcast to different groups in imperial society by use of coinage designs. It is common knowledge that the Roman emperor had to generally fulfil the expectations of a number of important stakeholders in society, mainly the army, the Senate and the people of Rome. But the topic of a more systematic

[218] Taken from Noreña 2011a: 60.

[219] Noreña 2011a: 101–177.

kind of audience targeting in ancient coinage has been taken up repeatedly.[220] It has been argued that personifications on silver coinage were intended for a more highly educated audience, while the depictions on bronze coinage were targeted at the urban and uneducated lower classes that supposedly were less capable of understanding such abstract creations.[221] Certainly, silver coinage was not the type of coin used for daily expenses by the vast majority of the empire's population. Yet as Noreña's database suggests, normative ideals related to the emperor generally appear as frequently on bronze coinage as on the silver. This broad general pattern should not obscure more specific case studies which do imply that the imperial mint may have designed coinage with potential audiences in mind. The work of Kemmers, for example, suggests that the troops stationed along the Rhine frontier were targeted with specific ideological messages by the Flavian mint masters, while Marzano has argued for a differentiation of coin types in the commemoration of Trajanic building projects.[222]

This leads us to a second main question concerning coinage which has important implications for our understanding of the ideological potential of the medium: did provincial subjects in the Roman Empire actually look at the images on their coins? A.H.M. Jones scathingly compared Roman coinage to modern postage stamps in their overall use for analysing governmental policies and self-image.[223] Yet the designs of some coin types strongly point to the possibility that the mint was working from the assumption that the inhabitants of the empire looked at their coinage. Under Nero, a radiate crown was introduced to the imperial portrait on the *dupondius* (valued at two *asses*), while the imperial portrait on the *as* remained crowned with a laurel wreath. The coins are of roughly equal size, suggesting that the crown iconography was intended to play a role in the identification of the coinage. For additional visual contrast, the *dupondius* received the new mark 'II', a reference to the value of the coin. Although both coins were minted from different metals (copper for the *as*, brass for the *dupondius*) and thus could likely also be identified by their hue, the metallurgic aspects of coinage tended to be variable, producing coins of different hues and colours.[224] The marks on the *dupondius* were not always strictly enforced and we know of numerous issues from the third century where the visual distinction is not upheld. Yet the same radiate crown seems to also have been used to differentiate the *denarius* and the *antoninianus* or 'double-denarius', both silver coinage.[225] It should be noted however that the *antoninianus* was (initially at least) slightly larger and heavier than the *denarius*, suggesting that the visual depiction of the laureate crown was not the only means of identification. Still, the choice to use the visual means of expressing the value of *dupondii* and *antonininani* is telling: the imperial mint expected coin users – and not only learned coin users, given the low value of the *dupondius* – to look at the images on their coins and to comprehend their meaning. As stated above, the pictorial markings on both *dupondii* and *antoniniani* were not uniformly upheld, and both coin types did not just differ from *asses* and *denarii* in their imagery but also their metallurgic specification. Even given this nuance, however, the addition of the radiate

[220] Metcalf 1993; Hekster 2003; Kemmers 2006; Marzano 2009. A special take on the idea of audience-targeting is presented by Levick, who suggests the emperor was the main audience for coinage designs: Levick 1982; Levick 1999.
[221] Metcalf 1993: 344; supported by Marzano 2009: 128.
[222] Kemmers 2006: 219–244; Marzano 2009.
[223] Jones 1974: 63. The scathing remarks fall flat when considering that postage stamps can, indeed, be used to reinforce nationalistic sentiments: Deans and Dobson 2005; Brunn 2011; Reeves 2015.
[224] Vagi 1999: vol. 2, 89.
[225] Vagi 1999: vol. 2, 83.

crown to imperial coinage does seem a conscious decision to differentiate both types through imagery as well.

Ancient literature suggests that the interpretation of coinage was a relatively commonplace affair.[226] Macrobius notes that the god Janus was the first to mint coins, using the image of a ship on the reverse to commemorate his co-ruler Saturn[227]; Epictetus advocates refusing coinage stamped with Nero's image[228]; Cassius Dio reports two cases – under Tiberius and Caracalla – of men taking a coin with the emperor's image into an indecent location (a latrine and a brothel, respectively) and being charged with *lèse-majesté* as a result[229]; he also describes the aforementioned coinage issued by Brutus after the murder of Caesar in specific detail[230]; Ephraem Syrus condemns the depiction of pagan symbols (a bull and two stars) on the coinage of Julian[231]; Suetonius notes that Augustus liked to hand out coins as gifts "including old pieces of the kings and foreign money"[232]; Herodian mentions that Commodus was only willing to believe that his trusted praetorian prefect Perennis had betrayed him after he had been shown a coin with the usurper's image[233]; most famously of all, the evangelist Matthew mentions imperial coinage in an encounter between Christ and the Pharisees.[234]

A further piece of evidence is the re-use of old coin designs which by necessity implies that the minter of such coins was aware of the images on other coinage. Such occasions are admittedly rare. With Nero's effective fall from power in 68, a series of anonymous coins were minted in Spain that have been attributed to Galba.[235] These coins include a striking set of personifications which were last minted under the Republic, even the typology is in a number of cases taken directly from their Republican predecessors. In other cases, earlier imperial coinage was copied, but with different legends, for example changing the SECURITAS AUGUSTI which was first minted under Nero to SECURITAS R.P.[236] Whoever was in charge of these peculiar coin designs not only had seen Republican coinage, but managed to adequately copy issues in the expectation that the Republican messages on his coinage would be read. An even more extreme case can be found in the coinage of the late-third century British usurper Carausius, whose coinage not only included visual symbols of

[226] See also Wolters 2003: 193–195; Fears 1981: 911–912, n.395.

[227] Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 1.22.

[228] Arrian, *Discourses of Epictetus*, 4.5.17. In the passage, Epictetus suggests that it was general practice to refuse Neronian coinage because, like his character, it was supposed to be worthless. This statement might have some basis in fact: among the 1300 bronze coins found in a bar in Pompeii, less than one percent bore Nero's image, while Claudius and Tiberius were well represented: Rowan 2012; Duncan-Jones 2003: 174. Epictetus contrasts Nero to Trajan, whose coinage is widely accepted because he was a good ruler. The moral lesson is one of human nature, and how the influence of a person with a negative 'imprint' should be shunned. His numismatic example might therefore be a somewhat light-hearted pun comparing a person's character to the imprint on a coin, as suggested by Rowan 2012: 21.

[229] *Caracalla*: Cassius Dio, 78.16.5. *Tiberius*: Cassius Dio, 58, fragment 2.

[230] Cassius Dio, 45.22.3.

[231] Ephrem Syrus, *Hymn against Julian*, 1.16-1.18.

[232] Suetonius, *The Divine Augustus*, 75.

[233] Herodian, *History of the Empire*, 1.9.6-8, the Greek is not clear on whether the coin bore Perennis' image or that of his son (who would have been pushed forward as emperor); Hekster 2011: 112.

[234] Matthew 22.15-22.

[235] Wallace-Hadrill 1981b: 33–34.

[236] Wallace-Hadrill 1981b: 34.

imperial power (notably the she-wolf and the suckling twins) but also seems to make reference to lines from Virgil.[237]

It seems fair to conclude that at least some inhabitants of the empire (including the imperial administration) looked at their coinage and expected coins to bear images which carried meaning. But looking is of course a very different thing from understanding. When normative ideals were depicted in visual form on coinage, they almost universally took a female form. These personified figures were differentiated primarily through their attributes and their legends – though the latter did not always make reference to the personification depicted. To the modern eye, the host of draped female figures with an array of different attributes makes a bewildering impression. Yet the images on coins formed part of a broader visual language, expressed not only in coinage types but in all forms of imperial art.[238] This shared visual language did not limit itself solely to imperial monuments or coins. Victoria is a great example of a key element of imperial ideology that found its way into countless media, from terracotta lamps to fresco's, while retaining the same iconography.[239] We should also refrain from ascribing a singular meaning to the images on coinage. As Cheung points out, viewers with different levels of intellectual sophistication may draw different messages from coinage; whereas an uneducated viewer might simply pick up on the association between the imperial bust on the obverse and the personified virtue on the reverse, a member of the elite may be able to appreciate the finer points of the intended association.[240]

1.4. – The imperial gaze: the image of the emperor

The imperial court spread normative ideals of legitimate rule both through its administrative documents and its coinage. Yet it could also employ a more indirect medium: portraiture and sculpture. Like other media considered thus far, sculpture gives expression to normative beliefs about legitimate rule, though rarely as explicit as for example a panegyric. When sculptures and reliefs depict the emperor together with personified concepts, such as the Cancelleria Reliefs from Rome, the Arch of Benevento or the Parthian Monument from Ephesus, they show mostly personified places or institutions rather than, for example, imperial *pietas* or *virtus*. But this does not mean that the imperial image was wholly without any underlying normative claims to legitimacy, which could be expressed through stylistic choices and contextualisation. Consensus view holds that imperial images were a common sight throughout the Roman world, ranging from small busts to large-scale equestrian sculptures. The oft-cited numbers of Pfanner – who estimated that between 25,000 to 50,000 imperial portraits were present in the empire at any given time – are vague at best but serve to give an impression of scale.[241] These thousands of portraits and sculptures existed in a living urban context. Its presence changed the civic landscape – for example by claiming prestigious spaces in town, such as the forum or the interior of the town's basilica, which might otherwise have been the preserve of local rulers and civic elites. Statues conferred authority and legitimacy through their physical dimensions: their prestigious location, large size and specific shape set them apart from other sculptures. Yet statues also fostered legitimacy through consent, given that the vast majority of statues in the provinces were erected by wealthy provincials rather than imperial agents.

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[237] De la Bédoyère 1998.

[238] Toynbee 1956; cited in Cheung 1998: 54.

[239] Noreña 2011a: 307; see in general Hölscher 1967.

[240] Cheung 1998: 54–55.

[241] Pfanner 1989: 178. See also Højte 2005: 102–111. For more on production methods, see Fejfer 2009: 404–425.

As stand-ins for the emperor they conferred authority and legitimacy upon magistrates and courts.[242] Imperial statues provided sanctuary to runaway slaves or about-to-be-lynched bureaucrats.[243] Damaging, moving or even undressing in front of an imperial statue was fraught with danger, since it could lead to severe punishments.[244] Conversely, in times of crisis, imperial statues could become the target of various forms of public anger and violence.[245]

Roman thinking associated certain physical qualities with virtue and leadership, and the idea crops up continuously in imperial sources, perhaps most explicitly in the minute descriptions of imperial bodies in Suetonius.[246] Although there does not appear to be any sort of direct correlation between physiognomic treatises and imperial portraits, the attention for imperial bodies does alert us to the potential layers of ideological meaning inherent in imperial portraiture. This conclusion is not new, of course: (art) historians have long tried to connect broader ideological trends of an emperor's reign to his portrait types. Thus, Nero's Hellenistic decadence is to be found in his luxurious locks, Trajan's martial success and *virtus* in his sober appearance and military cut[247], while Hadrian's philhellenism was displayed through his bearded portrait.[248] Whether this was as obvious to ancient viewers as it appears to modern ones, remains an open question. Specific imperial virtues – let alone broad normative concepts of legitimate rule – are difficult to pinpoint in a portrait alone. This is not to suggest that the emperor's idealized features had no ideological value: they undoubtedly suggested his moral character, strength and charisma. Near-identical portraits of imperial princes – Gaius and Lucius, Caracalla and Geta – displayed the imperial *concordia* among the emperor's successors.[249] Such similarities in style could also be retained across dynasties to suggest continuity between the greatness of one emperor and that of his successor; the resemblances between portraits of Septimius Severus and the later Antonines are a case in point. Conspicuous breaks in style on the other hand could signal a change in ideological course for the new emperor, the veristic portraits of Vespasian being the most well-known example. But beyond such general ideological notions the ability of the imperial portrait to communicate specific normative beliefs on legitimacy remained limited.

Like imperial portraits, the ideological reach of sculpted imperial bodies was also limited. Still, the stock bodies employed for imperial sculpture were clearly aligned with specific imperial roles and the legitimacy that the successful fulfilment of these roles implied. Imperial statuary bodies fell into a set number of categories, which could differ in their individual details but were nevertheless

[242] Severian, *In Cosmogoniam*, 6.5.

[243] Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, 10.74; Philostratos, *Vita Apolloni*, 1.15.2; Perry 2015: 663–664.

[244] Cassius Dio, 67.12.2.; Tacitus, *Annals*, 3.70; Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.74.3; Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 58. It stands without question that the damaging of imperial statues was a serious offense in Roman law: *Digesta* 48.4.4-5. Note however that the literary anecdotes almost always involve emperors that were considered bad or cruel in ancient historiography: Tiberius, Caligula, Domitian and Caracalla. Some anecdotes cross into the absurd – such as Caracalla punishing a man for bringing one of the emperor's coins into a brothel (Cassius Dio, 78.16.5). This suggests that we should perhaps read the worst excesses of this type as part of the *topos* of the 'bad emperor': petty and overly concerned with his images. Such is also the case with Domitian, whose love of golden statues is compared unfavourably with Trajan in no uncertain terms: Pliny's *Panegyric* 52.1-5.

[245] Stewart 2003: 267–298.

[246] Evans 1969: 48–58; Trimble 2014: 124–129.

[247] Fejfer 2009: 270.

[248] Zanker 1995: 217–233.

[249] Fejfer 2009: 271–273.

consistently upheld across the empire. The emperor could be represented in toga (occasionally *capite velato*), in cuirass and as heroic nude; corresponding to idealized roles of the emperor as civic leader, triumphant commander and semi-divine hero.[250] These static body types could, in and of themselves, represent ideals of legitimate rule, at least from a Roman elite perspective. Statues depicting the emperor veiled and with *patera* in hand not only denoted his function as *pontifex maximus* but also clearly suggested his *pietas* towards the gods and the state. And it was no major leap of imagination to connect the image of the emperor in martial attire with both his actual successes on the battlefield and his innate *virtus* and *providentia*. The specific setting of the emperor in for example reliefs could furthermore add to the reading of the piece of sculpture: perhaps depicting the emperor showing *clementia* to conquered foes, *liberalitas* to his people or *concordia* by being depicted clasping hands with his heir(s).[251] And lastly, each statue was usually accompanied by an inscribed base, which could present further ways in which the emperor lived up to his role as legitimate monarch. As Trimble remarks of imperial statues: "Each one identified a need (e.g. for *pietas Augusti*) and at the same time demonstrated it being fulfilled."[252]

Given the limited number of stock bodies and types, imperial statues were less expansive in their expression of legitimacy than, say, a panegyric. The association between imperial image and for example an imperial virtue rested on the viewer's ability to interpret the piece and connect the dots. Yet it is beyond doubt that sculpture could play a legitimising role, presenting both individual emperors and the institution of emperor-ship as meeting the requirements of good rule. This ideological importance, coupled with the great similarity between portraits over vast distances, has led some past scholars to the conclusion that the imperial court strictly controlled the creation and distribution of imperial sculpture.[253] This view is now generally considered untenable given not only the immense logistical effort involved but also the variations in technical quality and style clearly present, even in copies of the same portrait type. Others have underlined the role of the provincial workshops which received one or more imperial prototypes from Rome and copied these for further distribution in the provinces[254]; and provincials with an interest in art and a fondness for expressing their loyalty to the emperor could order portraiture from one of the imperial workshops in Rome or elsewhere.[255] Current consensus suggests that we should take into account elements of all of these 'models'.[256] It is likely that provincial workshops played an active role, either in requesting prototypes from Rome or in creating their own variations on approved imperial portraits. The variety in portrait styles for any given emperor, as well as the varieties in quality and technique, suggest that workshops employed a number of different models. These indirectly conformed to the wishes of the court by adjusting or replicating 'approved' models, but nevertheless opened the imperial image up to local variation in material, size, style and finish.

The imperial court set the standards of visual representation of the emperor, but its reach was limited. The vast majority of dedications to the emperor outside of Rome were set up by civic office

[250] Niemeyer 1968; see Lahusen 1983: 46–56 for ancient literary recognition of these types.
[251] Trimble 2014: 147.
[252] Trimble 2014: 147.
[253] Hannestad 1988: 49.
[254] Pfanner 1989: 178–180.
[255] Zanker 1983: 9.
[256] Fejfer 2009: 408–425.

holders, benefactors or city councils. Perhaps more so than in other expressions of imperial ideology – which were more closely tied to Rome and the imperial court – statues and sculpture offered provincials a chance to participate in the shaping of imperial ideology. Though the ideological 'range' of a portrait may have been set by the imperial court, the specific elements of a statue offered provincials some leeway. The most obvious example is the inscription accompanying the statue, which could contain widely differing epithets, honorific clausulae and other local additions. But in visual aspects, too, we see some room for provincial adaptation, from the choice of body-type for the statue to the physical context the statue was to be placed in. One prominent example is the Sebasteion in Aphrodisias, where the early Julio-Claudian emperors are depicted as divine rulers and military conquerors, though in a style and sculptural context that is decidedly Greek.[257] Likewise, the *quadrifrons* in Lepcis Magna, to which we shall return in greater detail in the next chapter, depicts the Severan imperial family in virtuous scenes of *concordia* and *pietas* while under the protection of Lepcitan civic deities. Of course, provincials were bound by tradition and convention. It was unthinkable for a statue of the emperor to be placed in anything other than a highly visible and prestigious location. And the choice for an armoured stock body may be motivated as much by the available output of a local workshop as it is by a desire on the part of the dedicator to honour the emperor's *virtus*.

[257] Smith 1987; Smith 1988.