

Conclusion: One Political Culture, One Ideology

The preceding chapters have surveyed six “constituencies” and the ways dynastic monarchy affected their political cultures. Several common themes emerge. These common traits indicate a convergence of political cultures, which in turn can help to explain the striking uniformity of early imperial ideology.

We have seen that, under the Principate, the Senate began decreeing regular honors to the imperial family and in this way extended its legislative competence (see chap. 1). The equestrian order acclaimed the imperial family during processions and from reserved theater seats and thus bolstered its corporate identity (see chap. 2). The urban plebs offered permanent honors to the imperial family through myriad internal organizations, such as the *magistri vicorum*. As a theater crowd or violent mob, the plebs championed the imperial house against the Senate and individual senators. In these ways, the plebs retained a political voice even when it had lost formal electoral power (see chap. 3). Extra-urban citizen communities, such as the colony of Pisae, used both their traditional civic institutions and the imperial cult to honor imperial family members and forge ties with them. The communities thus established a system of direct contact with the imperial house that bypassed the Roman Senate and popular assemblies (see chap. 4). In such Greek cities as Mytilene and Sardis, initiative shifted from democratic organs to diplomacy and imperial cult honors, giving diplomats and priests local political ascendancy (see chap. 5). In the army, the *contio*, where soldiers offered imperatorial salutations to the emperor and his sons, continued to be a scene of political debate and reward. The legions and the Praetorian Guard employed the *contio* to make and unmake emperors (see chap. 6).

The common traits of these changes may be summarized as follows:

1. *Each constituency rendered honors to the imperial family.* Sometimes the constituencies rendered honors in concert, as when the Senate, equestrian order, and Roman people named Augustus pater patriae; sometimes they did so separately, as when the equestrian order alone named Gaius and Lucius *principes iuventutis*.
2. *The constituencies often rendered honors informally.* Informal honors, without recourse to formal debate and voting, are exemplified by the theater acclamations of the equestrian order and the urban plebs.
3. *The princes' careers brought them into contact with each constituency.* Typically, the princes were introduced in public with the ceremonial assumption of the *toga virilis*, on which occasion they might receive congratulatory embassies from Greek cities and offer a cash gift to the urban plebs. At this point (if not before), they began receiving requests to serve as *patroni* and honorary duumvirs of extra-urban citizen communities. Then, while the emperor remained in Rome, the princes assumed personal command of the legions.
4. *The dynastic principle and any dynastic changes were universally recognized.* So, for example, Tiberius's departure for Rhodes in 6 B.C., his return to Rome and adoption by Augustus in A.D. 2–4, and his accession in A.D. 14 were each acknowledged in renewed oaths of loyalty.
5. *Each constituency seemed to see its power and corporate identity enhanced.* New formations, such as the "*plebs urbana* of the thirty-five tribes," also appeared.
6. *Individual citizens came to dominate collectivities.* This was especially the case in outlying communities that relied on diplomatic contacts with Rome. Characteristically, these individuals had made their names during the civil wars, either as soldiers, as did Holconius Rufus of Pompeii and probably Statulenus Iuncus of Pisae, or as diplomats, as did Potamon of Mytilene. They consolidated their positions as priests of the imperial cult and then contrived to transmit them to their descendants, as Menogenes of Sardis did for his son Isidorus.
7. *The constituencies fit together in a hierarchy.* This hierarchy was shifting and dynamic. It might involve, for instance, knights emulating senators' electoral privileges; the people, Senate, and Praetorian Guard competing for initiative after Caligula's murder; or the plebs forcing the Senate to punish Piso and Seianus. But it was always loyalist, and it could be cited as evidence of a consensus of devotion to the regime, as in the Tiberian decrees.

Thus, while politics continued, the various political cultures of the empire converged toward a single model. This convergence, along with state propagandizing, contributed to the uniformity of expressions of imperial ideology.

We have repeatedly noted the role of propaganda during this period. This propaganda was created by the central Roman state and diffused by its representatives, such men as Vibius Serenus, the Baetican proconsul who published the *s.c. de Pisone*, and Cornelius Scipio, the *quaestor pro praetore* who coordinated cult honors to the imperial house in Achaia, offering “sacrifices to Augustus, and at the same time causing most of the cities of the province to do the same with him” (*SEG* 23.206, trans. Zetzel; see chap. 5). The uniformity of ideology will have been in part the result of such propaganda. For example, when Messenians honoring Scipio described the prince Gaius as “fighting against the barbarians for the safety of all mankind” and Pisans remembered Gaius for “waging a war beyond the furthest borders of the Roman people” (*ILS* 140; see chap. 4) or when Ovid called Gaius “current leader of youths and future leader of seniors” (*Ars am.* 1.194) and the Pisans spoke of him as “having already been designated *princeps*,” each will have been repeating themes that accompanied Gaius’s departure for the East in 2–1 B.C.

But Ovid, the Messenians, and the Pisans also expressed themselves so similarly because they belonged to a common political culture. Each offered honors to Gaius and the imperial family. They did so informally. Scipio “directed everyone to wear crowns and to sacrifice” (*SEG* 23.206, trans. Zetzel). In Pisae, despite the absence of local magistrates, “all the decurions and the colonial citizens collectively agreed among themselves” (*ILS* 140). Gaius’s career had brought him in contact with each of them. He had been acclaimed *princeps iuventutis* by the equestrian order, including Ovid and the Pisan Statulenus Iuncus; he was further characterized as the “sole defense” of Pisae. His dynastic position was recognized by all. In offering honors to him, individuals enhanced their own status. Statulenus Iuncus was named “*princeps* of our *colonia*” by the Pisans. Scipio was honored because he was “endowed with unsurpassed goodwill towards Augustus and his whole house” (*SEG* 23.206, trans. Zetzel). Finally, in honoring Gaius, each constituency was taking its place in a larger system, in what Pisans called the “consensus of all orders” (*ILS* 140). This study has attempted to explain how that consensus was constructed.