



The Equestrian Order

Quid melius Roma?
—Ovid *Pont.* 1.3.37

The fullest evidence for what the life of an Augustan *equus Romanus* involved, what activities he participated in and what ideological expressions he contributed to as an *equus*, is offered by the poet Ovid.¹ Though he declined a public career, Ovid's life exemplifies the fundamental trends of equestrian history: centralization around a core of civic functions, the centrality of the emperor, the emergence of a collective identity. This political culture forms the essential backdrop to the public response of the *equester ordo* to monarchy and the succession.

At about age fifteen (28–27 B.C.), Ovid followed his father into the Roman Forum to assume the toga and the *latus clavus*, the broad tunic stripe signifying that he would seek senatorial office.

The years slipping by with a silent step, my brother and I assumed the toga that meant more freedom, and our shoulders were covered by the purple of the broad stripe.²

... the toga of liberty ... when a crowd would gather round the tiro.³

1. Ovid's picture of equestrian life combines events and rites he participated in with ones he would have participated in had he not been exiled. For the historical value of Ovid's remembered or imagined testimony see F. Millar, "Ovid and the *Domus Augusta*: Rome Seen from Tomoi," *JRS* 83 (1993): 1–17.

2. *Tr.* 4.10.27–29: "interea tacito passu labentibus annis / liberior fratri sumpta mihique toga est, / induiturque umeris cum lato purpura clavo."

3. *Fast.* 3.771–90, at 771 and 787: "... toga libera ... ergo ut tironem celebrare frequentia possit."

Ovid held his first presenatorial office, *tresvir* (*Tr.* 4.10.33–34), but then, for unknown reasons, he “fled ambition” [*fugax ambitionis*] (38) and changed his stripe to an *angustus clavus* to reflect his standing as a permanent *eques*.

Though the Curia awaited, the width of my stripe was narrowed.⁴

But declining office did not mean abandoning public life. As a *iunior eques*, Ovid would mount his “public horse” for the 15 July procession called the *transvectio*, revived under Augustus, and parade from the Temple of Honos and Virtus outside the Porta Capena, past the Temple of Castor and Pollux, through the Forum, to the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitol, where the emperor conducted a quinquennial review (*recognitio*).

Remember, you would approve my life and morals as I passed before you on the horse you had given me.⁵

. . . so many times, I, an *eques* who was never called back, passed before you as you noted down our faults.⁶

More equestrian processions, *pompae Circenses*, opened the *ludi Megalenses* in April, the *ludi Apollinares* in July, and the *ludi Romani* in September, passing from the Capitol through the Forum to the Circus Maximus.

The Circus will be filled with the *pompa* and an array of gods, and the horses, like the wind, will seek the first palm.⁷

Every 15 February, there was the Lupercalia, which was exclusively equestrian under the Principate.

. . . when the dawn beholds the naked Luperci.⁸

An *eques* had a role in special ceremonies—state funerals and triumphs.

4. *Tr.* 4.10.35: “curia restabat: clavi mensura coacta est.”

5. *Tr.* 2.89–90: “at, memini, vitamque meam moresque probabas / illo, quem dederas, praetereuntis equo.”

6. *Tr.* 2.541–42: “. . . cum te delicta notantem / praeteriit totiens inreprehensus eques.”

7. *Fast.* 4.391–92: “Circus erit pompa ceber numeroque deorum, / prima ventosis palma petetur equis.”

8. *Fast.* 2.267–68: “. . . tertia post idus nudos aurora Lupercos / aspicit.”

The loyal plebs rejoices, and with the loyal plebs, the senate and the *equites*, among whom until recently I had a small part.⁹

At about age 35 (8 B.C. for Ovid), an *eques* could resign his public horse and join the equestrian *seniores*, receiving assignment to a jury panel. As *iudex*, Ovid arbitrated private disputes and sat as *centumvir*, hearing inheritance disputes.

Nor was the fortune of the accused wrongly entrusted to me in the cases investigated by the *centumviri*. Private matters, too, I settled as *iudex* without being impugned: even the losing party conceded my good faith.¹⁰

I would still be sitting as I was accustomed, as one *iudex* of the *centumviri*, listening to your words, a greater pleasure filling my heart as I followed and nodded at your speech.¹¹

Public life might bring other obligations for an individual *eques*, like escorting a friend to the Capitol to take office as consul.

While a throng of venerable senators formed a belt around you, I, as an *eques*, would have been ordered to march in front of the consuls.¹²

Equestrian standing also carried regular perquisites. At the theater and probably at the amphitheater and Circus, Ovid enjoyed the privilege of sitting in equestrian seats (the XIV rows), where, under the Principate, *equites* from different backgrounds came together. There, an *eques* like Ovid, an “heir to the *ordo*” (*Am.* 3.15.5; *Tr.* 4.10.7), an “*eques* not recently made by a gift of fortune” and “in the whirlwind of war,” might find himself beside an “*eques* reared on blood.”¹³

9. *Tr.* 4.2.15–16: “plebs pia cumque pia laetatur plebe senatus, / parvaque cuius eram pars ego nuper eques.”

10. *Tr.* 2.93–96: “. . . nec male commissa est nobis fortuna reorum / lisque decem deciens inspicienda viris. / resque quoque privatas statui sine crimine iudex, / deque mea fassa est pars quoque victa fide.”

11. *Pont.* 3.5.21–26: “at nisi peccassem, . . . / utque fui solitus sedissem forsitan unus / de centum iudex in tua verba viris, / maior et implesset praecordia nostra voluptas, / cum traherer dictis adueremque tuis.”

12. *Pont.* 4.9.17–18: “dumque latus sancti cingit tibi turba senatus, / consulis ante pedes ire iuberer eques.”

13. *Tr.* 4.10.8: “non modo fortunae munere factus eques”; *Am.* 3.15.6: “militiae turbine”; *Am.* 3.8.10: “sanquine pastus eques.”

I remember, it was the third day of the *ludi* [*Megalenses*], and a certain *senior* with the place next to me at the show said, “This was the day when, on the shores of Libya, Julius Caesar crushed the treacherous army of proud Juba. Caesar was my *dux*. Under him I had the glory of serving as tribune: he himself gave me the post. I won this seat in war; you acquired it in peace, taking advantage of the title of decemvir.” He was going to say more, but a sudden storm interrupted us.¹⁴

. . . Perhaps he could tell me how many times he had cut a man’s throat.¹⁵

Lastly, in what was again an imperial novelty, *equites* could claim a part in collective honors, notably in bestowing the title *pater patriae* on Augustus (5 February 2 B.C.).

Venerable *pater patriae*, to you the plebs, to you the Curia gave this name; and we the *equites* gave you this name.¹⁶

Thus Ovid describes coming to Rome, participating in a range of ceremonies, and joining the *ordo*, alongside the Senate and people, in calling Augustus *pater patriae*. This chapter is concerned with the relationship between these activities. It rests on, but is essentially distinct from, the work of C. Nicolet and S. Demougine on the juridical, prosopographical, and social definition of the late republican and Julio-Claudian *equester ordo*.¹⁷ It returns to a concern of A. Stein, namely, the corporate nature of the *equester ordo*.¹⁸ Stein emphasized that though the *equester ordo* was not a corporation and did not have a corporate legal personality, it was occasionally credited with corporate expressions, which Stein took to be embodied in formal *decreta*.¹⁹ This chapter builds on a full survey of equestrian corporate acts. The question it asks is not legal

14. *Fast.* 4.377–85: “*tertia lux, memini, ludis erat, ac mihi quidam / spectanti senior continuousque loc / ‘haec’ ait ‘illa dies, Libycis qua Caesar in oris / perfida magnanimi contudit arma Iubae. / dux mihi Caesar erat, sub quo meruisse tribunus / gloriis: officio praefuit ille meo. / hanc ego militia sedem, tu pace parasti, / inter bis quinos usus honore viros.’ / plura locuturi subito seducimur imbre.*”

15. *Am.* 3.8.21–22: “*forsitan et quotiens hominem ingulauerit ille / indicet.*”

16. *Fast.* 2.127–28: “*sancte pater patriae, tibi plebs, tibi curia nomen / hoc dedit, hoc dedimus nos tibi nomen, eques.*”

17. C. Nicolet, *L’ordre équestre à l’époque républicaine*, vol. 1, *Définitions juridiques et structures sociales* (Paris: Boccard, 1966), and vol. 2, *Prosopographie des chevaliers romains* (Paris: Boccard, 1974); S. Demougine, *L’ordre équestre sous les Julio-Claudiens* (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 1988); S. Demougine, *Prosopographie des chevaliers romains julio-claudiens* (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 1992).

18. A. Stein, *Der römischen Ritterstand* (Munich: Beck, 1927), 57–62.

19. Outside Rome, some local groups of *equites* did form corporations—e.g., at Lugdunum (see *ILS* 7024).

but practical: how did the *equester ordo* render corporate decisions if it lacked officers (spokesmen) and a corporate assembly? This chapter argues that corporate expressions were initially informal parts of ceremony that were subsequently formalized simply by being described as expressions of the *ordo*. Another way of saying this is that the theater served as the corporate assembly of the *equester ordo*. This conclusion gives new point to studies of the theater in imperial politics. It also points up an essential feature of the Principate that lays at the heart of this study: the way informal public displays of loyalty and consensus replaced more formal, rigorous republican practices. The chapter begins by drawing out some themes from the evidence for early imperial *equites*; then analyzes *equites*' means for corporate expression in the late Republic, Triumvirate, and Principate; and concludes by asking how these expressions came to be represented as formal acts.

Ovid's testimony is supplemented by a body of epigraphic evidence, the hundreds of tombstones; cornerstones; honors from communities, freedmen, and relatives; and even inscribed *res gestae* (by Cornelius Gallus) that first appeared under the Principate, documenting *equites*' careers and showing what mattered to them.²⁰ Together, these reveal the equestrian political culture that underpinned collective honors—the equestrian response to monarchy. This political culture had several characteristics.

The first characteristic was centralization around a core of civic institutions. The history of the *equester ordo* is a chapter in the Romanization of Italy, or the Italicization of Rome. The *ordo* comprised, essentially, the Italian municipal aristocracy, and the story is of a diffuse, peninsular aristocracy taking shape as a civic order. The change is utterly concrete: more institutions meant more reasons to come to Rome. The Principate, particularly the reestablishment of the *transvectio*, marked a watershed. In this sense, Ovid's world began to take shape with the census of 70/69 B.C. that recognized the enfranchisement of all Italy, when the citizenry as a whole doubled. As Cicero began his *Verrines* (70 B.C.), "a crowd from all Italy . . . had come together at one time from everywhere for the comitia, for the *ludi*, and to be registered in the census" (1.18/54; cf. 10/31).²¹ Even the farthest flung may be imagined to have visited the capital:

20. For Cornelius Gallus see E. Bernand, *Les inscriptions grecques et latines de Philae*, vol. 2, *Haut et bas empire* (Paris: CNRS, 1969), no. 128. For a vivid idea of the scale of changes see the round mausoleum that M. Lucilius Paetus, an Augustan *praefectus fabrum* and tribune, erected for himself and his sister on the Via Salaria: *CIL* 6.32932; Demougin, *Prosopographie*, no. 370; E. Nash, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, 2d ed., 2 vols. (New York: Praeger, 1968): 2: 344–45. At 34.9 meters in diameter, this is the third largest funerary monument of ancient Rome, after only the mausoleums of Hadrian and Augustus.

21. T. P. Wiseman ("The Census in the First Century B.C.," *JRS* 59 [1969]: 59–75, at 67–69) took this to imply that all citizens had to come to Rome to register for the census, too strong a reading.

Gades reputedly boasted more *equites* than any Italian city except Patavium, and Strabo reports, “few Gaditans actually dwelled at Gades; most lived on the sea, and some spent their time at Rome” (169/3.5.3).

Most of the civic institutions were imperial novelties. With the reestablishment of the *transvectio*, the title *equo publico* came to denote a live horse ridden in parade. Ovid’s testimony is corroborated by a series of funerary reliefs showing *equites* riding in the *transvectio*—for instance, T. Flavius Verus, *eques Romanus* of Ostia, on his public horse, wearing the *trabea* and receiving the olive crown, attended by two men (one a *viator* with a rod) and watched by two women.²²

As the number of civic functions grew, so did the reasons for coming to Rome. In particular, the Augustan religious revival reestablished or invented many equestrian priesthoods. The Lupercalia is celebrated in funerary monuments, such as the altar of Ti. Claudius Liberalis, *equo publico*, which shows him both in the *transvectio* and as a Lupercus in a loincloth, holding a purificatory lash in his right hand and wearing a ring on the left.²³ But the Lupercalia was merely the most famous equestrian rite, Lupercus the most prestigious priesthood. Other products of the Augustan religious revival not mentioned by Ovid included *pontifices minores*, *tubicines*, and *curiones*. Most are bare names, but they were constituent parts of the state, involving rites at Rome. So, at the top of the inscription honoring Q. Decius Saturninus, *patronus* of Aquinum, above his local and Roman magistracies, appeared “pontifex minor at Rome, trumpeter for the public rites of the Roman people, the Quirites.”²⁴ Another *eques*, the sort who might have been Ovid’s neighbor at the theater, rising to presenatorial office in the same decade as the poet after a full military career, had a *cursus* that reflects how priesthoods gave the *equester ordo* infrastructure, providing it with *collegia* and *magistri*: he was A. Castricius of Lanuvium, chief officer of the colleges of Luperci, Capitolini, and Mercuriales and the residents of the Aventine.²⁵

The second characteristic of equestrian political culture was the appearance of being unified and distinct, a cohesive class apart.²⁶ This introduces the hotly disputed question of equestrian status. For generations, scholars have

22. See P. Veyne, “Iconographie de la transvectio equitum,” *REA* 62 (1960): fig. vii; cf. figs. viii, x.

23. See Veyne, “Iconographie,” fig. ix. Cf. the freestanding statue of a young Lupercus in P. Zanker, *Augustus und die Macht der Bilder* (Munich: Beck, 1987), fig. 105.

24. *ILS* 6285: “pontif(ex) minor Romae, tubicen sacror(um) publ(icorum) p(opuli) R(omani) Quirit(ium)”; Demougin, *Prosopographie*, no. 269. Cf. *ILS* 6286; Demougin, *Prosopographie*, no. 268.

25. See *ILS* 2676, add. (EJ 235); Demougin, *Prosopographie*, no. 53.

26. For the importance of separateness see P. A. Brunt, “The *Lex Valeria Cornelia*,” *JRS* 51 (1961): 71–83, at 76ff.

sought to provide a sovereign definition of equestrian status. “All members of the equestrian order are *equites equo publico*,” Stein pronounced, a view seconded by Nicolet and Demougin, who state that the census of four hundred thousand sesterces was necessary but not sufficient.²⁷ Others have sought to chop the order up into status gradations.²⁸ T. P. Wiseman argued that all making the census qualification were *equites* and that those having the public horse were an elite within the order.²⁹ F. Millar spoke of a broad class of census holders and officeholders and a narrow class of those who had received the grant of the public horse or an appointment to the jury panels from the emperor.³⁰ But it is possible to take a radically different perspective on the issue. There never was and never will be a single, independent definition of equestrian status. Status was a live issue in antiquity and is a live issue today. Rather than a single definition, there was a tangled set of overlapping categories and definitions, including pedigree (son of senator or *eques*, or, more broadly, agnate, cognate, or affine kin of a senator in the last three generations), military service, wealth (a census of four hundred thousand sesterces), status symbols (a gold ring, a gold necklace, a broad or narrow stripe, a *trabea*), perquisites (the XIV rows), public function (equestrian priesthood or office, jury panel, equestrian voting century), and participation in ceremony (*transvectio*, with the *equus publicus*). The qualifications themselves were interlinked. This may be seen in the dossier of Tiberian senatorial decrees, where the representatives of the *equester ordo* participating in funeral rites for Germanicus were “those who to the . . . order and have the [stripe? public horse?] and . . . come to the Campus [with? without?] the stripe, and those who have the public horse come to the Campus with *trabae*” (*T. Heb.* lines 54–57). The rule that the elder Pliny cited (*HN* 33.32) was that those who could wear a ring had to be freeborn going back three generations in the agnatic line, had to have a census valuation of four hundred thousand sesterces, and had to have the right to sit in the XIV rows of the theater according to the *lex Iulia theatralis*. It is no use trying to boil this down. Different circumstances demanded different standards. For a prohibition or a prescription, a broader definition of *equus Romanus* was used; for a privilege, a narrower definition. It was never possible to speak meaningfully of a simple *eques* (except as a shorthand that all understood or did not trouble to pin down).

Paradoxically, it was possible to speak of expressions of the *equester ordo*.

27. Stein, *Der römischen Ritterstand*, 54–57.

28. M. I. Henderson, “The Establishment of the *Equester Ordo*,” *JRS* 53 (1963): 61–72.

29. T. P. Wiseman, “The Definition of *Equus Romanus* in the Late Republic and Early Empire” (1970), reprinted in *Roman Studies: Literary and Historical* (Liverpool: F. Cairns, 1987): 57–73.

30. F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World*, 2d ed. (London: Duckworth, 1992), 279ff.

In the Tiberian dossier, equestrian expression was a matter of visible, public acts at the Lupercalia during the 15 July procession and especially in the XIV rows. In Pliny, unity is a matter of visible insignia, namely, rings. This created an appearance and a perception of unity. Though the order was divided, and though the Senate could not simply address *equites* in the dossier and the Larinum decree, it had been possible for Cicero to speak of an *ordo* (*Verr.* 2.1.47/124) and for the Senate to treat both the *equites* at the theater and the *iuniores* in the *transvectio* as representing the *equester ordo*. In speaking of the *equites* who demonstrated around the Curia during Piso's trial, the Senate extended the corporate metaphor.

Loyally understanding how great a matter, pertaining to the safety and devotion of all, was being deliberated on, [the equestrian order] declared with repeated acclamations [*frequentibus adclamationibus*] the feelings in its heart [*animi sui*] and grief for the wrongs suffered by our *princeps* and his son.³¹

Costumes, theater seats, and the range of civic functions gave the *equites* more than just an appearance of unity. In his highly personal digression, the elder Pliny describes a process he saw as culminating in the year of his birth, A.D. 23 (*HN* 33.29–34).

In the ninth year of Tiberius's principate, . . . when C. Asinius Pollio and C. Antistius Vetus were consuls, in the 775th year after the founding of the city, the *equester ordo* came together as one [*in unitatem venit equester ordo*].

Pliny saw new unity in costume (gold rings: "these insignia were sought by multitudes"; "they began to be sought after"), theater seating (the *lex Iulia theatralis*), and the jury panels (scarcely able to be filled under Augustus, then Caligula added a fifth). This is important, because Pliny saw unity where others would have been able to see it too: insignia now defined membership. But the boundary in time he chose had to do more with rhetoric and personal pride than with history.

The third characteristic of equestrian political culture was the role of the emperor, who granted the right to wear insignia, made appointments to posts and panels within the *res publica* and appointed private secretaries and procurators, and conducted a censorial review.³² For Ovid, Augustus may have

31. Tacitus *Ann.* 3.14.4–5.

32. For the emperor's role see F. Millar, "Some Evidence on the Meaning of Tacitus *Annals* xii, 60," *Historia* 13 (1964): 180–87; Millar, *Emperor*, 83–101, 284–90; and especially R. P. Saller, "Promotion and Patronage in Equestrian Careers," *JRS* 70 (1980): 44–62.

assigned the *clavus*, awarded the public horse, personally performed the *recognitio*, and made assignments to the jury panels. For Pliny, unification had been brought about by a series of individuals: the Gracchi, Cicero, the first four emperors. *Equites* returned corporate and individual recognition. This chapter is concerned with corporate recognition, but it is worth pointing out that, on an individual level, virtually all surviving Julio-Claudian equestrian building dedications are to the imperial house, a crudely simple exchange of benefactions for honors.³³

Nearly all known corporate expressions by the *equester ordo* were honors to individuals, especially to potential emperors.

- Cicero *Phil.* 6.13, 7.16 (43 B.C.): statues to Lucius Antonius, *patronus*
 Suetonius *Aug.* 57.1 (n.d.): birthday honors to Augustus; vow for Augustus's health
 Augustus *Res gestae* 14.2 (5, 2 B.C.): *princeps iuventutis* and other honors to Gaius and Lucius
 Augustus *Res gestae* 35.1; Ovid *Fast.* 2.128; Suetonius *Aug.* 58.1 (2 B.C.): Augustus named *pater patriae*
 Dio 55.12.1; *ILS* 140, lines 11–12 (A.D. 2, 4): funeral honors to Lucius and Gaius
 Suetonius *Claud.* 6.1 (A.D. 14, 31): Claudius sent as *patronus* to consuls
RIC 1, p. 96, no. 8 (reign of Caligula): honors to Augustus
 Tacitus *Ann.* 2.83.4; cf. *T.Siar.* fr. ii, col. b, lines 22–23 (A.D. 19): funeral honors to Germanicus
 Tacitus *Ann.* 3.71.1 (A.D. 22, 23): vow for Livia's health; funeral honors to Drusus
 Dio 58.2.7–8 (A.D. 29): statues, embassies, and other honors to Seianus
 Dio 59.6.6 (A.D. 37): Claudius ambassador to Caligula
RIC 1, p. 134, nos. 91, 95–97 (reign of Claudius): Nero *princeps iuventutis*

Further corporate acts probably lurk behind references to consensus and in other places where evidence of a precise role does not survive. But the sample preserved is sufficient to talk about the image the order projected of the ruling power and the image it projected of itself. Like the dossier of senatorial decrees, the equestrian honors recognized power extending beyond the emperor to a dynastic house, to women as well as men, to those holding official positions and those not holding them—to Livia, Germanicus, Drusus. With a proprietary pride, they honored prospective leaders who were at the time themselves

33. For the evidence of equestrian building see D. Kienast, *Augustus: Prinzeps und Monarch* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1982), 343–65.

equites—Gaius, Lucius, Nero, Seianus, and even Claudius. They were concerned with the succession, and they paraded exemplary figures. They were concerned with maintaining the status quo, and they declared loyalty at moments of transition or threatened transition—vows for Augustus’s and Livia’s health. They galvanized the tradition and provided the terms by which honorands were known, both titles and iconography. In iconography, Gaius and Lucius appeared with their shields and spears; in epigraphy, they were styled *principes iuventutis*.³⁴ In short, the unified *equester ordo* helped form the imperial ideology.

The self-image is one of a loyal, quiescent order, contrasting with the disruptive publicans of the late Republic. Equestrian corporate honors made the *ordo* part of the Roman polity. This is the creation of early imperial society. The *principes iuventutis* and *seviri* (ceremonial leaders: Gaius is the first attested) were makeshift officers, helping the conglomerate to seem more like a corporate body by giving it a head. The title *princeps iuventutis* also reflected the position of the *iuniores* of the *equester ordo*, both synchronically and diachronically, as youth, the coming generation, the state’s reservoir of talent, the second order.³⁵ This is expressed by Ovid: “nunc iuvenum princeps, deinde future senum” (*Ars am.* 1.194). In the funeral honors to Germanicus, the idea takes a different form: “useful to the youth of our children’s and their children’s generations,” (*T.Siar.* fr. ii, col. b, line 17). Ideologically, the imperial house became the mirror of Roman society, emperor and prince corresponding to Senate and *equester ordo*—a dynamic picture that highlighted upward mobility in the next generation; the *equester ordo* was not a permanent estate. More subtly, corporate honors mitigated the problem of heterogeneity and conglomerate character. An *eques* of any condition could bask in the reflected glory of having a prince associated with his rank. It only remains to see how *equites* expressed themselves.

For the late Republic, matters have to be seen from the perspective of a non-*eques*, Cicero. Cicero gauged and cited the important equestrian component of his *consensus omnium ordinum* through two channels, one that had a future and one that did not. He expected his public and Atticus to take these channels as reliable indicators of equestrian opinion. The first channel comprised decrees of the companies of publicans. Publicans’ companies met in Rome under *magistri*. They prepared welcomes for magistrates, sent and received letters, and passed decrees. Cicero’s words on returning from exile (in 57 B.C.) imply that the *equester ordo* itself lacked a mechanism for producing decrees (*Cicero Dom.* 73–75; cf. 142, *Vat.* 8).

34. See P. Zazoff, *Die antiken Gemmen, Handbuch der Archäologie* (Munich: Beck, 1988), fig. 100, no. 5; silver and gold from Lugdunum: *BMC* 1, figs. 13–14.

35. See C. Nicolet, “Augustus, Government, and the Propertied Classes,” in *Caesar Augustus: Seven Aspects*, ed. F. Millar and E. Segal (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984): 89–128.

What deliberative body [*consilium*] is there, great or small, that did not judge my achievements to be most beautiful and all that one could wish? The Senate decreed . . . Closest in dignity to the Senate is the *ordo equester*; and all the companies for all the public revenues produced most handsome and most distinguished *decreta* concerning my consulship and my achievements. The scribes decreed . . . No college in the city did not decree . . . And shall I recall those divine, immortal decrees of the *municipia, coloniae, and tota Italia*?

This is interesting, because the *consilia* are both inside and outside the *res publica*. Outside the companies, the *equites* were capable only of informal expression. The second channel for equestrian expression was the theater.³⁶ Crowd reactions were informal, but once the *lex Roscia* (67 B.C.) had created the XIV rows, *equites* could be isolated at the theater, and Cicero could cite the expressions of whoever happened to attend the show as representing equestrian opinion. (The following are paraphrases.)

In 63 B.C., at a wooden theater where the Theater of Marcellus later stood, when the praetor and author of the theater law, Roscius Otho, entered, the plebs hissed, and the *equites* applauded. The plebs hissed again, and the *equites* applauded louder. The two groups faced each other and exchanged curses. But after Cicero rebuked and exhorted the plebs from the steps of the Temple of Bellona, the plebs applauded Otho, competing with the *equites* to show him honor and esteem. (Plutarch *Cic.* 13)³⁷

At the *ludi Apollinares* of July 59 B.C., when Julius Caesar entered the theater, the crowd was silent. But when C. Scribonius Curio *filis* followed, the *equites* rose and applauded. (Cicero *Att.* 2.19.3)

At the *ludi Megalenses* of July 57 B.C., senators and *equites* stood when the consul Lentulus entered. (Cicero *Har. Resp.* 11/22)

At the *ludi Florales* of April–May 57 B.C., Cicero recalled to a jury of senators and *equites* that an actor delivered a line and pointed toward “your *ordines*.” (Cicero *Sest.* 115–27)

Both decrees and theater demonstrations relied on *equites* coming to Rome. Both were external to the *res publica*. But after the time when Julius Caesar

36. For the evidence see T. Bollinger, *Theatralis Licentia* (Winterthur: H. Schelenberg, 1969), 25–29.

37. For an inspired study of this episode see F. Coarelli, “Il tempio di Bellona,” *BullComm* 80 (1965): 37–72.

ended the farming of direct taxes in Asia and closed down the *collegia*, references to publicans' decrees end: the companies fell silent. Publicans did not disappear, but their companies vanished from the political scene. After the fall of the Republic, only the theater remained an important part of equestrian political culture.

As Rome prepared for renewed civil war after the ides of March, a number of individuals seeking or claiming equestrian support came forward. Equestrian corporate activity entered a new phase. Once more, one channel had a future, and one did not. First, there was a failed initiative that documents the decline of publicans' powers and the *equester ordo's* lack of independent financial and organizational resources. In 44 B.C., "[s]ome people devised the idea that a private fund [*privatum aerarium*] should be set up for Caesar's assassins by the Roman *equites*," Nepos reports critically (*Att.* 8.3–4, trans. Horsfall), adding:

They thought it could easily be brought about if the leading men of the *ordo* contributed money. So Atticus was appealed to by C. Flavius, an intimate of Brutus, to lead the scheme. But because he thought that services should be performed for friends without taking sides [*sine factione*], and he had always kept away from that sort of plan . . . the conspiratorial association was shattered by just this one man's dissent.

Then, in 44–43 B.C., statues appeared in the Roman Forum bearing inscriptions to L. Antonius, *patronus*, from the thirty-five tribes, *equites Romani equo publico*, two-time tribunes in Caesar's army, and Ianus Medius (bankers) (*Cicero Phil.* 6.12–15; cf. 7.16).³⁸ There is no indication of how this honor was effected and how the statues got there. But Cicero was able to reverse his earlier attitude and harp on the extraconstitutional nature of the order and its expressions. In the *Philippics*, Cicero expressed indignation about the extension of *patrocinium* to extraconstitutional orders. "Whom did this *ordo* [*iste ordo*] ever adopt as *patronus*?" he asked of the *equites*. "What *ordo* is this?" he asked of the tribunes. In that *equites* and tribunes lacked formal means to adopt *patroni*, Cicero was right. But the statues were also a logical development—or embodiment—of something resembling Cicero's own *consensus omnium ordinum*, as he came close to admitting: "If the *equester ordo* adopted anyone as *patronus*, it should have been me!" Despite their constitutional impropriety, the statues were a real part of the political landscape of the time,

38. On the Ianus Medius see J. Andreau, *La vie financière dans le monde romain* (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 1987), 707–9.

embodying the deformation of political culture by personal power. They may be seen as the earliest corporate expression of the *equester ordo*.

Under the empire, equestrian honors continued to be rendered informally. There is no evidence of official roles, even for a Maecenas or a Vedius Pollio or a Sallustius Crispus (prominent Augustan *equites* and symbolic social leaders) speaking on behalf of the order. In fact, the honors seem to make up for a lack of equestrian officers by appointing leaders for occasions when they were needed—for example, in parades (Gaius as *sevir*; *principes iuventutis*) and on embassies (Claudius as *patronus*). Instead, collective honors took the form of an extension of the order's ceremonial activity in Rome: in memorials for Drusus, at the Lupercal, in the *transvectio*, in all theaters. Some new ceremonies were created: all orders annually cast gifts (*stipes*) for Augustus's health into the Lacus Curti in the Forum (Suetonius *Aug.* 57.3). But all took place at Rome. The vow for Livia's health (A.D. 22) is the exception that proves the rule. Tacitus reports from Senate acts that "a religious question arose" (Tacitus *Ann.* 3.71.1).

In what temple would be placed the offering the *equites Romani* had vowed to Equestris Fortuna for the sake of Augusta's health? For though the goddess had many shrines in the city, none carried exactly that epithet. But it was discovered that there was a temple with that name at Antium and that in the towns of Italy, all the rights, temples, and statues of divinities were under the jurisdiction and the authority of Rome. So the offering was placed at Antium.

In particular, the theater played a prominent role. A neglected social critic, Phaedrus, shows how the pattern of theater politics was essentially continuous with Cicero's age, with a telling difference: Cicero referred to *equites*, Phaedrus to the *equester ordo*.³⁹ An imperial freedman composing verse fables in the latter half of Tiberius's reign, Phaedrus set some tales in a timeless world where animals stand for human weaknesses, other tales in the immediate human world. Though he considered the fable a slave's literature of dissent in the tradition of Aesop, his satire never extended to the imperial house. His tale of a popular stage flautist (*tubicen*) named Princeps shows many of the features of the late republican theater—the crowd reacting to lines and demanding encores, the interplay between *ordines* (Phaedrus 5.7). It also reflects the essential difference: that the crowd was now expressing itself

39. See M. Schanz and C. Hosius, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur*, 4th ed., 4 vols. Munich: Beck, 1927–35): 2:447–56.

not about an individual magistrate but about the emperor and his house. Princeps, having fallen and broken his shin, is persuaded to return for the *ludi* on crutches.

When the *tubicen* arrived, rumors about him were spreading around the theater. Some said that he was dead, others that he was going to appear any moment. The curtain dropped, thunder roared, and the gods spoke—in the traditional way. Then the chorus began a chant. New to Princeps, the chant went like this:

laetare incolumis Roma, salvo principe.
[rejoice, secure Rome, for the *princeps* is safe.]

As the crowd stood together to applaud, the *tubicen* blew kisses, thinking his fans were welcoming him. The *equester ordo*, recognizing his stupid mistake, laughed and demanded an encore. The chorus repeated the chant. Our hero bowed deeply. Delighted, the *equites* applauded, while the *populus* thought Princeps was receiving applause on the chorus's behalf. But when the truth was seen throughout the stands, Princeps, in his snow-white bandage, snow-white tunic, and snow-white shoes, having arrogated to himself honors for the *domus divina*, was thrown out headlong by all.

The theater remained a place where *equites* could express themselves and where their opinion could be isolated and taken as representing the view of the *equester ordo*.

The theater also provided a platform for dissent. The single exception to the rule of loyal equestrian obedience took place at the theater. During Tiberius's triumphal games in A.D. 9, *equites* protested against the law penalizing bachelorhood and childlessness, to be strengthened in the *lex Papia Poppaea* (Suetonius *Aug.* 39.2–3).

Augustus had emended the *lex de maritandis ordinibus* more severely than other laws . . . Seeing the *equester ordo* obstinately demanding [*postulante equite*] its abolition during a public spectacle, Augustus had Germanicus's children brought in and presented them, some in his arms, some in their father's arms. By gesture and expression, he let them understand that they should not object to imitating the example of the youth.

Dio has a more elaborate version of this story, a set piece in which Augustus reassembles the *equites* on the Campus Martius in two groups, compliant and

noncompliant, and addresses them in turn (Dio 56.1–10). But Suetonius’s version is enough to show the essential point: that *equites* could use the theater to express themselves spontaneously about something that mattered to them, not just an individual, but a law. Dissent took place within the same context as loyalism: chants in the theater. So did the official response, which was that the dynastic house was exemplary. It is important that the *equites* took the outcome of the comitial vote on the law to be a foregone conclusion and did not hope to express themselves through the centuries. The *res publica* was of no use to them.

The XIV rows might serve as a corporate assembly of the *equester ordo*. It is therefore unsurprising that many honors focused on the theater: curule chairs in honor of Germanicus in theaters during the *ludi Augustales*, wedges of seats named after Germanicus and perhaps Gaius and Lucius, the *ordo* expressing *dolor publicus* for the younger Drusus “in all theaters.”⁴⁰ It is more interesting that Suetonius makes a logical link between Claudius being chosen as *patronus* of the *ordo* and the XIV rows (*Claud.* 6.1).

The *equester ordo* twice chose Claudius as its *patronus* to serve as ambassador on its behalf, first when it petitioned the consuls for the honor of carrying Augustus’s corpse to Rome on their shoulders, and again when it congratulated the consuls after Seianus had been put down. For [*quin et*] it was accustomed to rise when he entered the theater, its members taking off their mantles.

Claudius could be approached because the XIV rows customarily honored him. This in itself is important. Even if formal procedures were lacking, equestrian consensus was manifest—both to *equites* themselves and to the rest of the theater crowd. Such mass mobilization goes a long way toward explaining why Romans apparently accepted the end of the Republic and the establishment of monarchy so seamlessly.

These honors were never formalized. Rather, they were simply described as corporate acts.⁴¹ In its funeral honors for Germanicus, the imperial Senate did exactly what Cicero had done. First, it cited the informal acclamations

40. For *cunei* named after Gaius and Lucius see Demougin, *L’ordre équestre*, 808–9, on Martial 5.14.1–5.

41. The last line of a marble plaque found near the Theater of Marcellus apparently referring to an appellation at the moment when an imperial prince doffed his childhood garment may suggest formal Senatorial approval of equestrian honors: “[C. vel L. Caesari Augusti f(ilio) Divi I]ulii nepoti / [co(n)s(uli) desig(nato) principi] iuventutis a se / [appellato post deposita p]ueritiae insignia / [equester ordo pe]rmissu senatus” (*CIL* 6.40326). It is more probable that the Senate gave permission to erect the plaque. The chief value of the document is to link *princeps iuventutis* with the *tirocinium*. An acclamation was probably performed on the spot.

and gestures as corporate expressions. Then, in summarizing, it lumped these with formal decrees and other displays of loyalty to form *consensus omnium ordinum* or *pietas omnium ordinum*.⁴²

Because honors originated as informal acts, without a permanent documentary record, it was also possible not to cite them. The possibilities are illustrated in the case of the title *pater patriae*. Ovid spoke of his own role, as an *eques*: “venerable pater patriae, to you the plebs, to you the Curia gave this name; and we the *equites* gave you this name” (*Fast.* 2.127–28). Augustus credited the same tripartite polity: “The Senate and *equester ordo* and *populus Romanus* everywhere named me pater patriae” (*Res gestae* 35.1). But the fullest account, from Suetonius (*Aug.* 58), does not explicitly mention the *equites*.

Everyone, by instant and complete agreement, bestowed the cognomen *pater patriae* on him: the plebs, by an embassy dispatched to Antium; then, since he did not accept, the crowd at the theater, wearing laurel crowns, as he entered Rome; next, in the Curia of the Senate, neither by decree nor by acclamation, but through Valerius Messala, who said, with the backing of all: “Good fortune to you and your house, Caesar Augustus! For we believe that this ensures eternal prosperity and happiness for the state. In accord with the *populus Romanus*, the Senate hails you as pater patriae.”

The *fasti* of Praeneste, deriving, like all municipal *fasti*, from acts of the Senate, also does not explicitly name the *equites*: “a senatu populoque Romano pater patriae appellatus” (Verrius Flaccus, *F. Praen.*, *Inscr. Ital.* 13², p. 119).⁴³ Thus, the appellation looked as if it came from the *res publica*, though in Suetonius’s account there was never a vote by the *comitia* of the *populus*, only an embassy from the plebs, never a decree from the Senate, only an address from Valerius Messala. The *equester ordo* was never formally incorporated in the *res publica*. Its role was visible and important from some perspectives, negligible from others. The imperial polity could not be constitutionally defined; it appeared different from different perspectives. But the perspectives of the emperor and an individual *eques*, Ovid, carried their own weight.

The citation of informal honors belongs in the context of acclamations gradually appearing in formal pronouncements.⁴⁴ Recognizable by their gram-

42. *T.Siar.* fr. ii, col. b, line 22; cf. *ILS* 139, lines 11–12.

43. This is the only reference to an act of the *populus Romanus* in all of the extant municipal *fasti*.

44. For the evidence on ratifying acclamations see *Diz. epigr.*, s.v. *consensus*. For Roman acclamations see A. Alföldi, *Die monarchische Repräsentation im römischen Kaiserreiche* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1970), 79–88. For Greek ones see L. Robert, “Une

metrical isolation, syllabic rhythm, and descending order, acclamations had an important place in Augustan Rome. Suetonius reports, “When Augustus returned from a province, not only all sorts of welcomes but rhythmic chants [*modulata carmina*] accompanied him” (*Aug.* 57.5). When a false rumor of Germanicus’s return to health circulated in A.D. 19, the plebs chanted: “*salva Roma, salva patria, salvus est Germanicus*” (Suetonius *Calig.* 6.1). The recording of acclamations was new. Pliny’s *Panegyric for Trajan*, which contains many acclamatory formulae, states that they were first being engraved in bronze then (75.2). Acclamations begin appearing in the inscribed *acta* of the Arval Brethren and on Roman milestones from the early third century A.D., and Constantine had acclamations for provincial governors transcribed and communicated to him. In the context of the growing recognition of the importance of acclamations, of the special significance of the XIV rows, and of recording acclamations, Nero created the Augustiani for his Juvenalia in A.D. 57 (Suetonius *Ner.* 20.5–6).⁴⁵

Nero was greatly taken with the rhythmic applause of some Alexandrians, who had flocked to Naples from a fleet that had lately arrived, and he summoned more men from Alexandria. Not content with that, he selected some young men of the *equester ordo* and more than five thousand sturdy young members of the plebs to be divided into groups and learn the Alexandrian styles of applause (they call them “the bees,” “the roof tiles,” and “the bricks”) and to ply them vigorously whenever he sang. The Alexandrians were noticeable for their thick hair and fine apparel; their left hands were bare and without rings, and their leaders were paid four hundred thousand sesterces each.

More generally, the trend of equestrian history reflects how Roman political culture changed with the advent of personal power. Formal practices gave way to informal shows of loyalty, which were in turn enshrined in documents. The order that emerged lacked any institutional anchorage—no officers, no formal assembly—yet appeared alongside the Senate and people in official documents. This process was the natural outcome of equestrian pride and of the consolidation of the order around ceremonies in Rome. The *equester ordo* defined itself, as a corporate body, by defining its relation to the present and future of imperial power.

This equestrian political culture may be set in a broader context. In Rome,

épigramme satirique d’Automédon et Athènes au début de l’empire,” *REG* 94 (1981): 338–61, at 360–61; and especially C. Roueché, *Performers and Partisans at Aphrodisias in the Roman and Late Roman Periods* (London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, 1993).

45. Cf. Tacitus *Ann.* 14.15; Dio 62.20.5.

as Augustus had encouraged *equites* to follow the example of Germanicus, so the proceedings against Piso praised the plebs for following the example of the *equester ordo* (*s.c. de Pisone* line 158). Chapter 3 describes the parallel incorporation in the makeup of the imperial polity of the thirty-five tribes of the *plebs urbana*, from the statues to L. Antonius to honors for Gaius, Germanicus, and Drusus. But the recognized informal expressions of the plebs extended beyond statues and even the theater, to include mob violence.