

Memory, Identity, and Senatorial Actions in the Early Principate

This paper will examine the intersection of history and memory to better understand various senatorial reactions to the emergence of the Princeps from its inception into the 1st century of the Principate. In the early Principate, the composition and role of the senate had fundamentally changed (Wiseman 1971). The old aristocracy actively negotiated its relationship to the new imperial power using Republican precedents as guides for their own behavior. At the same time, recently enfranchised men from *municipia* and provinces largely outside the traditional circles of power were now negotiating their way in the very Roman context of the Senate in the city of Rome (Roselaar 2012; Bispham 2007; Haeussler 2013).

Starting from this point of inquiry, my paper will examine the Calpurnii Pisones as a case study for how a traditional, blue-blooded aristocratic family continued to seek power through the attainment of political office. The prominent men of this family continued to operate within the paradigm of aristocratic competition familiar from the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE with occasional success and quite a bit of failure (Rosenstein, 1990). During the reign of Augustus, the Pisones was one of the few aristocratic families remaining in the Senate after the proscriptions in the 30s and achieved the consulship with some regularity. In the reigns of the remaining Julio-Claudians, however, the Pisones are exiled, compelled to commit suicide, and executed for their political aspirations. I argue that the Pisones, like the Claudii, had the pedigree necessary for imperial power and that the struggles between these two families exposes the tenuous claim upon which Augustus built his legacy.

As a counterbalance to focus on the response of the “Roman” aristocracy, I will examine how municipal and provincial senators employed a different kind of memory to achieve social and political enfranchisement in the Senate. These men were following in the footsteps of the new men from various municipia throughout Italy who had been enfranchised after the Social War. After the *Lex Rosica* in 49 BCE, a new group of municipal and provincial senators gained access to the Roman Senate. Although there is much debate, it is possible that Augustus and Tiberius also opened the senatorial ranks to a select few before the censorship of the Emperor Claudius in 48 CE granted broad enfranchisement of provincials (Syme, 1999). With each new batch of men admitted to the Senate, a new process of identity negotiation and hybridization likely occurred.

The municipal and provincial senators under consideration are Thrasea Paetus, Seneca, Lucan, and Helvidius Priscus. I argue that these men refashioned the memory of Cato Uticensis, a Roman of exemplary status, into a Stoic sage and *exemplum* for the senators opposing Nero. Their use of Cato related to their own negotiation of elite circles in Rome. Despite the long history Rome had with both Patavium and Spain, there were few senators from these locations enfranchised in the Senate prior to Seneca and Thrasea Paetus (Syme, 1999). Thus, it makes sense to try to understand these new members of the Senate as inhabitants of multiple cultural identities, negotiating participation in an ancient institution alongside senators whose families had been senators for centuries. That Cato was nominally a Stoic, famously and thoroughly Roman, and untainted by the assassination of Caesar made him an optimal choice for the Patavians (Thrasea Paetus and Helvidius Priscus) and Spaniards (Lucan and Seneca).

Ultimately, though, the claims to the past made by both the Pisones and the municipal and provincial senators failed. The Pisones never achieved the throne, despite their ancestral heritage. The Patavian and Spanish senators' choice of Cato turned out to be more threatening to an unstable Princeps than helpful in achieving enfranchisement in the Senate. The appeal to memory by both these groups failed, and they all paid with their lives at the orders of the Princeps.

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