“Art imitates life.” Andy Warhol once said, and though his quotation has become a cliché, its overuse points to the universal acknowledgement that an artist’s work contains truth about the culture in which he creates. Warhol made his declaration in an age of Technicolour photographs and abstract sculptures, some two thousand years after the tumultuous transition in Rome from Republic to Empire, but his words apply just as well to the past as to the present. Art is effective only when it arouses emotion, an impossible feat if the message of the art does not resonate within its particular cultural context. A painting of dining and reclining patricians would have been confusing and aesthetically displeasing to a Roman art collector if it contained no depictions of food, just as Cicero’s long-winded reassurance that it is possible to win the consulship without noble ancestry would have seemed redundant and repetitive to his listeners and readers had they not themselves been obsessed with the nexus of lineage and political office. Roman art, from literature to paintings and sculptures, is teeming with data about Roman cultural assumptions. Since direct observation of Roman cultural structures is clearly impossible, critical analysis of Roman art is the most powerful tool available for the study of Roman culture and society.

This paper will examine one aspect of Roman culture in particular – aristocratic values – through one type of Roman art – Latin literature. It will consider Roman literature of many genres, including epic and lyric poetry, prose history, philosophy, satire and oratory. I include oratory as literature in this paper because although it is not written in meter, and usually recorded only after a speech is given, it is crafted beforehand for a specific purpose. Literature is a rich resource of culture: by peeling away the layers of rhetorical device, literary context and authorial intent, the latent beliefs are laid bare.

Latin literature is obsessed by the Roman aristocracy. From Republican orators such as Cicero exhorting the Senate to meet the ideals of nobility, or outlining how best to electioneer, to Imperial satirists like Juvenal decrying the fallen standards of noble behaviour, aristocracy and the aristocratic ideal are common fixtures in Roman literary works. Even after the collapse of the Republic, and the resulting drastic reduction of aristocratic power, the nobility remains a central topic of discussion. This paper has two components of inquiry: first, what the qualities of an ideal aristocrat were, and how those qualities are reflected in Latin literature of various genres; and second, how the aristocratic ideal changed, if at all, from the Republic to the early Empire, and what accounted for that change or lack thereof. The period of transition from Republic to Empire was tumultuous, and the aristocracy played an important role in managing the Roman state during that crisis period, as it had during the Republic, when it was the government, and as it would during the Empire, when it struck an unsteady power balance with the Emperor. It is important to emphasize that the ideal I will construct is how Romans thought that

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1 It is also important to note that literature is not automatically made by virtue of being recorded. Graffiti, for example, is fascinating and certainly sheds light on Roman culture, but I do not include it as literature.
nobles ought to behave, even if most did not behave that way at all. No noble could be behaving “nobly,” but the ideal would still exist, as ideals are prescriptive, and not descriptive, constructions. The Roman aristocratic ideal encompassed the qualities that made one an ideal politician: eloquence, education, manliness, morality and good family heritage; yet it also dictated that while being wealthy and refined one behave modestly. Though the status of aristocrats and the amount of power they held changed from the Republic through the transition to Empire, the aristocratic ideal itself did not change.

In the late Republic, more specifically in the first half of the first century BC, the Roman nobility was at the peak of its power. In theory, the structure of the res publica was balanced about the people: although not every Roman person was enfranchised, elections did occur; although the consulship existed as the pinnacle of Roman authority, the office’s power was divided in two moreover was checked by the Senate. In practice, however, the only men with the time and resources to run the government were nobles, people with free ancestry, usually for many generations prior. Unsurprisingly, there is much written on the ideal statesman of the time, as well as on the state itself. These writings provide the most direct analysis of the nobility of the time for the simple fact that Roman aristocrats were politicians; the characteristics valued in those running the state blend into the aristocratic ideal because the nobility was entirely engaged in politics. The portrait of elections shows how Romans viewed the process behind selecting those in power; as nobility ruled or tried to rule, “electable” qualities or practices became synonymous with aristocratic ones. The admired values in a Roman aristocrat were ultimately public: the most explicit characteristics desirable in a noble were moral excellence, rhetorical skill and a strong family reputation. There are two important components of the discussion of the aristocratic ideal in a political context: the characteristics valued, and more subtly but equally important, the lifestyle required to achieve those characteristics.

The concept of virtus lies at the heart of the Roman conception of aristocratic character. Virtus is notoriously difficult to define; the word can be translated into English as “courage,”2 “human excellence,”3 “valour,”4 and, most obviously, “virtue.”5 The nebulousness of the term reflects its broad application to a diverse range of aristocratic behaviour. On the most general level, virtus can be understood as pertaining to proper personal conduct; an inelegant, but all-encompassing definition of virtus is “doing the right thing.” For politically-minded Roman authors, virtus refers to moral excellence in public service, for military historians it suggests martial virtue and physical courage, while for social critics it carries connotations of appropriately masculine sexual conduct and identity.

2 Myles McDonnell, Roman Manliness: Virtus and the Roman Republic (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 13. 3 McDonnell 2006, 105. 4 Cic. Comment. pet. 3.5-6. The examples cited here for each translation of virtus are a small sampling of the works in which the word is translated as such. The citations given were selected as indicative of the contexts in which virtus is used in a specific manner. 5 Cic. Comment. pet. 15.38-39.
Marcus Tullius Cicero’s *Commentariolum Petitionis*, or “Handbook of Electioneering,” provides valuable evidence for the political implications of *virtus*, both through his explicit advice to would-be political candidates, and through his subtler rhetorical implications. The *Commentariolum Petitionis (CP)*, written in 64-63 BC, is a guidebook to winning a consular election; although it purports to be a letter from Cicero’s younger brother Quintus, it was probably written by Cicero himself to console his brother, who was abroad in Asia and having difficulty with his career. Cicero, a novus homo, without consular ancestry, was elected consul in 63 BC, defeating more established aristocratic candidates, a remarkable feat for a novus homo; his analysis of Roman politics in the *CP* is thus especially valuable, both because of his political success and his status as an outsider eager for success. Cicero asserts that even with the presence of an opponent’s prestigious ancestry, *virtus* distinguishes good candidates from bad ones. Early in the *CP*, Cicero writes, “Another great help for your status as a “new man” is that your noble competitors are persons of whom nobody would venture to say that they should get more from their rank than you from your moral excellence [virtutem].” Cicero maintains that even the men with the noblest ancestry could not defeat a man of good character, if their character left much to be desired. Dismissing the importance of ancestry for electoral success, Cicero argues that Roman politics are full of morally bankrupt men who have nothing to offer but references to family members who held the consulship, and that a novus homo, if he exhibited *virtus*, could easily be elected. He emphasizes the significance of a candidate’s *virtus* by contrasting the idea of *virtus* with hyperbolic descriptions of the atrocities committed by former and potential candidates. For example, Cicero writes of Catiline:

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\text{In quibus ille hominem optimum, Q. Caucilium, sororis suae virum, equitem Romanum, nullarum partium, cum semper natura tum etiam acetate tiam quietum suis manibus occidit. Quid ego nunc dicam petere eum consulatum qui hominem carissimum populio Romano, M. Marium, inspectante populio Romano vitibus per totam urbem ceciderit, ad bustum egerit, ibi omni cruciatu laceraris, <vix> vivo <et> spiranti collum gladio sua dextera secuerit, cum sinistra capillum eius a vertice teneret,}
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6 Novitas was an ambiguous term in the late Republic. T.P. Wiseman offers the two most common usages: referring to a consul, or candidate for the consulship, whose ancestry included no consuls; or referring to a senator whose ancestry was limited to the class of equites, and had no senators. Wiseman uses the latter term in his discussion of ‘new men’ but Cicero’s usages vary more widely. Novitas was not a clearly delineated concept; however it is clear that it denotes a candidate whose ancestry does not contain the kind of prestigious offices that would help him win an election. In this sense it does not matter that there is no consistent definition, even within Cicero’s works: ‘newness’ meant that the candidate could not rely on family name, and it is this focus on the role of name that the aristocratic ideal incorporates. See T.P. Wiseman, *New Men in the Roman Senate: 139 B.C. – A.D. 14* (Oxford, Oxford UP, 1971), 1-7.

7 Cic. *Comment. pet.* 9-10.

That Catiline would kill his sister’s husband in order to further his career is repugnant enough, but Cicero emphasizes the horror of the deed by characterizing the murdered man as a mild-mannered politician; he juxtaposes the apolitical man, “nullarum partium,” (literally, “of no parties/factions”) with the sordidness of politics. He goes on to describe Catiline’s cruelty in explicit detail: he explains that Catiline did not just kill the “hominem carissimum,” he beheaded Marcus Marius and held the bloody head “sua manu” in his hands. This disturbing image emphasizes Catiline’s cruelty more vividly than the simple statement that he kills. Cicero’s use of hyperbole in his brutal (and perhaps fallacious—his description of Catiline’s relish of murder smacks of gossip) imagery as well as his use of juxtaposition and contrast in his choice to use of the superlative of “carissimum” instead of the positive adjective “carus,” leaves the reader not only with a sense of Catiline’s the moral depravity but also with an awareness of the importance and value of virtus for the Republic’s aristocratic leadership.

Cicero’s discussions of virtus, moreover, make it clear that the term applies specifically to the public sphere of politics. Throughout his entire corpus, which contains, in addition to the CP, treatises on Roman law, the role of the state, and the ideal orator, Cicero pays almost no attention to altruism, kindness, love of family and other features of interpersonal relationships.10 McDonnell writes, “Only once does Cicero write of his own virtus in relation to his fatherly duties, and there the reference is to the consequences of his lack of courage in public life.”11 The public character of virtus is a significant feature of its place in the aristocratic ideal. For the Roman aristocracy, defined as it was by its political activity and involvement, to behave like an aristocrat was to behave like a politician. Virtus was perhaps the single most important characteristic for a politician to have: it separated men who would make a good rulers from men who would not. Clearly “right” behaviour might vary in different situations, but right behaviour was always public behaviour: a concern for the preservation of the Roman state, rather than any private interests or qualities, defined a man who was possessed of virtus. Sallust, who drew upon Cicero’s works as sources, summarizes the centrality of virtus to the aristocratic ideal most elegantly when he writes, “It is glorious to serve one’s country by deeds; even to serve her by

9 Cic. Comment. pet. 9-10: “Among them he killed with his own hands his sister’s husband, the excellent Quintus Caucilius, a Roman Knight, neutral in politics, a man always inoffensive by nature and by that time also through advancing age. Need I go on? He to be running for the consulship with you—he who scourged Marcus Marius, the Roman People’s darling, all around the town before the Roman People’s eyes, drove him to the tomb, mangled him there with every torture, and with a sword in his right hand, holding his head of hair in his left, severed the man’s neck as he barely lived and breathed and carried the head in his hand, while rills of blood flowed between his fingers!”
words is a thing not to be despised; one may become famous in peace as well as in war.”

Cicero expounds further on the values encompassed by *virtus* in *De Re Publica* (DRP), “On the Commonwealth,” his treatise on the workings of the Roman Republic and the proper behaviour of its citizens and rulers. Cicero argues that men should enter into public life in order to protect the state from corrupt rulers; he acknowledges, however, that worthy motivation provides no guarantee that, once in power, the well-intentioned will not become corrupt themselves. He addresses this problem by insisting on the association of *virtus* with action. He writes, “It is not enough to possess virtue, as if it were an art of some sort, unless you make use of it... the existence of virtue depends entirely upon its use.” This is a clever rhetorical distinction—Cicero, in categorizing *virtus* as a characteristic that can only exist if it is exercised, eliminates all uncertainty in the discussion of morality. If a man has *virtus*, he shows it. Virtus manifests itself in many ways, such as “iustitias, fides, aequitas,” “justice, loyalty, fair-dealing” and “pudor, continencia, fuga turpitudinis, adpetentia laudis et honestatis,” “decency, self-restraint, fear of disgrace, eagerness for praise and honour.” These various manifestations of *virtus* appear in different circumstances: *continencia* is reflected in civil conduct during a heated debate, while *aequitas* consists of not taking advantage of peers or inferiors.

*Virtus* also encompasses the appropriate public display of masculine sexuality. T. Wade Richardson cites Aulus Gellius’ *Noctes Atticae* 6.12.4-5, in which the author describes a speech given by Publius Scipio Africanus against Publius Sulpicius Gallus for wearing effeminate togas. Scipio is described as “vir omnibus bonis artibus atque omni virtute praeditus,” in apposition to Gallus, “hominis delicato.” Richardson argues that the description of Scipio implies that “he is the ‘default setting’ of maleness”; while he acknowledges that none of the words in the passage necessarily imply sexuality, he argues that the juxtaposition of *virtute* and Gallus’s homosexual behaviour suggests that *virtus* can mean proper male sexual display. McDonnell, in contrast, although he acknowledges that some of the cognates of *virtus*, such as *virilis* or *virilitas*, can connote sexual activity, ultimately concludes that *virtus* was not used to refer to sexuality or sexual display. His objection however relies heavily on the absence of this sense of *virtus* in the poetry of Catullus. While this absence might demonstrate that *virtus* has little importance for the private sexual behaviour with which Catullus is concerned, it does not preclude the application

12 Sall. Cat. 7; 3.1.
17 Gell. NA 6.12.4-5. “A man gifted with all worthy arts and every virtue” versus “An effeminate man.”
19 Richardson 2007, 167.
of the term to public sexuality, the context in which it used by Aulus Gellius. *Virtus*, then, may be applied to the sexual bravado or machismo exhibited by aristocratic Roman men.

Finally, *virtus* describes a Roman aristocrat’s military prowess. In the contexts of warfare in the abstract or specific battles, *virtus* means bravery or valour. In his *Ab Urbe Condita* Livy uses this sense of the term in his account of Roman battles with various Italian tribes. Describing a battle against the Albans, he writes, “Romani, si umquam ante aliasullo in bello fuit quod primum dis immortalibus gratias ageritis, deinde vestrae ipsorum virtuti, hesternum id proelium fuit.” For Livy, *virtus* is directly correlated with skill in battle—the Romans survive the battle due to “*dis immortalibus*” and “*vestrae virtuti*.”

*Virtus* was not, of course, the only important moral quality for an aristocrat to possess. Augustus’s *clupeus virtutis*, or “shield of virtue,” which was set up by decree of the senate and the people in the curia Iulia, displayed four attributes: *virtus, clementia, iustitia*, and *pietas*. These values were equally prominent on the shield, implying their equal, or at least comparable importance to the character of a good Roman. As the shield’s overall identification as “*virtutis*” suggests, however, *virtus* is the most flexible and encompassing of these concepts. None of the terms on the shield can be narrowly defined—*pietas*, for instance, has a range of meaning from mere diligence to the insistence of the observance of rituals—but *virtus* has the most expansive, nebulous and diverse range of meaning. Without denying significance to these other values, *virtus* served, uniquely, as a kind of summation of a broad range of expectations and ideals for noble behaviour.

For a politically-minded aristocrat, however, his *virtus* was of little use unless he could effectively advertise it to his peers and the electorate. The most powerful way to do so was through oratory, which consisted of both legal speeches and politically addresses made, for example in the senate. Cicero writes, “Great prestige has always been attached to [oratory]; an advocate deemed worthy to defend ex-consuls cannot be thought unworthy of the consulship.” It was not enough just to be able to make a speech—that speech needed to be compelling. Style and argumentation were oratorical skills a speaker needed in order to be successful in Roman politics. As a man gained supporters from those whom he defended, his command of the Roman legal system became more fluent from his frequent defenses, and most importantly he learned to be persuasive. The Senate was suffused with oratory—men argued constantly over which course of action to take in both domestic and foreign policies, and a good politician was one who could articulate his ideas both clearly and convincingly. As Cicero makes clear, oratorical brilliance was essential if a *novus homo* was to use his *virtus* to advance his political career: the very first piece of advice which he of-

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21 Liv. 1.28. “Romans, if ever anywhere in any war you have had reason to give thanks, first to the immortal gods and then to your own valour, it was in the battle of yesterday.”


23 Cic. *Comment. pet.* 1.2.
fers in the CP is “Nominis novitatem dicendi gloria maxime sublevabis.”

In more concrete terms, oratorical ability allowed an aristocratic to increase the number of his *clientes*, or clients. These men were not business partners, nor were they friends; instead, they had an unofficial agreement, under the terms of which that the *cliens* would ask for favours in return for political support. Cicero writes, “Et omnino, quoniam eo genere amicitiarum petitio tua maxime munita est quod ex causarum defensionibus adeptus es, fac ut plane iis omnibus quos devinctos tenes discriptum ac dispositum suum cuique munus sit.” The aristocratic *patronus*, or patron protected his *clientes* in legal matters, and vouched for their reputations, while the *clientes* provided the politician with the prestige of having many followers; having loyal *clientes* showed that a man was clearly skilled at defense, that he kept his word in their agreements and did not just use his *clientes* for his own benefit. Indeed, a Roman would not have chosen the terms *patronus* and *cliens* to describe this reciprocal, asymmetrical relationship. Richard P. Saller notes that *patronus* and *cliens* were infrequently used, and restricted to formal usages, such as to legal advocates or ex-masters of freedmen. He uses the terms, as I do, for their precision, but their limited usage sheds light on the psychology of the relationship. Saller writes, “The reason for the infrequent appearance of *patronus* and *cliens* in literature lies in the social inferiority and degradation implied by the words.” No client would want to admit to being in a subordinate role, and no patron would want to humiliate his current clients and discourage potential clients. This pretended equality, or *jovialité*, made both partners feel their relationship was fruitful. The patron/client relationship fits neatly within Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic capital, since each man in this relationship is indebted to the other without any tangible, wealth-based tie. *Patroni* were constantly vying for *clientes*, and it was not uncommon for *clientes* to attempt loyalty to two or more *patroni*. Having loyal clients was thus a testament to a *patronus*’ ability to provide material assistance to his clients and to his powers or oratorical persuasion; as well, having large numbers of loyal clients was essential to political success.

Cicero claims that having enough *virtus*, here manifesting itself as compelling rhetoric, could override the benefits of a prestigious family name: *sublevare* literally means “to lift up from under” and is best translated here as “to overcome.” Cicero could have phrased the notion of oratory being important in a variety of ways. He could have written that a *novus homo* would win an election due to his oratory, or merely mentioned that oratory was a useful skill to have. Instead, he uses a verb that implies there is an incredible burden to being without consular ancestry.

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24 Cic. Comment. pet. 1.2. “For your status as a “new man” you will compensate chiefly by your fame as a speaker.”
25 Cic. Comment. pet. 1.2. “In general, since your campaign is amply supported by the kind of friendship which you have acquired by defending cases, make quite sure that a particular duty is apportioned and assigned to each of all whom you have laid under obligation.”
Even as he argues vehemently that rhetorical skill might allow a novus homo to obtain the consulship, however, Cicero’s own rhetoric draws attention to the importance which the aristocratic ideal placed on the possession of a good family name. In the CP, urging his brother not to be discouraged by status as a new man, he writes:

> Quanto melior tibi fortuna petitionis data est quam nuper homini novo, C. Coelio! Ille cum duobus hominibus ita nobilissimis petebat ut tamen in ipsis omnia luris essent quam ipsa nobilitas, summa ingenia, summus pudor, plurima beneficia, summa ratio ac diligentia petendi; ac tamen eorum alterum Coelius, cum multo inferior esset genere, superior nulla re paene, superavit.quare melior tibi fortuna petitionis data est quam nuper homini novo, C. Coelio! Ille cum duobus hominibus ita nobilissimis petebat ut tamen in ipsis omnia luris essent quam ipsa nobilitas, summa ingenia, summus pudor, plurima beneficia, summa ratio ac diligentia petendi; ac tamen eorum alterum Coelius, cum multo inferior esset genere, superior nulla re paene, superavit.29

Although it is intended to be an example of the triumph of a novus homo over his more illustrious aristocratic competitor’s, the story of Coelius also shows that the expectation in Roman elections was that breeding would trump a candidate’s individual characteristics; it reflects what Romans claimed they ultimately value in a candidate, although in actuality they might vote for men who do not possess those characteristics. Cicero’s hyperbole draws further attention to the importance of ancestry in Roman politics. He describes the consular candidates in only superlatives: they are “nobilissimis,” and their good characteristics are all modified by “summus/a.” By contrast, and again using hyperbole, Coelius is not just “inferior...genere” but “multo inferior...genere.” His rhetorical emphasis on the significance of ancestry in the election reflects his understanding of broader Roman political sentiments; in DRP Cicero writes, “opulentos homines et copiosos, tum genere nobili natos esse optimos putant.”30 For a novus homo like Cicero, the election campaign presented special challenges. T.P. Wiseman writes:

> The greatest advantage of the nobilis was the Romans’ notorious obsession with mos maiorum, their belief that ‘what is done by precedent is done by right.’ There were ample precedents for the election of a Lentulus or a Scipio; the task of the new man was to find analogous ancient exempla to whom he might appeal and for whose reputation he might claim some affinity.31

29 Cic. Comment. pet. 3.11. “How much better luck has fallen to you in your canvass than to C. Coelius, another ‘new man,’ a while ago! He stood against two men of the highest nobility, yet whose nobility was the least of their assets—great intelligence, high conscience, many claims to gratitude, great judgment and perseverance in electioneering; yet Coelius, though much inferior in birth and superior in almost nothing, defeated one of them.”
30 Cic. Rep. 1.51. “[Roman men] think that the best men are those who are rich, prosperous, or born of famous families.”
Even in his adamant defense of the electability of *novi homines*, Cicero reveals the ultimate gap between a *novus homo* and an ideal aristocrat; in the minds of both the aristocracy and the Roman electorate more broadly, the ideal aristocrat was not just himself noble, but had noble ancestry as well.

Moreover, by assigning a set of noble characteristics to the candidates, Cicero affirms the valued qualities in elections; by assigning them to every candidate, he renders them irrelevant to the discussion and focuses on the importance of ancestry. The “*ingenia…pudor…beneficia…ratio ac diligentia petendi,*” (“intelligence… modesty…[much to be] thankful for… judgment and doggedness in the pursuit [of the consulship]”) which Cicero attributes to the two candidates standing for election alongside Coelius are useful in the construction of the aristocratic ideal, because they are “stock” noble characteristics. Cicero’s argument relies on all three candidates being equal in *virtus*, and only having differences in ancestry. They are all pristine candidates, and Cicero’s elaboration of what makes them so speaks directly to the aristocratic ideal—he is not giving a nuanced description of the men’s characters, just mentioning the standard for what makes one a good candidate, and thus a good noble.

A final important quality in an ideal aristocrat was modesty. Although discussion of moral character was often incorporated into the broad category of *virtus*, the idea of *pudor* deserves special consideration as a separate entity, especially in the context of concrete qualifications such as prestigious lineage. Sallust writes, “*Nam pro pudore, pro abstinentia, pro virtute audacia, largitio, avaritia vigebant.*”32 Here again is the notion of the notion of *virtus*, as well as the specific manifestation of *virtus* in *pudor*, with the addition of the idea that a noble should not greedy or take bribes. This idea of moderation and modesty is one that runs through Cicero as well, but is best articulated through Sallust’s condemnations of the Roman state “*postquam divitiae honori esse coepere.*”33

Some wealth was clearly necessary for one to maintain aristocratic status: canvasses and campaigns were costly and time-consuming. Yet wealth was a necessary but insufficient condition in the aristocratic ideal. If an aristocrat had money, it was improper to make vulgar displays of it or be so greedy as to take bribes. Sallust’s view that the esteem of money and the lack of modesty was symptomatic of greater Roman problems shows how essential modesty about wealth was to the aristocratic ideal: once aristocrats stopped behaving as they “should” have, the Republic was doomed. This passage clearly articulates the aristocratic ideal of the late Republic: Sallust is an historian of decline, explaining the mid-century tumult. He sets up a contrast between what he expected of public life and what he found once he entered it, a contrast that only has meaning if his expectations are familiar to the reader—he expected politicians to behave in a certain way based on a commonly-held ideal, and the power of the contrast relies on how disparate the ideal and reality are.

These four components of the aristocratic ideal: *virtus*, oratory, prestigious ancestry and modesty are articulated explicitly in Roman literature. Beneath them, in the

32 Sall. *Cat*. 3.3. “For instead of modesty, incorruptibility and honesty, shamelessness, bribery and rapacity held sway.”

33 Sall. *Cat*. 12.1. “As soon as riches came to be held in honour.”
subtext of late Republican texts, lie a set of assumptions about the kind of lifestyle required to cultivate these worthwhile qualities. Particularly important among these assumptions are the ideas of *otium* and *negotium*. *Otium*’s primary meaning is “leisure” or “free time”; when contrasted with *negotium* it can also mean “lack of business” or “freedom from business.” Perhaps the most obvious and important implication of the aristocratic ideal is the amount of time one needed in order to foster noble traits: one needed tremendous *otium* to be educated enough to be able to engage in politics at all, as well to be a successful politician once that threshold of education was met. *Negotium*, on the other hand, which literally means “not leisure,” is best translated as “business” or “occupation”—what one does to fulfill a certain practical purpose, such as making enough money to support one’s family, or garnering support for an upcoming election. What *negotium* implied for a Roman man varied according to his social status and economic position: out of necessity, the common man engaged in *negotium* for money, while aristocrats directed their *negotium* towards the accrual of political glory and honour that politics conferred. In Bourdieu’s terms, commoners largely sought blunt economic capital whereas aristocrats sought intangible social capital.  

*Otium* was, of course a crucial component of aristocratic *negotium*, since it allowed would-be politicians to form alliances and campaign in unofficial capacities. The line between business and leisure was a blurry one for Roman politicians: loitering in the Forum and talking to potential clients could be viewed as both as a business errand and a product of leisure-time. Indeed, only with the freedom *otium* conferred from concerns with everyday subsistence could one engage in politics at all, since Roman politics was an unpaid profession in which *negotium* might obtain delayed or intangible gains; *otium* was thus a crucial attribute for Roman aristocrat politicians.

Cicero’s discussion of *amicitia* provides a good illustration of the inseparability of *otium* and *negotium* in political life. Cicero writes:

> *Amicorum studia beneficiis et officiis et venustate et facilitate ac iucunditate naturae parta esse oportet. Sed nomen amicorum in petitione latius patet quam in cetera vida; quisquis est enim qui ostendat aliquid in te voluntatis, qui colat, qui domum ventitet, is in amicorum numero est habendus.*

Cicero points to the different roles of friendship in the life of a private man and in that of a politician. Although links to *amici*, or “friends,” would, for a private man, be based on personal characteristics like *venustas*, *iucunditas*, and *facilitas*, a candidate for office, as Cicero explains, must treat anyone who pays attention to him, even

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34 Bourdieu 1990, 122.
35 Cic. *Comment. pet.* 5.16. “The endeavours of friends should be enlisted by kindnesses and observances of duties and old acquaintance and affability and natural charm. But that word ‘friends’ has a wider application in a canvass than in the rest of life, for anybody who shows you some good will, or cultivates you society, or calls upon you regularly, is to be counted as a ‘friend.’”
just by *domum ventitet* (calling on at home, paying respects), as a friend. Although the words *amicitia* ("friendship") and *amicus* derive from the verb *amo, amare*, meaning “to love,” and although they are thus associated with *otium*, Cicero uses them here is the more public sense of “ally.” In public life leisure and business mix: in the aristocratic ideal, in keeping with the idea of *virtus* being a public value, friendships were not just private enjoyments of another’s company, but rather public alliances.

In addition to alliance-building, *otium* allowed aristocrats to obtain social capital through education and the flaunting of knowledge. Elaine Fantham writes, “In republican Rome’s more hierarchical world the two main forms of public speaking, political and judicial, were relatively open to members of the governing class, just as they were virtually closed to the ordinary citizen;”36 this informal exclusion of common classes from political power was enforced by the aristocratic monopoly on historical and philosophical literacy. Aristocratic education was neither practical nor vocational, but instead centered about philosophical ideas and Roman history. In a certain sense, an education in Roman history and law, and ancient philosophy was practical for a politician: he needed to understand law to plead cases, to have knowledge of history and philosophy to strengthen his rhetoric, as well as presumably to act with prudence once in office. More importantly, education was an indirect mark of one’s class. In *De Re Publica*, Cicero’s dialogue between Scipio and Tubero touches on the report of “*de isto altero sole quod nuntiatum est in senatu.*”37 To pass the time before others arrive at their gathering, they try to explain what those reporting the second sun saw. Their discussion is saturated with philosophers’ names, both famous and little-known: Socrates, Plato, Pythagoras, Aratus, Eudoxus. The fluent mention of many philosophers in what is depicted as a casual social gathering shows both the content and extent of the education an aristocrat might receive. In order to be able to participate in politics, as we have seen, men needed to be able to socialize strategically with other men. Familiarity with various philosophical concepts acted as a Shibboleth for class: men could show that they too were of the class which concerned itself with loftier ideas.

Education in rhetoric, moreover, shaped the aristocratic ideal because of the immediacy and potency of speech as a class marker. In *Post Reditum in Senatu*, a speech given on his return to Rome from exile in 57 BC, Cicero describes the unsavoury impression which a rival politician, Caesoninus Calventius, might make on one meeting him for the first time, “*sine sensu, sine sapore, elinguem, tardum, inhumanum negotium, Cappadocem modo abreptum de grege venalium diceres.*”38 Cicero consistently draws attention to the contrast between Calventius’ behaviour and the behaviour expected of him as a result of his high degree of *otium*; he notes that “*Caesoninus Calventius ab

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37 Cic. *Rep.* 1.15. “… In regard to that second sun which has been reported in the senate.”
The object of Cicero’s critique is not Calventius’ deep moral turpitude, but rather the superficial signs that he is un-aristocratic; in doing so he highlights the importance of oratorical and speech training. Cicero calls Calventius “elinguem,” which literally means “tongue-less” or “speechless” and is best translated here as “without eloquence.” The choice of this insult shows how integral refined speech was to the aristocratic ideal; the emphasis on proper, eloquent speech in turn demonstrates the equal importance of education. Furthermore, by calling Calventius a Cappodocian (where many of the toughest slaves originated), Cicero equates stupidity and lack of eloquence with the lower classes, specifically those without free ancestry.

This, then, was the state of affairs at the death of the Republic: the ideal aristocrat was well-spoken, educated, and from a good family; he had enough wealth to be able to concern himself with politics, and above all tried to express virtus through public acts. With Caesar’s crossing of the Rubicon, however, the nature of Roman political power changed permanently. The culmination of the Civil Wars in the introduction of a princeps, whose power was unchecked, changed the political power balance; moreover, the rise of the Principate was a blow to the identity of individual Romans, who apart from experiencing the terror of civil war, had to come to terms with the new Rome. It is evident that the civil war and the changes it wrought weighed heavily on the Roman people: Horace, the brilliant and prolific lyric poet and satirist who belonged to Maecenas’s circle of artists, writes in the opening ode of his second book:

\[
\text{quis non Latino sanguine pinguior/campus sepolcri impia proelia/tes-tatur auditumque Medis/Hesperiae sonitum ruinae?/qui gurges au que flumina lugubris ignara belli? quod mare Dauniae non decoloravere caedes? quae caret ora cruore nostro?... quaere modos leviore plectro.}
\]

The personification of natural features such as “campus,” “gurges,” “flumina,” and “mare,” suggests both the ubiquity of civil strife, and the intensity of the conflict. The choice of natural features which are by definition expansive amplifies the scale the carnage and of the damage done to Rome: in Horaces’s poem it is not a small lake or a single waterfall or tree, but entire bodies of water and wide plains which “sepolcri... testa[n] tur.” Bodies of water in particular represent Rome’s boundaries; Horace implies that Rome was so saturated with trouble that even its farthest reaches felt the effects of the war. Horace’s desire for “modos leviore plectro,” and in particular his emphasis on the songs being “leviore”, implies how seriously (in the literal sense as well—gravis is the opposite
of levis) the conflict was felt. The revolution was, in colloquial terms, kind of a big deal.

The period beginning with the inception of Civil Wars in 49 BC and ending with Augustus’ death in 14 AD (a period which I will refer to as the “Principate”), saw an intense flourishing of Latin literature; Augustus’ restoration of stability in particular encouraged a new burst of literary creativity, and a new interest in generic and metrical innovation. Although there is certainly something to S.J. Harrison’s remark that “interesting literature is often the product of interesting times,” this literary flourishing also reflected important social and political trends. Patrons, such as Augustus’ close associate Maecenas, were increasingly willing to sponsor truly gifted artists over long periods of time. A community of talented writers from rather humble beginnings found patrons in Rome and were given the otium needed to be educated and write. Horace and Virgil were friends; Horace writes an ode for Virgil as he traveled to Greece. Catullus, writing a generation before Horace and Virgil, describes a typical meeting of artistic minds: “Hesterno…die otiosi/multum lusimus in meis tabellis/ut convenerat esse delicatos/ scribens versiculos/uterque nostrum/ludebat numero modo hoc modo illoc/reddens mutual per iocum atque vinum.” The cultural climate was inviting to collaboration as well as innovation, and the sort of scene Catullus describes only became more frequent with more patronage.

In the early Principate, moreover, Augustus, out of concern for his image, oversaw works that examined Rome’s evolution as a state. Augustus exploited his relationship with Maecenas’ literary circle, and understood the power of literature to reach the common people through public recitations. Augustus famously overrode Virgil’s dying wish to have his unfinished Aeneid burned, sparking a two thousand year debate over Virgil’s authorial intent in the Aeneid’s message; while the work has most often been read as a glorification of Augustan Rome and a justification of the Augustan political settlement, other critics see its true brilliance lying in its subtle, ironic denunciation of the Principate. The Aeneid tells the story of a minor Trojan character mentioned in Homer’s Iliad who is destined to found the proto-city of Rome, as well as the line that would produce Romulus and Remus; he and the other Trojan survivors of the sack of Troy make their way across the Mediterranean and into Italy, where they must conquer the tribes living there. Virgil retroactively creates a mythological history for Rome, one that has great relevance in the understanding of how Romans viewed the princeps and the reduction in aristocratic and common peoples’ power (little though it was). Francis Cairns writes, “[There is a] link between kingship and Aeneas: he is at once the character most frequently and consistently treated in terms of

42 Horace dedicates many of his odes, most famously 1.1, to Maecenas, as well as writing poetry to him specifically, as in 3.29.
43 Hor. Carm. 1.3.
44 Catul. 50.1-6. “Being at leisure yesterday, we had great/fun…with impromptu verses/(on agreement to be light and witty)/each alternately scribbling little squiblets,/playing around with every kind of metre/matching jest with jest, vintage with vintage.”
kingships and the one who, as the ancestor of the Julian house, which Augustus had joined by adoption, ties the *Aeneid* most closely to the concerns of Virgil’s contemporaries.” 45

Despite its potentially critical association of Augustus with kingship, the *Aeneid* is ultimately a pro-Augustan work. Although there is a compelling case for the *Aeneid* as a criticism of the Principate, authorial intent can never be proven; perhaps a Republican listening to the epic would hear strains of criticism, but Augustus would never have encouraged Virgil, nor saved his manuscript against Virgil’s explicit request, if Augustus felt it was critical, or if the Roman people thought it was critical enough to rebel against the princeps. Regardless of the conclusion, however, an exploration of the *Aeneid* is valuable in its reflection of Augustan values and views on the changing roles of the nobility. Nor was commentary on the end of the Republic limited to historically informed epic; Horace, in Ode 1.35 addresses Fortune and asks her, “*serves iturum Caesarem in ultimos orbis Britannos.*” 46 The invocation for protection during the British campaign is juxtaposed with mentions of “*cicatricum et sceleris pudet/ fratrumque;*” 47 Horace clearly does not shy away from writing explicitly of current events.

Even as they engaged with current events, however, in moments of crisis, Roman poets and prose authors, products of their conservative society, turned to the past, both real and constructed. Far more than their Republican predecessors, writers of the Principate looked to the history of Rome’s foundations, and sought clues to Rome’s ultimate fate and destiny. Horace alludes to the Trojan War 48 as well as countless deities and mythical figures; Livy constructs a history of Rome guided by the gods to her current glory; and Virgil in his epic poetry makes indirect references to the Roman Civil War in his descriptions of “proto-Roman” figures and events: the tension between Aeneas’s love for Dido and his duty to settle in Italy, coupled with the *Aeneid’s* emphasis on destiny, fate and divine intervention announced that Rome was special, she was worth any trouble, and she was destined to be. In keeping with this conservative, historical outlook, writers of the Principate clung to a Republican ideal of aristocratic behaviour, in spite of the fact that actual Roman political behaviour was changing radically. The literature of the period is bursting with commentary on the changing reality of Rome, but the aristocratic ideal appears not to have changed at all; indeed the traditional values of the politician-aristocrat are affirmed at every turn.

From Horace’s contemporary commentary on the values of noble Romans to Virgil’s emphasis on Aeneas’ *pietas*, and Livy’s teleological account of the founding of Rome, the literature of the Principate embraces *virtus* as the chief attribute of the aristocracy. The reduction in senatorial power due to the emperor’s increase in power seems not to have dampened any enthusiasm or desire for office holding. Horace writes, “*hunc, si mobilium*
turba Quiritium/ certat tergeminis tollere honoribus.” He makes this declaration in his opening Ode, his dedication to Maecenas: he lists the pleasures of men in order to express how he desires nothing more than “doctarum hederae praemia frontium.” Horace’s long list of human passions is not intended as exotic or unusual. He catalogues common activities, such as racing, sailing and being in the army; his inclusion of canvassing as one of the first and most obvious pursuits is thus a testament to the continuing interest the cursus honorum, and to the institution’s enduring prestige. But beyond this basic affirmation of the continued importance of politics to the nobility, Horace’s observations on Roman values show that not only did the same offices garner respect from potential politicians, but they also required the same characteristics as they did before the fall of the Republic. In an Ode about military and social virtues, Horace writes, “dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.../virtus repulsae nescia sordidae/ intaminatis fulget honoribus/ nec sumit aut ponit securis/ arbitrio popularis auro.” Horace’s use of the word shows that virtus has retained its nebulous meaning of “doing the right thing.” He urges men not to be cowards and to show their devotion to Rome, but his language blends the military meanings of virtus with the more abstract layers of the word. The discussion of proper virtus is in the context of military values, such as a willingness to die for one’s country, but it is clearly both a political value and a value focused on doing what is best in any given situation, not just what is easiest. Horace defines political virtus as “ignorant of base rebuff”, which Rudd confirms is specifically a rebuff at the polls. Ideal politicians are thus above petty politics and desire not power but the chance to lead Rome. Furthermore, when Horace writes that “nec sumit aut ponit securis/ arbitrio popularis auro” he criticizes politicians who play to the whims of the crowd; like Sallust he not only defines an ideal but critically displays the failure of many men to adhere to that ideal; although Horace is a poet of crisis, rather than an historian of decline, he and Sallust both show the aristocratic ideal by their delineations between current behaviour and ideal behaviour. Virgil’s and Livy’s critique of aristocratic behavior is more obscure than Horace’s; their works contain the same insight into Roman values but do so through discussion of the past. In both Virgil’s epic account of the founding the beginnings of Rome, when Aeneas “dum conderet urbem/ inferretque deos Latio – genus unde Latinum/ Albanique patres

49 Hor. Carm. 1.1.7-8. “One man is delighted if the mob of fickle citizens strive to elevate him to the three great offices” (Rudd notes: “Those of quaestor, praetor and consul”).
50 Hor. Carm. 1.1.29. “The ivy crown, the reward of poetic brows.”
51 Hor. Carm. 3.2.13, 17-20. “It is sweet and fitting to die for one’s country... A man’s true worth does not acknowledge a demeaning rebuff, but shines forth with its glory undimmed; it does not take up or lay down the axes of authority at the people’s whim.”
52 Although Aeneas does not found Rome but rather the line which eventually produces Romulus and Remus, Aeneas’ successful journey to Italy marks a distinction between Aeneas and his followers as Trojan survivors and those whose progeny would become Romans. I will therefore distinguish the beginning of Rome from the foundation of Rome: the former connotes the idea of ‘proto-Rome’ while the latter is a more legal, technical term for when the city began to take its current shape.
atque altae moenia Romae,”\textsuperscript{53} and Livy’s exhaustive and aptly titled history \textit{Ab Urbe Condita}, fate, destiny and divine intervention are invoked to explain the turn of events. Roman history thus appears as an inevitable progression; the teleological slant of these works suggests that contemporary Roman society and the Principate itself are pre-ordained and unavoidable. The past is used both to explain and justify the present, and to insist on the unshakeable continuity of Roman values through time. Perhaps the most striking instance of this historical foreshadowing of Roman values is Virgil’s description of Aeneas as “\textit{pius}.” Aeneas, as the most important figure in Roman mythology (apart from the gods, of course), embodies the characteristics that shape Rome and make her successful. \textit{Pietas} appears more broadly in Republican and Imperial literature, but Virgil makes such frequent use of it that it becomes epithetical: Aeneas is “\textit{pius}” in contexts in which his devotion or diligence are only peripherally apparent. Virgil writes, for example, “\textit{At pius Aeneas, per noctem plurima volvens/ ut primum lux alma data est, exire locosque/ explorare novos, quas vento accesserit oras/ qui teneant, nam inculta videt, homines feraene/ quare constituit, sociisque exacta referre.}”\textsuperscript{54} Aeneas is surely performing a service to his comrades by scouting the lands they are shipwrecked onto, but the emphasis Virgil places on the potential danger of the land from its description as “\textit{novos}” to the possibility of “\textit{homines feraene}” seems more aptly described as bravery, not diligence. Yet he is not “\textit{fortis Aeneas}” but “\textit{pius}.” By describing him thus to the point of redundancy and in irrelevant contexts, Virgil makes a point about Aeneas’ character that is outside each individual episode of the epic: Aeneas is not just “\textit{pius}” in particular instances, but is “\textit{insignem pietate},”\textsuperscript{55} “marked by dutifulness,” by traveling to Italy undertaking to fulfill Rome’s destiny. \textit{Pietas} often appears in contexts of rituals or religious rites, and so Aeneas’ defining characteristic has both the meaning of mere diligence as well as the observance of divine orders. In its broad range of meaning \textit{pietas} in the \textit{Aeneid} thus prefigures Republican \textit{virtus}. Just as Horace’s ideal noble is not swayed by \textit{popularis auras}, so Aeneas does not let anything sway him from his ultimate goal.

Moreover, Aeneas’ \textit{virtus} is a public value; he privileges the good of Rome over his personal affairs, and sacrifices his relationship with Dido and her well-being in order to create the Roman state. Dido’s love for Aeneas accomplishes two primary objectives: it first shows how powerful and appealing Aeneas is, and how powerful and appealing Rome must be for him to give up love in order to found her. The language surrounding Aeneas’ departure contains a suggestion of ritual sacrifice. Virgil writes:

\textit{Aeneas... moenia respeciens, quae iam infelcis Elissae/ conlu-}

\textsuperscript{53} Verg. \textit{Aen.} 1.5-7. “Till [Aeneas] should build a city and bring his gods to Latium; whence came the Latin race, the lords of Alba, and the lofty walls of Rome.”
\textsuperscript{54} Hor. \textit{Carm.} 1.305-309. “But loyal Aeneas, through the night revolving many a care, as soon as kindly light was given, determines to issue forth and explore the strange country; to learn to what coasts he has come with the wind, who dwells there, man or beast—for all he sees is waste—then bring back tidings to his friends.”
\textsuperscript{55} Hor. \textit{Carm.} 1.10.
cent flammis. quae tantum accenerit ignem/ causa latet; duri
magnus sed amore dolores/ polluto, notumque furens quid fe-
mina posit/ triste per augurium Teucrorum pectora ducunt. ⁵⁶

The walls of Carthage alight with Dido’s funeral pyre contains an element of poetic exaggeration: at sea, Aeneas would not actually be able to see Carthage’s walls, much less the light of Dido burning. The hyperbole suggests the extent of Dido’s passion, and thus the resolve required of Aeneas to leave her behind. In killing herself at Aeneas’ departure, she turns herself into a human sacrifice to Rome. Although Aeneas’ departure might appear harsh and single-minded, it confirms the affiliation of pietas-virtus with the public interest of the Roman state; for a Roman reader to condemn him as a selfish, fanati-
cal, pugnacious monster, he would also have to condemn Rome itself. Indeed, even if Virgil
is read as being critical of Aeneas’ actions, his description of pietas still involves him in
the construction of virtus and his acknowledgment of its place within the aristocratic ideal.

Livy, too, in his treatment of the founding of Rome, relies on Virgil’s articulation
of virtus. Livy’s Ab Urbe Condita records Rome’s trajectory from Aeneas’ arrival in
Italy to the politics of his day. Although his work is expansive and highly detailed, Livy
does not write with a consistent methodology. He does not have the same sources avail-
able for a discussion of Aeneas as he does for a discussion of senatorial politics in the
early first century B.C.; nevertheless, what a modern historian would leave to the realm of
mythology, Livy includes as legitimate history. His early books are thus extremely valu-
able cultural artifacts; in the absence of actual sources, Livy’s Roman history becomes
an etiological myth of the origins of contemporary Roman values. Livy writes, “iuva
bit tamen rerum gestarum memoriae principis terrarum populi pro virili parte et ipsum
consulisse.” ⁵⁷ His history is motivated by the glory of Rome: he refers to Romans as
“principis terrarum populi,” a clear indication of his admiration for Rome and her place
in the world. Livy further reveals his bias in his discussion of Aeneas’ conquest of the
Latin tribes; like Virgil, his teleological explanations link proto-Roman history with con-
temporary Roman values. Livy describes Aeneas as “ad maiora rerum initia ducentibus
fatis,” ⁵⁸ in his wanderings, imposing a strict sense of purpose to the hero’s otherwise
accidental settlement in Rome; although Aeneas lands in Macedonia and Sicily as well,
Livy makes sure to reassure the reader that Rome was always the final destination. He
also frames the political turmoil of the Etruscan kings as part of the gods’ plan for Rome,
writing that, “debebatur, ut opinor, fatis tantae origo urbis maximique secundum deorum

⁵⁶ Verg. Aen. 5.3-7. “Aeneas… looking back at the city walls, which now were alight with the unfortunate flames of Dido. They did not know what the cause of such fire was; but the harsh grief from a love defiled, and the knowledge of what a frenzied woman is capable of, led the hearts of the Trojans to grim foreboding.”
⁵⁷ Liv. 1.3. “It will be a satisfaction to have done myself as much as lies in me to commemorate the deeds of the foremost people of the world.”
⁵⁸ Liv. 1.4.
This invocation of higher powers gives divine sanction both to the actions of Rome’s ancestors, and to their personal qualities, which played, as Livy suggests, an essential role in the creation of the city. In Livy’s descriptions of the Roman conquest of the Latin tribes, his emphasis on Rome’s military destiny promotes the idea of *virtus*, although the word itself is not given special emphasis. He invokes *virtus*’ technical sense of courage in warfare in his battle scenes, as well as its more abstract meaning of “doing the right thing” in his justifications of Roman expansionism: the early Romans did not go to war, Livy claims, in order to gain wealth and plunder, as other peoples did, but to make room for the greatest city ever. The literature of the Principate thus loudly affirms the preeminence of *virtus* in its ideal conception of aristocratic behaviour.

Family affiliation also remained important for writers of the Principate. In pseudo-historical works, such as the *Aeneid*, Virgil inserted references to specific Roman lineages, and stressed the value of prominent ancestry. In Book Five of the *Aeneid*, in which Aeneas holds a series of contests to commemorate his father on the anniversary of his death, Virgil spends much of the text listing the names of the various competitors. In these inventories Virgil puts in side-notes connecting the names of the men mentioned in the epic to contemporary Roman families; he writes, for example, “Scyllasque Cloanthus/ caerulea, genus unde tibi, Romane Cluenti,” and, making two allusions in one passage, “ducit quam parvus ovantem/ nomen avi referens Priamus, tua clara, Politus/ progenies, auctura Italos... alter Atys, genus unde Atii duxere Latini.” Since Virgil’s work would have been recited in a public context, his text itself a site for aristocratic boasting over ancestry. His decision to include these genealogical references points to the continued importance of within the aristocratic ideal; his inclusion of these quasi-historical details must reflect both their continued interest in the subject, and their continued ability to recognize “big” family names. As well, the association between mythical figures and contemporary Roman families reflects the importance of a family’s age to its prestige. Horace summarizes this preoccupation with noble lineage most aptly when he writes, “fortes creantur fortibus et bonis.” Romans clearly still thought that what guaranteed a man’s *virtus* was being born of those with *virtus*. This preference for ancient lineage has clear political ramifications. Horace writes:

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cum referre negas quail sit quisque parente/ natus, dum ingenuus, persuades hoc tibi vere/ ante potestatem Tulli atque ignobile regnum/ multos saepe viros nullis maioribus ortos/ et vixisse probos, amplis et honoribus auctos... namque esto, populus Laevinio mallet honorem/ quam Decio mandare novo, censorque moveret/ Appius, ingenuo si non essem patre natus.63
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59 Liv. 1.4.1.
60 Verg. *Aen.* 5.122-123. “And Cloanthus in the sea-blue Scylla, whence is your family, Roman Cluentius.”
61 Verg. *Aen.* 5.563-565. “[One line of boys, which] rejoicing, a little Priam leads, named after his grandfather, your distinguished ancestry, Politus, destined to increase the Italian race... the other, Atys, whence the Latin Atii have drawn their lineage.”
62 Hor. *Carm.* 4.4.29. “The brave are born from the brave and good.”
63 Hor. *Sat.* 1.6.6-11, 19-21. “When you say it matters not who a man’s parent is, if he be himself free-born,
Horace draws a stark contrast between a glorious past, in which men were elected to office on the basis of merit, rather than name, and the harsh reality of the present, in which the people only trust “brand” lineage; moreover, the image of the censor literally not counting a man who does not have a freeborn father is a powerful indication of the importance of family in politics.

Horace acknowledges, however, that not all Romans were snobs. He writes, “non quia, Maecenas...ut plerique solent, naso suspendis adunco/ ignotos, ut me libertino patre natum.”

Maecenas had a specific reason to overlook Horace’s genealogical shortcomings. Horace, like Virgil, was in possession of the most potent tool to overcome class boundaries: oratorical skill; the success of the two poets is a clear example of the continued importance of eloquence as an expression of worth. Both poets were adopted into Maecenas’ inner circle in the closing half of the first century B.C. Horace, who had attended university in Athens before fighting as a military tribune on the losing side at Philippi, was able to navigate Roman politics thanks to his brilliant poetry. Even though he did not give political speeches, his powers of elegant recitation allowed him access to a patron, and, therefore, to a more aristocratic lifestyle. Horace did not hold any offices, and his consistent, frank address of his status as a son of freedman throughout his work points to a lingering insecurity about his status. Yet both he and Virgil were thrust into the company of aristocratic peers, solely on account of their rhetorical skills, a remarkable achievement of social mobility and a testament to the continuing importance of oratorical skill.

Horace declares, “fides et ingeni/ benigna vena est, pauperemque dives/ me petit.” His self consciousness about his humble beginnings not only emphasizes the power of eloquence as a tool for social mobility, but is also, situated as it is within his observations on his relationships with wealthy aristocrats, a commentary on the proper way to approach the question of personal wealth. In the same Ode, he chastises a wealthy man for such crimes of spending as, “tu secanda marmora/ locales sub ipsum funus et sepulcri/ immemor struis domos/ marisque Baiae obstrepentis urges/ summovere litora/ parum locuples continente ripa.”

Horace argues that acquiring such wealth is silly, as “aequa tellus/ pauperi recluditur/ regumque pueros.” His claim, while not directly related to questions of aristocratic behaviour, nevertheless reflects accepted attitudes towards noble display of wealth.

you rightly satisfy yourself of this, that before the reign of Tullius and his lowly kingship, number of men, sprung from ancestors of no account, often lived upright lives and were honoured with high office... for let us grant that the people would rather given office to a Laevinus than to an unknown Decius, and that an Appius as censor would strike out my name if I were not the son of a free-born father.”

64 Hor. Sat. 1.6.1, 5-6. “Yet you, Maecenas, do not, like most of the world, curl up your nose at men of unknown birth, men like myself, a freedman’s son.”

65 Hor. Carm. 2.

66 Hor. Carm. 1.18.9-11. “I do have good faith and a generous vein of talent, and, poor as I am, the rich seek my friendship.”

67 Hor. Carm. 2.18.17-22. “But you, though in the very shadow of death, place contracts for cutting marble slabs, and build houses without giving a thought to your tomb. You press on to move back the coastline where the sea roars in protest at Baiae, for you have insufficient property as long as the shore hems you in.”

68 Hor. Carm. 2.18.32-4. “The earth opens impartially for the poor and for the sons of princes.”
wealth in its assignment of stupid behaviour to an ostentatiously rich man. The juxtaposition of Horace’s own admission that despite his poverty, wealthy men deem him worthy of their company, and the image of a rich man voraciously acquiring possessions and building larger and larger houses show that class was not correlated directly with wealth. Horace, because of his *virtus*, is drawn into the company of aristocrats, but the subject of Ode II.18’s vulgar wealth does not make him nobler: modesty about wealth was an important aspect of the aristocratic ideal, and wealth was still ultimately an insufficient condition for nobility.

Perhaps because of his background, Horace was acutely aware of excess in its varied manifestations. In Odes such as II.18, he decries the *luxuritas* that men mistakenly pursue, but in Ode I.38 his criticism of excess explicitly links modesty to Romanness. Horace writes, “Persicos odi, puer, apparatus/ displicent nexae philyra coronae… simplici myrto nihil allabores/ sedulous curo: neque te ministrum/ dedecet myrtus neque me sub arta/ vite bibentem.” The most striking feature of this short Ode is the prominent position of “Persicos”; Horace exploits the flexibility of Latin word order to create a contrast between Roman moderation and Persian luxury. Persian luxury, as Horace illustrates, is essentially the practice of gilding the lily: wreathes are bound with another plant, and Horace begs his servant not to add anything to myrtle. Even the smallest details help create a distinction between Roman and foreign character, from the choice of “philyra,” a Greek borrowing, as the plant which makes a decoration ostentatious, to the relative brevity of the Ode, a product of a Roman poet: the Roman ideal was one of *simplicitas*, not of *luxuritas*.

The aristocratic ideal of the late Republic survived the transition to Empire. *Virtus*, family name, oratory and modesty continued to be its central components. Because no part of the ideal changed, neither did any of its substantive requirements, in particular, its demand for *otium* and education. The continued prevalence of *otium* and liberal education among the aristocracy is reflected in the highly allusive quality of the literature of the Principate. Horace, for instance, comforts a friend who is in love with a slave girl by reminding him that, “prius insolentem/ serva Briseis niveo colore/ movit Achillem;/ movit Aiacem Telamone natum forma captivae dominum Tecmessae.” Most Romans would recognize Achilles and Ajax, but not be intimately acquainted with the details of their affairs with slave-women; the allusions are written for an audience educated enough to understand them, and whose enjoyment and understanding of the poem would have been enriched by Horace’s precisely chosen examples. Here again, poetry becomes a means of displaying cultural capital; the allusive literature of the Principate both participates in the creation of a class division between those with *otium* and those without, and provides good evidence for the characteristics of that class division.

69 Hor. *Carm.* 1.38.1-2, 5-8. “I dislike Persian frippery, my boy; I do not care for garlands tied with linden bast… please don’t go to the trouble of adding anything to plain myrtle; myrtle is entirely suitable for you as a servant, and for me as I sit drinking beneath the thick vine leaves.”

70 Hor. *Carm.* 2.4.2-7. “In earlier days the slave girl Briseis with her snow-white skin roused the haughty Achilles; the beauty of the captive Tecmessa roused Ajax, son of Telamon, though he was her master.”
Given the inherent conservatism of Roman society, it is of course possible that changes in the aristocratic ideal resulting from the tumultuous transition from Republic to Empire might only have appeared in the generations following the completion of the tradition. To fully understand the ramifications of Rome’s political transformation, therefore, it is important to examine the works of authors like Seneca, Tacitus and Juvenal, all written in the latter half of the first century A.D. These authors had grown up with the new political regime; indeed, by the time they reached the peaks of their careers, the Republic had passed from living memory. These authors could no longer cling nostalgically to Republican cultural ideals; instead, their works must reflect the actual ideals of Roman imperial culture. The literature of the Empire expresses two distinct notions about the aristocracy: that aristocratic behaviour had changed, and that it deviated from the expected norm. These two ideas are most clearly articulated in discussions of individual behaviour, especially in discussions of virtus. Because of the complexity of virtus, it is often given more treatment, and so it is here that much of the evidence lies: while the condition of the aristocracy had changed, or at least was perceived to have changed, the ideal itself had not.

Three of the prominent genres of the first century A.D., biographical history, philosophy, and satire, are each uniquely qualified to proscribe behaviour. Tacitus’ profile of Gnaeus Iulius Agricola, his father-in-law and commander of the forces that conquered much British territory, is a laudatory account of his life. Tacitus relies on comparisons between Agricola’s values and characters and those of other men in order to lavish praise on the Roman general; in doing so Tacitus makes explicit the qualities valued by Roman society. Moral philosophy, such as Seneca’s Epistulae Morales, addresses how people should treat each other, as well as offering reflections on life, death, and other existential topics. Although Stoic philosophy’s rejection of hierarchy and emphasis on private reflection limits its interaction with the public world of aristocratic display, Seneca’s wide-ranging and worldly letters nevertheless offer valuable insights into the nature of the aristocratic ideal. Satire is perhaps the most useful genre in exploring the aristocratic ideal. Satire, specifically Juvenalian satire, is a nebulous term, but it generally connotes a criticism of society that is wry, cynical and often relies on an assumption that behaviour has declined from previous years. By focusing on decline and on deviation from expectations, Juvenal participates in the construction of those expectations and the aristocratic ideal. Indeed, all three of these authors express dismay over a perceived decline in the observance of proper values. In the opening statement of Agricola, Tacitus writes:

*Clarorum virorum facta moresque posteris tradere, antiquitus usitatum, ne nostris quidem temporibus quamquam incuriosa suorum aetas omisit,*

71 I have limited the examination of the aristocratic ideal to the next full generation after the Principate because any extension of the time period allows new and unrelated forces to enter into the equation; the purpose of this paper is to explore whether the reduction in aristocratic power had any impact on the ideal, and the influence of Christianity, for instance, would obscure the reasons for potential change.
As the beginning of Tacitus’ account, this passage frames the way he will explore the life and character of Agricola. His grudging admission that even in his “aetas” the conservative and respectful tradition of recording the lives of notable figures endures is an indictment of the morality of his time, and his classification of his time as “incuriosa suorum” only furthers the pessimistic portrayal of contemporary values. Angered by the difficulties he faced in attempting to publish his work, Tacitus condemns his time as “tam saeva et infesta virtutibus tempora.” Yet even amidst his criticism a familiar definition of *virtus* emerges. Tacitus juxtaposes the opposites *virtus* and *vitium*, with *vitium* defined as “ignorantia[m] recti,” or “Ignorance of what is right” – an almost precise antonym for the Republican sense of *virtus* as “doing what is right.” Although there is a sense in the literature of the Republic and the Principate that *virtus* is not just knowing what is right, but doing it, this sense of action is not necessarily excluded from Tacitus’ definition. A man whose character was able to discern the proper course of action, even if it were not the easiest course, would most likely follow it.

Seneca too describes the nobility as departing from expected standards. Seneca discusses the meaning of friendship, “Itaque si proprio illo verbo quasi publico usus es et sic illum amicum vocasti, quomodo omnes candidates bonos viros dicimus, quomodo obvios, si nomen non succurrit, dominos salutamus, hac abierit.” Seneca argues that one should sometimes call people what they perhaps should be, but are not. Politicians should be honourable, he asserts, and should be called so, but are not. Seneca here contrasts the degraded and changed behaviour of politicians, with a fixed ideal. The casualness with which Seneca offers the case of dishonourable politicians shows how familiar this contrast would be to his readers, since he generally elucidates more complex and subtle concepts more fully. Juvenal, in his satire on life in Rome, agrees with this view of politicians. Juvenal uses a mouthpiece for his rant about Rome, a middle class man named Umbricius who is leaving the city because of its vices and corruption. He complains, “me nemo ministro/fur erit, atque ideo nulli comes exeo tamquam/ mancus et extinctae corpus non utile dextrae.” The choice of “fur” to describe political corruption

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72 Tac. *Agr*. 1.1. “To hand down to posterity the works and ways of famous men was a custom of the past: our age has not yet abandoned it even now, indifferent though it be to its own affairs, whenever, at least, some great and notable virtue has overcome and surmounted the vice common alike to small states and great—ignorance of what is right and jealousy.”

73 Tac. *Agr*. 1.4. “So harsh was the spirit of the age, so cynical towards virtue.”

74 Sen. *Ep*. 3.1. “Now if you used this word of ours in the popular sense, and called him ‘friend’ in the same way in which we speak of all candidates for election as ‘honourable gentlemen,’ and as we greet all men whom we meet casually, if their names slip us for the moment, with the salutation ‘my dear sir,’—so be it.”

75 Juv. 3.46-48. “No one will be a thief with my help. For that reason, I never get out to the provinces on a governor’s staff. It’s as if I were crippled, a useless body with a paralyzed hand.”
is both harsh and effective; Juvenal uses a blunt, almost technical word to refer to an activity more associated with euphemism and slyness. Umbricius clearly expects different standards of behaviour in Rome; his anger at political corruption reflects again the disparity between the aristocratic ideal and its reality. Juvenal, through Umbricius, pithily summarizes the chasm between expectation and behaviour, “probitas laudatur et alget.”

The literature of the Empire is rife with criticism of the nobility. The ideal was not only made distinct by discussion fallen standards, but was also articulated independently. Seneca consoles his correspondant Lucilius about the difficulty in moving up the cursus honorum by telling him how to be a good politician: “si mala bonaque non populo auctore distinxeris.” Lucilius’ anxieties stem from his status as an equites; Seneca echoes Cicero’s examination of the proper way for an aspiring politician to act by prescribing a set of behaviours and characteristics that seem not to apply to how the political realm actually functioned, but how it should. The ideal aristocrat was still expected to do what was right at every turn.

In the Imperial age virtus continued to be a political and militaristic value determined from public actions. Virtus still applied to military prowess; Tacitus praises Agricola for his genius as a general by writing a biographical history of him. Seneca also confirms the continued value of virtus as a public value. He writes, “Ne Gnaeo quidem Pompeio externa bella ac domestica virtus aut ratio suadebat, sed insanus amor magnitudinis falsae.” Seneca asserts that the only legitimate motivation for drastic political action, such as warfare, is virtus, what is good. The juxtaposition of “virtus” and “insanus amor magnitudinis falsae” carefully delineates the two motivations: virtus is a selfless characteristic, and is good because it promotes only what is best for Rome, whereas insanus amor is immoral because of the interference of a private desire in the public realm—personal desire obscures the “right” course of action. Seneca presents the Imperial attitude best when he philosophizes about what is good. He writes:

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\text{Bonum putant esse aliqui id, quod utile est; itaque hoc et divitiis et equo et vino et calceo nomen inponunt; tanta fit apud illos boni vilitas et adeo in sordida usque descendit. Honestum putant, cui ratio recti officii constat, tamquam pie curatam patris senectutem, adiutam amici paupertatem, fortem expeditionem, prudentem moderatamque sententiam... Nihil est bonum, nisi quod honestum est. Quod honestum est utique bonum.}\]

76 Juv. 1.74. “Honesty is praised—and left in the cold.”
77 Sen. Ep. 44.6. “Simply by distinguishing between good and bad things without patterning your opinion from the populace.”
78 Sen. Ep. 94.64. “It was not virtue or reason which persuaded Gnaeus Pompeius to take part in foreign and civil warfare; it was his mad craving for unreal glory.”
79 Sen. Ep. 120.2. “Some believe the Good to be that which is useful; they accordingly bestow this title upon riches, horses, wine and shoes; so cheaply do they view the Good, and to such base uses do they let it descend. They regard as honourable that which agrees with the principle of right conduct—such as taking dutiful care of an old father, relieving a friend’s poverty, showing bravery on a campaign, and uttering prudent and well-
Here philosophy shows the aristocratic ideal well, because philosophy is concerned entirely with morals in their purest form; it is a prescriptive genre of literature, and so matches the prescriptive nature of the aristocratic ideal. Seneca emphasizes that true “bonum” and “honestas” are concerned with behaviour, and not just thoughts. He equates honestas exclusively with bonum, and thus connects “doing the right thing” to proper conduct. While Seneca’s advice extends to people of all classes, the examples he presents imply behaviour of the upper class; “adiutam amici paupertatem” requires considerable wealth, and moreover “fortem expeditionem” is an important component of aristocratic virtus.

Even in an age when the behaviour of those in power was criticized generally, Romans retained the specific components of the ideal; Romans connected noble behaviour with well-known families. Tacitus describes a fierce British chieftain giving a rousing speech, “inter plures duces virtute et genere praestans nomine Calgacus apud contractam multitudinem proelium poscentem in hunc modum locutus fertur.”80 Although Calgacus was a British chieftain, Tactitus highlights him and the qualities that make him an excellent leader through a Roman lens. Calgacus makes a speech, then Agricola counters with a speech to his own men, and Tacitus pits the two generals against each other before a close battle. Agricola and his men win the battle, but Tacitus heightens the dramatic opposition by naming those of Calgacus’ characteristics which make him a worthy adversary: “virtute et genere.” This focus on noble birth appears in Seneca’s works as well.

Seneca flips the notion of virtue and prestigious ancestry when he writes, “Quis est generosus? Ad virtutem bene a natura conpositus.”81 Lucilius is upset because he is only a knight, and seems unable to progress beyond others with the advantage of noble birth; all of Seneca’s soothing words about the possibility of advancement by character alone, just like Cicero’s exhortations to his brother, achieves the opposite effect: it shows just how important noble birth was. Juvenal, like Seneca, argues against the idea that political success should be restricted to those whose families had previously held office. He writes, “tota licet veteres exornent undique cerae atria, nobilitas sola est atque unica virtus.”82 If what Juvenal professes were actually true, it would be unremarkable and unfit for discussion; instead Juvenal rejects the preconceived notion of the importance of noble birth at the exclusion of character. It is important to note that Juvenal does not state that birth should be eliminated from any consideration of worth; what he satirizes is the over-

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80 Tac. Agr. 29.4. “Pre-eminent by character and birth among the many chieftains was one named Calgacus. To the gathered host demanding battle he is reported to have spoken in the following strain.”
81 Sen. Ep. 44.5. “Then who is well-born? He who is by nature well-fitted for virtue.”
82 Juv. 8.324. The “veteres…cerae” refer to the practice of displaying wax masks of successful ancestors in the foyer of a Roman house; these masks were reminders to the family of their own reputation but moreover to the callers, who would be intimidated and impressed by the family lineage. For more on ancestor masks, see Harriet I. Flower, Ancestor Masks and Aristocratic Power in Roman Culture (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996).
whelming importance of birth at the expense of men whose pedigrees are less prestigious but would perhaps be better leaders. Within his corpus of work, Juvenal does affirm the importance of ancestry to the aristocratic ideal. In Satire 1, Juvenal notes with disdain that the “Troiugenas,” or Trojan born, another name for nobles, must collect hand outs along with the common folk; however they are given no special treatment by the freedmen in line with them.\(^{83}\) Juvenal most importantly decries the lack of “proper” treatment of the nobility solely based on their birth; everyone in the breadline would presumably have the same amount of money, but Juvenal argues that because they are “Troiugenas” the nobility should be given preference. The class distinction is entirely due to birth.

Tacitus’ description of Agricola and Calgacus rousing their troops points not only to the continued importance of noble birth, but also to oratory. Strong rhetoric was incredibly powerful: it could rouse troops or rouse the senate. Tacitus defines oratory as limited to the leaders—the British troops “excepere orationem alacres... fremitu cantuque et clamoribus dissonis”\(^{84}\) and even the more civilized Roman troops follow Agricola’s speech not with words but “ingens alacritas.”\(^{85}\) The difference between vocal noise and oratory is the difference between the masses and the nobility. Seneca too implies the importance of eloquence when he urges Lucilius, “si mala bonaque non populo auctore distinxeris.”\(^{86}\) As shown before,\(^{83}\) virtus was not just the private weighing of courses of action; the responsibility lay with the individual to make clear what the right choice was, and why. The only way to do this was through convincing others of its value, which required oratorical skill. When Juvenal asks, “fidimus eloquio? Ciceroni nemo ducentos nunc dederit nummos, nisi fulserit anulus ingens.”\(^{87}\) Juvenal’s anger at the privileging of vulgar wealth over eloquence proves the ideal’s component of oratory by his hysteria over the departure from it. Finally, Imperial Romans still expected nobles to be modest about their wealth. The keenest evidence of an unchanged view of modesty is the invective against corruption and greed. Tacitus writes, in praise of Agricola, “sors questurae provinciam Asiam, proconsulem Salvium Titianum dedit, quorum neutro corruptus est, quamquam et provincia dives ac parata peccantibus, et proconsul omnem aviditatem pronus quantalibet faciliunte redempturus esset mutuam dissimulationem mali.”\(^{88}\) Tacitus contrasts the unscrupulous quaestors with Agricola in order to show what is good and what is not; he

\(^{83}\) Juv. 1.100-102.
\(^{84}\) Tac. Agr. 33.1.
\(^{85}\) Tac. Agr. 35.1.
\(^{86}\) Sen. Ep. 44.6. “Simply by distinguishing between good and bad things without patterning your opinion from the populace.”
\(^{87}\) Juv. 7.139-140. “Do we put our faith in eloquence? There’s no one these days who will give Cicero two hundred, unless there’s a huge ring flashing on his hand.”
\(^{88}\) Tac. Agr. 6.2-3. “The allotment of quaestorships brought him Asia for his province, and Salvius Titianus for his pro-consul; neither corrupted him; yet the province was rich and an easy prey to the unscrupulous, and the proconsul, ready for every kind of rapacity, was prepared to show any amount of indulgence in order to purchase mutual silence about wrongdoing.”
argues that Agricola was remarkable in this instance because he did not participate in
the pervasive corruption, although it would have been easy to succeed. Greed is the op-
opposite of monetary modesty; aristocrats needed to maintain a certain amount of wealth
but it was not the central focus of their noble qualification. As Juvenal states of an ar-
 aristocracy which behaves most unaristocratically, “quid enim salvis infamia nummis?” 89

Even in the midst of this perceived epidemic of avarice, *otium* and education
remain necessary features of aristocratic self-fashioning. Seneca focuses on educa-
tion and oratory as a way to elevate one’s status. 90 Even outside of Rome, Roman sub-
jects sought to obtain education and *otium* in order to imitate the Roman upper class.
Tacitus writes of Agricola’s efforts to assimilate the conquered Britons, “*iam vero prin-
cipum filios liberalibus artibus erudire, et ingenia Britannorum studiis Gallorum ante-
ferre, ut qui modo linguam Romanam abnuebant, eloquentiam concupiscerent.*” 91 The
chieftain’s sons serve as a powerful analogue for the aristocracy at Rome. As soon as
they are given a liberal education, they aspire to oratory: this progression from Briton
to Roman through *otium* reflects the unchanging implications of the aristocratic ideal.

The aristocratic ideal, despite the trials and tribulations of the shift from Republic
to Empire, endured. Perhaps it is ultimately impossible to know the reasons for the lack of
change, however, there are two potential causes which either independently or in combina-
tion could account for the continuity of the ideal: the conservatism of Roman society, and
the emperor’s expression of his power within a familiar framework. Most societies cling to
their histories for guidance in times of turmoil, and Romans behaved no differently. As they
looked to the past for guidance, however, they also explored their present through an ex-
pansion of their mythic history. The *Aeneid* is not just a retelling of Rome’s origins; rather,
Virgil creates Aeneas as the ultimate proto-Roman and imbues him with the values of the
Republic in order to guide the new era of imperial power. The Romans could thus have re-
tained the same ideal by a simple refusal to accept cultural change. The continuity of cultural
assumptions can also be explained by the fact that the fall of the Republic was actually ac-
companied by a fairly minimal disruption of existing political structures. Augustus, aware
that kingship was necessarily associated with the Tarquins and thus anathema to the Roman
aristocracy and people, did not call himself *rex*, but instead adopted the less threatening
title of *princeps senatus*. Romans could retain their ideas of aristocracy because the offices
of the *cursus honorum* still existed, while the emperor’s supreme power was obscured,
tucked away in familiar titles. Just as aristocrats needed the support of the lower classes,
so the emperor needed the support of the *nobiles* in order to stay in power. Encouraging
continuity in aristocratic values would thus have been a crucial component of the Augus-

89 Juv. 1.48. “After all, what’s disgrace, if their money is safe?”
91 Tac. *Agr.* 21.2. “Moreover, he began to train the sons of chieftains in a liberal education, and to give a prefer-
ence to the native talents of the Briton as against the trained abilities of the Gaul. As a result, the nation which
used to reject the Latin language began to aspire to rhetoric.”
tan effort to provide political stability and create class concord within his new Principate. Beyond these speculations, of course, literature cannot provide concrete conclusions as to why no cultural change took place. Nevertheless, lyric poetry’s attention to everyday Roman social interactions, philosophy’s concern with personal conduct, and history’s and epic’s self-conscious interest in Roman values all produce a rich and diverse supply of information on the very fabric of Roman society. Straightforward readings of prose history can tell us what the Romans did, but only by immersing ourselves in the literature which the Romans wrote and read for the purposes of political advancement, philosophical self-improvement, or simple enjoyment can we begin to understand what Romans thought.
Primary Sources:


Secondary Sources:


Margherita Devine  Aristocrats and Assumptions  63


