INTRODUCTION

T HE YOUNGER SENECA, in his treatise "On Anger," provides the following account of the goings-on at a Persian royal dinner party:

King Cambyses was excessively fond of wine. One of his dearest friends, Praexaspes, advised him to drink more sparingly, declaring that drunkenness was disgraceful in a king, whom everyone's eyes and ears followed. To this the king responded, "That you may know how much I am in control of myself, I will prove that both my eyes and my hands are serviceable after drinking wine." He then drank even more freely than before, from even bigger cups, and now heavy and sodden he bid that his detractor's son go out beyond the threshold, and that he stand with his left hand raised over his head. Then he bent his bow and struck the boy through the very heart, which he had said was his target. Cutting open the boy's chest, he pointed out the arrow tip sticking in the heart itself, and looking back to the father he asked whether he had a sufficiently steady hand. Whereupon the father declared that even Apollo could not have shot more accurately.

Cambysen regem nimis deditum vino Praexaspes unus ex carissimis monebat ut parcius biberet, turpem esse dicens ebrietatem in rege, quem omnium oculi auresque sequerentur. ad haec ille "ut scias," inquit, "quemadmodum numquam excidam mihi, adprobabo iam et oculos post vinum in officio esse et manus." bibit deinde liberalius quam alias capacioribus scyphis et iam gravis ac vinolentus obiurgatoris sui filium procedere ultra limen iubet adlevataque super caput sinistra manu stare. tunc intendit arcum et ipsum cor adulescentis (id enim petere se dixerat) figit rescissoque pectore haerens in ipso corde spiculum ostendit ac respiciens patrem interrogavit satisne certam haberet manum. at ille negavit Apollinem potuisse certius mittere. (*Ira* 3.14.1–2)

This hair-raising sequence of events cries out for explanation on several points: What possessed Praexaspes to reproach Cambyses for heavy drinking in the first place? What is the meaning of the king's savage display of what he calls, paradoxically, his "self-control"? And why, in the end, did Praexaspes praise the king's aim? Seneca, never one to stint on interpretation, offers answers to all of these questions in the sentences immediately following this anecdote. First, he condemns Praexaspes for complimenting the king on his accurate shooting: he calls this courtier a "slave in spirit rather than in legal status" (*animo magis quam condicione mancipium*, §15.3), since he took the murder of his own son as "an opportunity for flattery" (*occasionem blanditiarum*). Next Seneca directs his invective against the king: he denounces Cam-

byses for his bloodthirstiness, and for "breaking up dinner parties with punishments and corpses" (*convivia suppliciis funeribusque solventem*); and he declares that the king is himself a worthy target of arrows, to be shot at him by his own friends (§15.4). Finally, regarding Praexaspes' initial comments to the king, Seneca suggests that it was not wise to chastise the king for drinking too much wine, when the real problem was that he might drink blood instead of wine, and since his hands were better filled with wine cups than with weapons. Yet Seneca concedes that Praexaspes was trying to do his king a service: he concludes that this courtier "was added to the number of those who showed, by the great disasters they suffered, how great was the cost, for the friends of kings, of giving good advice" (*accessit itaque ad numerum eorum qui magnis cladibus ostenderunt quanti constarent regum amicis bona consilia*, §15.6).

This anecdote, of course, is not so much about a specific Persian aristocrat's relationship with his king as about the relationship between aristocrats and kings more generally and, by implication, about how Roman aristocrats relate to their own ruler, the emperor. For, while the date of composition of this text cannot be fixed with great precision, it was probably written late in the reign of the emperor Claudius (Griffin 1976: 396)—about a century after Julius Caesar defeated all his rivals in battle, definitively swept away the old republican sociopolitical order, and established himself as the undisputed master of the Roman world; also some eighty years after Augustus put in place the institutional arrangements of the new sociopolitical order that modern scholars call the "principate," and thereby made himself the first of what we conventionally call the "emperors."[1] By the time Seneca (himself a high-ranking aristocrat) wrote this treatise, then, Roman aristocrats were familiar with the necessity of coping in a world that had an emperor in it; yet, as I will argue in this book, alternative visions of how the emperor did or might or should impact the actions and values of aristocrats continued to be fiercely contested. That Seneca borrowed this anecdote (suitably modified) from Herodotus (3.34–35), and that the figures involved are Persians rather than Romans, in no way detracts from its contemporary relevance: for Seneca has retold the tale, in Latin, within a treatise ("On Anger") that overtly urges particular patterns of behavior and mental discipline upon an audience of contemporary Roman aristocrats, Seneca's own social peers (indeed, the treatise is explicitly addressed to Seneca's own brother Novatus). Moreover, Herodotus provides none of the lengthy ethical commentary that Seneca appends to the anecdote:

[1] The Romans themselves, however, called their ruler by a variety of names under different circumstances; some of these alternatives, and their implications, are discussed in chapter 4 below.

this is Seneca's own contribution for the edification of his audience; it is this commentary in particular that stitches the story into contemporary Roman aristocratic modes of thinking and connects it to elite anxieties.

I have begun with this passage because the situation it describes, and Seneca's commentary on the actions and motives of the participants, encapsulates a variety of conceptual and constructive engagements with the imperial regime on the part of aristocrats—ways in which aristocrats think about their situation in a society dominated by an autocrat, and through which they position themselves relative to him so as to avoid harm, preserve their traditional prestige, and gain various social advantages. First, there is the dinner-party setting, where aristocrat and ruler interact face-to-face over food and wine: we will see later (chapter 3) that the dinner party, with its wealth of social nuances and implications, was a particularly fruitful locus for working out and comprehending the character of the ruler-aristocrat relationship. Second, there is the matter of reciprocity: the aristocrat, according to Seneca, gave his ruler good advice, yet was rewarded by having his son gruesomely executed before his very eyes; the aristocrat in turn responded with praise for the king, which appears to be completely inappropriate to these circumstances; and Seneca himself bestows blame liberally on both parties. As we will see (again chapter 3), exchanging goods and services with the emperor was another common way in which Roman aristocrats articulated and manipulated this relationship. Third, the aristocrat's initially rather frank criticism of his ruler, followed later by a compliment that Seneca condemns as "flattery," raises the question of "speaking to power": what kinds of things an aristocrat can or should say to his ruler under various circumstances, and what the consequences of such speech are for both parties (chapters 2 and 3). Fourth, Seneca speaks briefly of the aristocrat paradoxically as a "slave," though he alerts us that this usage is figurative by noting that it is a slavery of mind or soul (*animus*) rather than of legal status (*condicio*). This is an insult to the aristocrat, implying that it would better befit his high status to have acted or spoken otherwise than he did; but to speak or act otherwise would necessarily be to challenge the ruler, to call his legitimacy into question: for this aristocrat is a "slave" only if the king stands as "master," and to be free is to be rid of the master (chapter 4). In a subsequent anecdote similar to this one (*Ira* 3.15), Seneca carries this "slavery" metaphor much further, suggesting that an oppressed aristocrat can always "free" himself from an oppressive ruler by committing suicide. This kind of "freedom" has a whiff of the philosophical about it (again chapter 4), and we will see in general that philosophical ethics can provide aristocrats with ways of thinking about their relations with emperors that differ from established, longstanding patterns

of aristocratic ethical thinking (chapter 2). Indeed, some aristocratic authors articulate their relations with the emperor and his regime precisely by placing alternative value systems, linked to alternative sets of interests, in competition with one another (chapters 1 and 2). This one anecdote, then, adumbrates a range of issues that will be addressed in this study, all related to the question of how Roman aristocrats living in the early principate conceptualized, shaped, and sought to manage the autocracy in which they lived. There will consequently be no surprise that I discuss this anecdote several further times, from different points of view, in the chapters that follow.

Let us step back and take a broader view. The advent of the emperor in Roman society, and of the imperial regime we call the principate, marked a massive and unprecedented relocation of power and authority in the Roman world: as I will soon discuss further, it came to be concentrated in the hands of a single person (along with a small group of select associates), while the authority of other persons and institutions, in which social and political power had been vested through the five centuries of the republican regime, was correspondingly diminished. My aim in this book is to examine the terms, or the conceptual frameworks, in which and by which Roman aristocrats who lived under the Julio-Claudians—the first dynasty of emperors[2]—comprehended and molded the emergent sociopolitical order that was the principate, with its distinctive relocations of power and authority. I contend that, in this period, the emperor was being invented on the fly, through various feats of imagination, as a social figure who related in particular ways to other members of society, and particularly to elites. This invention of the socially contextualized and integrated ruler was a dialogical process: different visions of the ways in which the emperor and his power intervened, or could potentially intervene, in aristocratic values and social practice were proposed and placed in competition with one another. Ultimately, these contestations and negotiations were moves in power struggles between different segments of the aristocracy, in which the competing groups sought to articulate the character of the principate in ways most advantageous to themselves, and to persuade others of the correctness and legitimacy of these articulations.

It is primarily in literary texts that I seek evidence for this dialogical, contested thinking-out and shaping of the principate, for it is here that the material for this investigation is richest. The group whose involvement in this process is most in question is the aristocracy, for aristocrats

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[2] I date the beginning of the new regime to the victory of Octavian (later Augustus) over Antony at Actium in 31 B.C. (other scholars may prefer 27 or 23 B.C.); the Julio-Claudian dynasty ended with the death of Nero, Augustus's last surviving male descendent, in A.D. 68.

were the primary producers and consumers of literary texts—activities that presupposed significant leisure time and education, hence a degree of wealth.[3] At Rome, the aristocracy consisted minimally of equestrians and senators, and the authors of the texts examined in this study were all members of one of these orders.[4] I do not take the view that these authors were nothing more than mouthpieces for a collective aristocratic class consciousness; on the contrary, their representations of the new order, and of the relationship between emperor and elites, were substantially their own uniquely individual constructions, as will be obvious from the discussions below. However, they wrote for an audience of other aristocrats, and they presumably hoped that their representations would be found compelling and persuasive by that audience. Thus it seems reasonable to examine these texts for representations of the principate that engaged the interests of the elites—the group that included both author and audience, and that was most immediately affected by the emergence of the principate.

Modes of representing are linked to social and economic structures. It is appropriate, then, to sketch briefly certain broad changes in these structures that occurred in the transition from republic to principate, to provide a general background against which the arguments developed in this book will play out. This information is well known, has received much detailed discussion, and is (I take it) broadly uncontroversial. In the longstanding sociopolitical order of the Roman republic, the aristocracy dominated society in a number of ways. Its dominance was economic, since aristocrats monopolized society's material resources, primarily through their ownership of or control over land. It was political, in that aristocrats competed for and occupied all the positions of power in the government, through an oligarchic system of collegial magistracies of annual tenure. It was social, to the extent that they subordi-

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[3] See Kautsky 1982: 24, 79, who defines an aristocracy, broadly, as a "ruling elite" composed of those who competed for magistracies and other positions in the government, and who did not labor themselves but derived their livelihood from the labor of peasants. Kautsky's work is a cross-cultural study of aristocracies and their political and economic role in primarily agrarian, noncommercialized, premodern societies, societies that he calls "traditional aristocratic empires" (pp. 3–27). For him an aristocrat is defined primarily by his role in such a society, and not strictly by the source of his income: his definition does not require an "aristocrat" to be a member of the landed nobility that lives directly off the peasantry, but admits also those (exceptional) persons in agrarian economies who derive some or much of their income indirectly from the peasantry by taking it from other aristocrats, or, even more exceptionally, have significant income through trade (pp. 79–83). Throughout my book I use "aristocracy" and "elites" interchangeably.

[4] As Hopkins 1983: 44–45, 110–11 argues, equestrians and senators constituted a single elite which, although it contained many different subgroups with competing political interests, was largely unified by birth, acculturation, socialization, and economic interests.

nated to themselves, more or less directly, many other inhabitants of the state though patronal activities, slaveholding, and sometimes brute force. With the advent of the principate, however, significant shifts in the distribution of power and authority began to occur in each of these categories. In no case did any nonaristocratic social group acquire significant power: the modes of production did not change hands, nor did the class structure of society change, so there was no revolution in a Marxist sense.[5] Rather, power and authority began to be redistributed within the aristocracy. Its collective, oligarchic dominance in the areas described above faded, and power became increasingly concentrated in the hands of one aristocrat in particular — the emperor — and a group of other persons distinguished and empowered primarily by their proximity to him: family members, certain equestrians and senators who were particularly close friends or associates, and certain freedmen within the imperial household.[6] Economically, the emperor was by far the wealthiest individual in society, owning or controlling more land, slaves, and other forms of capital than anyone else. Politically and socially, emperors from Augustus onward maintained dominance in large part by exploiting their superior capitalization to co-opt other individuals and groups. For through distributions of foodstuffs and other goods, money, offices, and other sorts of honors to persons of every social rank and position, they kept others in their debt; in particular, they took care to appoint handpicked men to the most important positions in the government and in the military, rather than entrusting the allocation of these positions to the vagaries of the electoral process and other longstanding modes of aristocratic competition. (Note, however, that the traditional magisterial principles of annual tenure and collegiality did not apply to the emperor qua emperor, for the tenure of this role involved no preset time limitation or, usually, any recognized equal in power.) Since he dominated established modes of aristocratic competition, the aristocracy at large was forced to seek new arenas of compe-

[5] Whether, or to what degree, the term "revolution" usefully describes the changes that took place in the Roman world between 60 B.C. and A.D. 14 (Syme's periodization in his provocatively titled 1939 study, *The Roman Revolution* [p. vii]), between 80 and 49 B.C. (approximately the years covered by Gruen 1974; see esp. pp. 1–5), or in any other interval one may choose, has long been debated. However, a consensus seems to have emerged that even though the modes of production and the class structure of society did not change, nevertheless significant changes did occur in many aspects of Roman culture. This topic is now revisited in a collection of essays entitled *The Roman Cultural Revolution* (Habinek-Schiesaro 1997); for a brief history of the characterization of these changes as "revolutionary," see pp. xv–xvi, along with Wallace-Hadrill's essay, esp. pp. 3–7.

[6] Wallace-Hadrill 1996: 285, 299 discusses power derived from proximity to the emperor, especially power of this sort exercised by women and freedmen. He speaks of the emperor's normal entourage as a "court," resurrecting an earlier idea of Friedlaender.

tition, new ways of competing both among themselves and with the emperor. My project is not to examine these shifts in the locations of power and authority per se, though aspects of some of these shifts will receive detailed discussion. Rather, these shifts both stimulated and were in turn affected by the ideological activity, the conceptualizing and constructing, that is my primary object of study.

My thinking about the linkages between sociopolitical change and conceptual change in ancient Rome has been helpfully informed by the work of scholars who have investigated this interrelationship in other societies. One scholar whose work in this area has been seminal is Clifford Geertz. In his 1964 essay "Ideology as a Cultural System," he argues that sharp changes in an established political and social order may lead to "a loss of orientation," "social dislocation and psychological tension," and "conceptual confusion" among those whose ordered social universe has been swept away. Such confusion, he contends, leads to intensive ideological activity: a "search for a new symbolic framework in terms of which to formulate, think about, and react to political problems" (Geertz 1973 [1964]: 219–21). While his insight that social and conceptual change are linked is vitally important, Geertz seems to present this link as unidirectional: social change precedes, stimulates, and drives conceptual change; the latter is a reaction to the former. More recently, this approach has been nuanced by a group of political theorists who embrace the idea that our conceptual categories do not simply mirror a preexisting social reality, but at least partly constitute that reality. One of these theorists, Quentin Skinner, cites as an example Elizabethan entrepreneurs who, in an attempt to give moral legitimacy to their commercial activities, borrowed from the language of the church and referred to themselves as "religious"—a term with positive connotations that implied pious, selfless, conscientious behavior. Yet, Skinner argues, this self-construction imposed effective limits on the kinds of commercial activities in which these men could participate. For in calling themselves "religious," they subjected themselves to a larger set of expectations for what constitutes "religiosity," expectations that accompanied this term in its original ecclesiastical domain of reference. These entrepreneurs could not maintain this self-representation without also systematically tailoring their conduct to fit these broader expectations. Thus conceptual change—in this case, the interjection of a conceptual category from one discursive realm into another—is constitutive in that it can actively shape how people behave, and hence, how the world actually is.[7]

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[7] Skinner 1989: 20–22. Other political theorists have also contributed to this approach. Farr 1989 (in the same collection) argues that politics is linguistically constituted at the

The current study is deeply concerned with the relationship between social and conceptual change, as revealed in Roman aristocratic thinking and writing of the Julio-Claudian era. Aristocratic imaginings of the autocracy in which they live involve more than just the attempt to comprehend the new power structure: they are also attempts to affect that structure, to cause it to distribute power in ways that preserve, even enhance, aristocratic privilege and prestige. In part 1, I contend that both Lucan and Seneca portray received modes of ethical discourse as malfunctioning, or functioning in ways disadvantageous to the aristocracy at large, in the sociopolitical order of the principate; Seneca, however, argues that by adopting Stoic ethics the aristocracy can in certain ways reassert its traditional power and privilege against the power of the emperor. Again, in part 2 I argue that, among the familiar, longstanding authority figures in Roman society that are adduced as paradigmatic for the emperor — e.g., "dominant gift-giver," "father," "master" — one model or another may seem particularly appropriate at a given time because the emperor is behaving in a certain way. On the other hand, to propound one or another of these paradigms in a public manner is to invite others (including the emperor himself) to compare his behavior systematically to the model invoked, and thus to impose upon him a kind of social pressure to mold his behavior accordingly — much as the Elizabethan merchants found themselves constrained in unforeseen ways by the associations of the word "religious." Thus Roman aristocrats are attempting to guide and shape the new order — to constitute their social reality — even as they struggle to comprehend and articulate it.

The place of ethics in this study requires further discussion. Moral understanding was perhaps the most important mode of understanding in Roman culture, and almost all representations of social, political, or economic phenomena are at some level — often at the most obvious, surface level — also ethically significant. Ethics, then, is central to the conceptualizing and constructing that is the object of this study, and is a key concern throughout. In the first part, "Ethics and Imperial Ide-

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same time that language is politically constituted. He suggests (p. 26) that conceptual change can be seen as an "outcome of the process of political actors attempting to solve the problems they encounter as they try to *understand and change* the world around them" (my emphasis). Thus he presents conceptual change as both reflective and constructive of political change. Ball 1988: 12, like Skinner, sees the cross-pollination of discourses as an important source of conceptual change that generates social change: "When the concepts and metaphors constituting the discourse of economics, for example — . . . or of any other discipline — enter the field of political meanings they alter the shape and structure of that field by altering its speakers' terms of discourse." Similarly, Bourdieu 1993 [1983]: 44.

ology," conflicting ethical systems take center stage as means of expressing the social and ideological tensions associated with the emergence of the emperor as a concentrated locus of power. Here I work with two specific authors, each treated in his own chapter, whose ethical engagements with the principate are particularly intense and sustained: the epic poet Lucan, whose poem on the civil war between Caesar and Pompey (49–48 B.C.) dates from the early 60s A.D. (the middle of the reign of Nero), and the younger Seneca, whose ethical treatises and letters were composed from the 40s to the 60s A.D., in the reigns of Claudius and Nero. These two chapters examine how, and on what grounds, these authors deploy crucial Roman value terms such as *virtus*, *pietas*, and *gratia*. I argue that both authors represent the new, concentrated locus of power in the Roman state (the emperor in Seneca's texts, and Julius Caesar in Lucan's) as spawning novel, disruptive ways of deploying these value terms—new modes of ethical discourse that are opposed to and compete with received, established modes. Specifically, as I contend in chapter 1, the ethical contradictions that fill Lucan's poem are his way of representing the competing, alternative views of the composition of the Roman community that emerged during the civil war and persist in Lucan's own day. For when Caesar takes up arms against the state, he creates a community of supporters who largely regard other Romans as enemies rather than as fellow citizens, and who deploy ethical language accordingly (e.g., it is right and proper to use violence against them). On the other hand, the Pompeians generally regard their Caesarian opponents as fellow citizens, which renders the use of violence against them problematic, if not impossible. The advent of the imperial regime therefore involves the creation of a faction within society—a subcommunity with a distinctive set of moral values—and consequently institutionalizes a persistent, unbridgeable cleft in aristocratic ethics. In chapter 2, I show that Seneca puts forth Stoic ethics, which locates moral value in mental dispositions, in a way that systematically engages with traditional, received aristocratic ethics, which locates moral value primarily in observed actions. Seneca urges his audience to accept the former in place of the latter, a move that (I argue) addresses specific, concrete social and cultural dislocations experienced by elite Romans in the face of the emperor's power—for example, a reduction of the opportunities and rewards for displaying military prowess, and a perceived aggravation of certain problems associated with flattery. In addressing these issues as he does, Senecan ethics offers a way of reestablishing aristocratic power and prestige, albeit in a transfigured form, in the new order.

Now, Seneca and Lucan, both writing quite late in the Julio-Claudian period, and being not only close relatives (Seneca was Lucan's paternal

uncle) but also co-conspirators against Nero (both were forced to commit suicide in A.D. 65, upon the exposure of the Pisonian conspiracy), could be thought not to provide a representative sample of the conceptualizing and constructing of the new order that went on more widely in aristocratic society throughout this period as a whole. Indeed, their modes of framing in ethical terms the social and ideological conundrums of the new order are distinctly their own, unlike anyone else's. Nevertheless, I will show that these authors address the same problems that are revealed more broadly in Julio-Claudian sources, and address them in ways that intersect significantly with other contemporaneous modes of conceptualizing. It is these more widespread, more chronologically persistent modes of constructing autocracy that are the subject of the second part of this study, "Figuring the Emperor." The two chapters comprising part 2 range widely through authors and texts of the Julio-Claudian period, along with other texts (whether earlier or later) that discuss or bear upon this period. These chapters investigate how several longstanding, familiar types of authority relationship in Roman society—specifically the relationships of gift-creditor to gift-debtor, of father to son, and of master to slave—came to be used in the Julio-Claudian period as models by which to articulate and evaluate the emperor's relationship to his subjects, particularly aristocratic ones. In chapter 3, I examine the practices of the Julio-Claudian emperors as gift transactors; that is, as givers and receivers of objects and services in a society where such exchanges were a means of establishing hierarchical social relationships. I begin with a case study of the emperor at dinner among other diners, for the dinner party was a key social context in which hierarchical relationships were asserted and challenged through exchange. In this context and also more broadly, as I argue next, the emperor established his authority as legitimate through his relentless giving, or conversely delegitimated himself by failing to give and receive in the ways regarded as appropriate for someone with such resources. Furthermore, as a matter of practice and even policy, he conducted his exchanges so as to maximize his giving of gifts and minimize his receiving of them. Thus the emperor's authority was rendered socially and ethically comprehensible through its manifestation in this most familiar of cultural forms, giving and receiving. Chapter 4, finally, examines a pair of competing metaphors by which the emperor's relationship with his subjects, especially aristocratic ones, was widely modeled in the Julio-Claudian period, namely the relationships of master to slave and father to son. Each of these paradigms involves a particular set of expectations about the roles that the participants play in respect to one another, and hence about the ethical character of the relationship so modeled—the former being stereotyped as adversarial and exploitative,

and the latter as warm and nurturing. There is no question of one or the other model winning out, or being more true than the other, in general or in any particular situation: their utility is precisely in their opposed ethical implications, hence their ability to impose specific behavioral expectations and pressures upon the emperor and his regime, as well as upon aristocratic subjects. The widespread, competitive setting and evaluating of paradigms for the emperor's authority, as discussed in chapters 3 and 4, along with the more idiosyncratic competing ethical discourses constructed by Seneca and Lucan, discussed in chapters 1 and 2, indicate the range and depth of aristocratic ideological activity, their constructing of the autocracy in which they lived, during the Julio-Claudian period.