‘HONOURING’ TIBERIUS ON INSCRIPTIONS, AND IN VALERIUS MAXIMUS – A NOTE*

The attitude of the early 1st-century AD author Valerius Maximus (PIR¹, V 82)¹ to Tiberius² has met with criticism. To modern ears his praise of the emperor seems extravagant and has aroused distaste. Does it betray a particular background? Given the paucity of our information on Valerius, the question is difficult to answer. However, it is the aim of this note to suggest that epigraphical evidence could possibly be adduced to throw some light on the question.

Before turning to the inscriptions, it may be noted that other writers in the early Principate have also attracted adverse comment for their praise of Augustus and Tiberius. Among the poets Ovid (PIR², O 180) has been regarded as sycophantic to the imperial house, even if one makes allowance for his special agenda, his desire to be recalled from exile by the emperor.³ Velleius Paterculus (PME, V 64) may represent writers in prose: he has also been criticized for the extravagance of his praise of Tiberius.⁴

¹ I wish to thank an anonymous referee for some very helpful suggestions. However, not all the points which were raised could be addressed within the compass of this brief note.
² The following additional abbreviations have been used: PCR = S. Demougin (ed.), Procopographie des chevaliers romains Julio-Claudiens (Paris 1992); PIR = H. Dessau et al. (edd.), Prosopographia Imperii Romani (1st edition, Berlin 1896-98); E. Groag et al. (edd.) (2nd edition, Berlin/Leipzig 1933-); PME = H. Devijver (ed.), Prosopographia Militariun Equestriun (Louvain 1976-93).
⁴ Cf. him praising Tiberius, and Livia, in Getic (Pont. 4.13.16-36). Cf. R. Syme, History in Ovid (Oxford 1978) 127-34, 163-66. Ovid says that he was ashamed to have composed a poem in Getic. This surely refers to a literary decline, a failure to maintain the sophisticated Graeco-Roman conventions of the capital. It seems unlikely, as S. Casali, ‘Quaerenti plura legendum: on the necessity of “reading more” in Ovid’s exile poetry’, Romus 27 (1997) 80-112, esp. 92-96, has suggested that this was a signal to Ovid’s audience to ‘read’ his praise of the imperial family as in fact harsh criticism.
All three authors were writing at the close of a period of great social change. But with the accession of Tiberius the system of the Principate had clearly become institutionalized. It required an appropriate style of address to the holder of power. This applied not only to senators, but also to members of the second order of nobility at Rome, the *equites* as they were called. They had come to hold important positions in the army, in the imperial administration as well as being *domi nobites* or local authorities in their home towns in Italy. Many had literary interests and aspirations: Tiberius himself included literary figures among his *comites* or the official companions in his entourage. The attitude of some of the *equites* to the emperor has left traces in their inscriptions.

Whether Valerius was a member of the equestrian order cannot be established. His position in society is unknown. Attempts to connect him with the patrician Valerii do not convince: he had a patron, Sex. Pompeius, who was probably the distinguished senator who was consul in 14.

However, it may be instructive to compare some of his remarks on the emperor with the attitudes of some of the less articulate members of the equestrian order which survive in part in the epigraphical record. It may even be the case that his work was at least in part intended for aspirant members of the order.

Before individuals are considered, a document referring to the order as a whole may be considered. In 19 there was a grave crisis in Rome after the death of the emperor’s heir, Germanicus, in the East and the subsequent suicide, before his trial for treason, of Cn. Calpurnius Piso (PIR² C 287), who had been supposed to ‘assist’ him,. A special decree of the Senate was issued on the conclusion of the affair, the *senatus consultum de Cn. Pisonis patre*. One of its purposes was to reassert loyalty to the imperial house. There is particular praise of the equestrian order for its concern and conscientiousness, because it realized the seriousness of the situation and declared with repeated acclamations its feelings and grief for the wrongs

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3 Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 1.12, censuring them for getting it wrong.


8 Val. Max. 2.6.8; 4.7. ext. 2; *PIR²*, P 584.
suffered by the emperor." An emotional outburst from the body was regarded as entirely appropriate.

As far as individual equestrians were concerned, the *tribuni militum* (there were six tribunes in a legion, which contained some 6,000 troops) were the most prominent. They often made mention of a link with Tiberius in their inscriptions. This is also the case of *primipili* or leading centurions, whose rank conferred equestrian status. Equal devotion came from ordinary centurions. Valerius (3.8.8) gives an example. A centurion of Octavian’s who had been captured by M. Antony refused to change sides. He is made to declare that he could not stop being ‘Caesar’s soldier’: ‘ut aut Caesaris miles desinam aut tuus esse incipiam.’ Valerius called him a ‘centurio diu Augusti’. Although most centurions were drawn from the ranks, they could hope to reach the primipilate or the prefecture of a camp, its equivalent, and so attain equestrian rank. And certain members of the equestrian order were not above seeking direct commissions as centurions in the army.

Patronage was a pervasive feature of Roman society. It operated in appointment to posts in the army, and promotion within it. A personal tie with the dynasty was of great value. It became customary to highlight a link with Augustus on honorary or funerary inscriptions. The custom continued under

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9 AE (1996) 885, lines 151-54. The plesbs was more expressive but restrained itself by the ‘exemplum’ of the equestrian order. The loyalty of the army was also singled out for commendation, significantly together with an appeal for their further support, since ‘they realized that the safety of our empire rests under the protection of the imperial house’ (lines 159-63). Valerius’ phrase in his preface ‘penes hominem (i.e. Tiberium) hominem deorumque consensu maris ac terrae regimen esse uluit’ basically expresses the same sentiment. The Tab. Siarensis (AE 1984, 508), a senatus consultum detailing honours for Germanicus, speaks generally of the ‘pietas omnium ordinum erga domum Augustam’ and enjoins representatives of all the ‘municipia et coloniae Italiae’ to display the decree in prominent places.


Tiberius, but started to decline under Claudius.

An early example is provided by Q. Veranius (ancestor of the patrician governor of Britain under Nero [PIR¹ V 266]). A military tribune in the late Republic, he rose to become a legate of Augustus (addressed as Θεός Σεβαστός on the inscription) in Germany. But also included in the inscription, unfortunately lacunose at this point, is the fact that he was the legal guardian of ‘his ward Drusus Germanicus the father of Tiberius [Claudius Caesar] Augustus’, i.e., Drusus the Younger, father of the emperor Claudius.¹⁴

Some further representative cases may be considered: A. Virginius Marsus,¹⁵ a primus pilus and a prefect of the camp, became a tribune in the Praetorian Guard at Rome. He described this post as ‘tr. mil. in prae(ctorio) diui Aug. et Ti. Caesars Aug.’: it had been bestowed by Augustus and Tiberius themselves. Similarly, Sex. Aulienus, primus pilus bis and a military tribune, was prefect of a camp of ‘Caesar Augustus and Tiberius Caesar Augustus’.¹⁶ An ignotus military tribune, who had possibly also been a primus pilus, had also been a ‘praef. c[astr. imp. Caes]aris Aug.’.¹⁷ Another ignotus is more grandiloquent: he had filled ‘the highest military posts of the equestrian order by the appointment of Augustus’ (‘castresibus ... Caesaris August. summis equestris ordinis honoribus’).¹⁸ A freedman celebrated in verse the fact that the generosity of his noble patron had enabled his son, M. Aurelius Cottanus, to reach the ‘honore tribunī, quem fortis castris Caesaris emergit’¹⁹ – the Caesar being Tiberius. While still an equestrian, Velleius Paternculus, having just held the military tribunate, was proud to become ‘castrorum Ti Caesaris militem’, ‘a soldier in Tiberius’ camp’, in fact a prefect of an auxiliary regiment.²⁰ He spent many years serving under Tiberius and, as referred to above, was only too ready to give vent to his increasing admiration for him.

Military figures of equestrian or near equestrian status continued to honour

¹⁶ *ILS* 2688; *PME*, A 201.
¹⁷ *CIL* 1.11; *PME*, Inc. 190.
¹⁸ *ILS* 2682; *PME*, Inc. 162.
²⁰ Vell. Pat. 2. 104. 3; *PME*, V 64.
Tiberius after leaving the army. Virgius Marsus (mentioned above) left a considerable sum and five silver busts ‘of the Caesars’ (i.e., of Augustus and Tiberius) to his village. An equestrian officer who later became a procurator or financial administrator in Judæa, C. Herennius Capito, executed a commission on behalf of a deceased centurion who had served with him in the East. It consisted of a bequest of ten pounds of silver (presumably in the form of a bust) for Tiberius.

A former primus pilus bis and military tribune, L. Cassius Corneolus, made a dedication to Tiberius ‘from his own money’ in Verona: It may have taken the form of an honorary arch, a not inexpensive item. He also represented a member of the imperial family as local ‘mayor’ in Verona (‘praefect. [—Caesianis’). In fact, in the early Principate it was quite common for communities in Italy to elect the emperor or a member of his family as one of the duoviri or quattuorviri (‘mayors’) who headed the local town council. This was especially honourable in a fifth year, when a census was conducted. A local dignitary would have had to be chosen to deputize for the emperor. He had the title of praefectus. The practice was particularly common under Tiberius. Besides Corneolus above, two further examples may be quoted. An equestrian officer with a distinguished record, L. Arrius Salanus, represented Tiberius in the quinquennial prefecture in Formiae (Formia), and five years later was designated to do the same for the emperor’s grandsons by adoption, Nero and Drusus Caesar. Similarly, Q. Decius Saturninus of Aquinum (Aquino) was praefectus quinquennalis of Tiberius himself, then of his son Drusus the Younger and finally of his grandson Nero Caesar. It

21 Note 14 supra. Ovid (Pont. 2.8) placed silver statuettes of Tiberius in his lararium. For the value attached to statues of the emperor, cf. the attempt (Tac. Ann. 3. 70.1) to bring the eque L. Ennius (PFR 241) to trial on a charge of maestas for having melted down silver statues of Tiberius. Plin. NH 33. 151 implies that silver statues signified defilection. Cf. Suet. Tib. 26.1; Tac. Ann. 4.2.4; K. Scott, ‘The significance of statues in precious metals in Emperor worship’, TAPhA 62 (1931) 101-23.


25 ILS 6285; PFR 269; D.B. Saddlington, ‘The relationship between holding office in a Municipium or Colonia and the Militia Equestris in the Early Principate’, Athenaeum 84

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may be noted that the brother of the ignotus advanced to 'castrenses ... summi honores' mentioned above also owed the highest position in his municipium to 'iudiciis August. Caesaris'. At a lower level one may note the man who became a decurion or town councillor 'by favour of the god Caesar', 'benefic. dei Caesaris' at Nola, where Augustus had a villa.

Service in the militia equestris and office-holding in the coloniae and municipia of Italy were inextricably combined. In both these milieux praise of the emperor is prominent, and apparently sincere.

As noted above, praise for him, even in the form of the ascription of divine honours, appears in the authors of the period. Ovid's effusions have been mentioned. He was prepared to acknowledge his Italian background and equestrian status. In fact, from his home town of Sulmo (Salmo) we have the career of a L. Ovidius Ventrio (surely a relative): he was both a tribunus militum and a quattuoruir quinquennalis and the first of the municipium to be granted a public funeral. Ovid could have had (a more privileged) equestrian career and even advanced to the Senate, but preferred literature. Because of his desire to be recalled from exile, his praise of the emperor seems suspect, but it is not all that different from his contemporaries'.

Also an Italian – his roots were in Campania – Velleius Paterculus did rise from the equestrian to the senatorial order, but he had long years of military experience. As noted above, his admiration for Tiberius was unbounded. It issued in a passage of extravagant praise. Whether Tiberius was actually addressed in 'divine' terms cannot be determined: the passage is incomplete. But there is an undercurrent of the imperial cult in it.

It may be asked whether this was the atmosphere in which Valerius Maximus belonged. As noted above, nothing is known of his social standing, or of any military or civilian career. Reference has been made to his patronizing reference to a centurion who provided an example of loyalty, with the inference that must have been of superior standing. But authors sometimes adopt the assumed stance of their readers, rather than their own: Horace waxed indignant about a presumptuous freedman who became a military tribune,


7 Note 18 supra.
8 ILS 6343.
29 Cf. Sadlington (note 26) 157-81.
30 CIL 9.3082; PME, O 26.
31 For Ovid's truncated official career, cf. Trist. 4.10. 33-40.
although he, also a military tribune, was the son of a freedman father.\textsuperscript{34} Valerius certainly included many military exempla in his work. He even reflects the actual language found in equestrian inscriptions. He says of T. Marius Siculus, who reached a military tribunate and the quattuorvirate in his municipium, that he rose ‘beneficiis diui Augusti imperatoris ad summos castrenses honores’ (cf. ‘castrensis honor’ in 8.14.5); this recalls the phrase ‘castrensis ... Caesaris Augusti summi honores’ in the inscription of an ignotus quoted above.\textsuperscript{35}

Valerius’ panegyric of Tiberius certainly parallels that of the equestrians Ovid and Velleius Paterculus. He is aware of the language used of Tiberius in the inscriptions of equestrian officers and local authorities in the towns of Italy. His exempla seem eminently suitable for this class, and those aspiring to join it, who realized that their best hope of advance lay in gaining beneficiæ from Tiberius.\textsuperscript{36} One may ask whether he worked with them in mind and even whether he came from that milieu himself. However, as stated at the outset, there is no definite evidence to prove this.

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\textsuperscript{34} Hor. Epod. 4.20; PME, p. 844; for Horace as a trib. mil. cf. Sat. 1.6.48; cf. 1.6.6; PIR2, H 198.
\textsuperscript{35} Val. Max 7.8.6; cf. note 18 supra. For T. Marius Siculus, cf. CIL 11.6058; PME, M 35.
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