

In the Roman Republic, one measured the greatness of a man by the size of his retinue. The escort (*deductores*) and followers (*adsectatores*) who gathered around aristocrats were an indicator of status and, according to the author of the *Commentariolum Petitionis*, “an estimate of how much strength and support [the candidate] will have at the polls” (*Comm. Pet.* 34). If ancient authors typically (and predictably) favor the ideological lens of the man being escorted, modern scholarship has in turn analyzed such public demonstrations from the point of view of the *deductores*. For Nicolet, the escort is one of the “alternative” institutions emerging in the late Republic to offer the people a “means of self-expression” (Nicolet 1980, 356). In such a reading, the escort becomes one of the quasi-democratic aspects of late Republican politics that have been the recent focus of much scholarly debate (Hölkeskamp 2004; Millar 2002; Morstein-Marx 2004; Mouritsen 2001; Yakobson 1999). But if the power of the escort is explicitly political, and even potentially democratic, what happens to the *deductio* when the nature of political power is transformed? In this paper I show how Tacitus and Pliny exploit the Republican associations of the escort and reveal its continued relevance in a new political climate.

For Tacitus, the Republican connotations of the escort are convenient: the escort becomes yet another institution sullied by the emergence of the Principate. The consolidation of power behind one family leads to such atrocities as Agrippina marching through the city behind lictors (*Ann.* 13.2, though this may evoke the rights of the Vestals as much as the rights of Roman magistrates: see Beard *JRS* 1980, 17) or the freedman Pallas parading about with an escort more suited to a magistrate (as Nero’s barb reveals: *Ann.* 13.14). Popularity is still gauged by the size of one’s retinue, but, as Tacitus shows, the meaning of that popularity depended very much on one’s relationship to the emperor; just as the popular spectacle of a triumphal parade became a privilege granted only to members of the imperial family, imperial control extended even to more quotidian forms of procession. Moreover, great men like Agricola must go out of their way to avoid the escort that would naturally adhere to them in better times (*Agr.* 40); in a clever inversion, Tacitus has him return from Britain and visit the *princeps* at night, usually a sign of devious intent, so eager is he to avoid any appearance of threatening popularity. Tacitus suggests that Agricola practically flaunted his *lack* of ambition for power, and the characteristics that he fixes on are revealing: Agricola adopts a plainness in appearance, in speech, and in his very manner of walking, by eschewing the full retinue that was (as Tacitus so clearly implies) his right as a great Roman.

If Tacitus fixes on the Republican nature of the escort to condemn the *princeps*, Pliny uses it as a source of praise in the *Panegyricus*. His memorable description of Trajan’s first entry into the city as *princeps* emphasizes the fact that he walks rather than rides (thereby avoiding some of the connotations of the triumph), and makes himself accessible to the throngs who turn out to support him (*Pan.* 22-23). He continues this accessibility in his daily life by making himself available – again, on foot – for regular consultation (*Pan.* 24). Pliny here consciously evokes the Republican practice of great men advertising their availability for consultation by walking in the forum (*Cic. De or.* 3.133). The inclusive and accessible nature of Trajan’s escort is another way in which Pliny co-opts the “ethical and political clout” of the Republic in his praise of Trajan (Gowing 2005, 121). As they had in the past, the people can still signal their approval by turning out in droves to meet and consult with their leader; the “ideology of publicity” so important to Roman political life in the Republic (Millar 2002, 45) did not disappear with the turn to the Principate, but was now more tightly controlled and focused on the *princeps*.