

A Speech on Incorporating the Gauls

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Claudius, the third successor of Augustus (41 to 54 CE), had a reputation as a pedantic and long-winded individual. He was not without abilities as a ruler, however, and did much to equalize the condition of the Italians and the Provincials.

The following speech of his in the Senate (preserved on an inscription) illustrates at once the nature of an imperial harangue before the Conscript Fathers (the members of the Senate), the interruptions that seem to have been allowed even in the speech of an Emperor, the broad personalities in which Claudius indulged, and his liberal policy withal, especially to the Gauls. A version of the speech is also reported by Tacitus; it is presented below.

Claudius: "It is surely an innovation of the divine Augustus, my great-uncle, and of Tiberius Caesar, my uncle, to desire that particularly the flower of the colonies and of the municipal towns, that is to say, all those that contain men of breeding and wealth, should be admitted to this assembly."

[Interruption, seemingly by a senator]: "How now? Is not an Italian senator to be preferred to a provincial senator!?"

Claudius: "I will soon explain this point to you, when I submit that part of my acts which I performed as censor, but I do not conceive it needful to repel even the provincials who can do honor to the Senate House. Here is this splendid and powerful colony of Vienna;¹ is it so long since it sent to us senators? From that colony comes L. Vestinus, one of the glories of the equestrian order, my personal friend, whom I keep close to myself for the management of my private affairs. Let his sons be suffered—I pray you—to become priests of the lowest rank, while waiting until, with the lapse of years, they can follow the advancement of their dignity. As for that robber, Valerius Asiaticus from Vienna, I will pass over his hateful name. For I detest that hero of the gymnasium, who brought the consulship into his family before even his colony had obtained the full rights of Roman citizenship. I could say as much of his brother, stamped as unworthy by this unlucky relationship, and incapable henceforth of being a useful member of your body."

[Interrupting shout]: "Here now, Tiberius Caesar Germanicus! It's time to let the Conscript Fathers understand what your talk is driving at—already you've reached the very limits of Narbonnese Gaul!"

Claudius: "All these young men of rank, on whom I cast my glance, you surely do not regret to see among the number of the senators; any more than Persicus, that most high-born

gentleman and my friend, is ashamed when he meets upon the images of his ancestors the name Allobrogus. And if such is your thought, what would you desire more? Do I have to point it out to you? Even the territory which is located beyond the province of Gallia Narbonensis, has it not already sent you senators? For surely we have no regrets in going clear up to Lugdunum² for the members of our order. Assuredly, Conscript Fathers, it is not without some hesitation that I cross the limits of the provinces which are well known and familiar to you, but the moment is come when I must plead openly the cause of Further Gaul. It will be objected that Gaul sustained a war against the divine Julius for ten years. But let there be opposed to this the memory of a hundred years of steadfast fidelity, and a loyalty put to the proof in many trying circumstances. My father, Drusus, was able to force Germany to submit, because behind him reigned a profound peace assured by the tranquility of the Gauls. And note well, that at the moment he was summoned to that war, he was busy instituting the census in Gaul, a new institution among them, and contrary to their customs. And how difficult and perilous to us is this business of the census, although all we require is that our public resources should be known, we have learned by all too much experience."

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In the consulship of A. Vitellius and L. Vipstanus the question of filling up the Senate was discussed, and the chief men of Gallia Comata, as it was called, who had long possessed the rights of allies and of Roman citizens, sought the privilege of obtaining public offices at Rome. There was much talk of every kind on the subject, and it was argued before the emperor with vehement opposition. "Italy," it was asserted, "is not so feeble as to be unable to furnish its own capital with a senate. Once our native-born citizens sufficed for peoples of our own kin, and we are by no means dissatisfied with the Rome of the past. To this day we cite examples, which under our old customs the Roman character exhibited as to valor and renown. Is it a small thing that Veneti and Insubres have already burst into the Senate-house, unless a mob of foreigners, a troop of captives, so to say, is now forced upon us? What distinctions will be left for the remnants of our noble houses, or for any impoverished senators from Latium? Every place will be crowded with these millionaires, whose ancestors of the second and third generations at the head of hostile tribes destroyed our armies with fire and sword, and actually besieged the divine Julius at Alesia. These are recent memories. What if there were to rise up the remembrance of those who fell in Rome's citadel and at her altar by the hands of these same barbarians! Let them enjoy

¹ Modern Vienne in the South of France (not Vienna, Austria).

² Modern Lyons in France, Claudius's birthplace.

indeed the title of citizens, but let them not vulgarize the distinctions of the Senate and the honors of office.”

These and like arguments failed to impress the emperor. He at once addressed himself to answer them, and thus harangued the assembled Senate. “My ancestors, the most ancient of whom was made at once a citizen and a noble of Rome, encourage me to govern by the same policy of transferring to this city all conspicuous merit, wherever found. And indeed I know, as facts, that the Julii came from Alba, the Coruncanii from Camerium, the Porcii from Tusculum, and not to inquire too minutely into the past, that new members have been brought into the Senate from Etruria and Lucania and the whole of Italy, that Italy itself was at last extended to the Alps, to the end that not only single persons but entire countries and tribes might be united under our name. We had unshaken peace at home; we prospered in all our foreign relations, in the days when Italy beyond the Po was admitted to share our citizenship, and when, enrolling in our ranks the most vigorous of the provincials, under color of settling our legions throughout the world, we recruited our exhausted empire. Are we sorry that the Balbi came to us from Spain, and other men not less illustrious from Narbon Gaul? Their descendants are still among us, and do not yield to us in patriotism.

“What was the ruin of Sparta and Athens, but this, that mighty as they were in war, they spurned from them as aliens those whom they had conquered? Our founder Romulus, on the

other hand, was so wise that he fought as enemies and then hailed as fellow-citizens several nations on the very same day. Strangers have reigned over us. That freedmen’s sons should be entrusted with public offices is not, as many wrongly think, a sudden innovation, but was a common practice in the old commonwealth. But, it will be said, we have fought with the Senones. I suppose then that the Volsci and Aequi never stood in array against us. Our city was taken by the Gauls. Well, we also gave hostages to the Etruscans, and passed under the yoke of the Samnites. On the whole, if you review all our wars, never has one been finished in a shorter time than that with the Gauls. Thenceforth they have preserved an unbroken and loyal peace. United as they now are with us by manners, education, and intermarriage, let them bring us their gold and their wealth rather than enjoy it in isolation. Everything, Senators, which we now hold to be of the highest antiquity, was once new. Plebeian magistrates came after patrician; Latin magistrates after plebeian; magistrates of other Italian peoples after Latin. This practice too will establish itself, and what we are this day justifying by precedents, will be itself a precedent.”

The emperor’s speech was followed by a decree of the Senate, and the Aedui were the first to obtain the right of becoming senators at Rome. This compliment was paid to their ancient alliance, and to the fact that they alone of the Gauls cling to the name of brothers of the Roman people.