MOB POLITICS: THE POLITICAL INFLUENCE OF THE CIRCUS FACTIONS IN THE EASTERN EMPIRE FROM THE REIGN OF LEO I TO HERACLIUS (457-641)

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Abstract

This paper seeks to continue the research started by scholars such as W. Liebeschuetz and P. Bell in order to challenge the traditional argument put forth by Al. Cameron, namely that the circus factions did not have a political role in society. The objective of this study is to examine the political importance of the circus factions from the reign of Anastasius (491-518) to Heraclius (610-641). Furthermore, it explores the political motivations behind the factions' violent behaviour, the evidence for their involvement in the military, and their role in accession ceremonies. The methodology includes establishing a typology for sixth century riots, an examination of the hippodrome and its role as a medium between people and emperor, tracing the shift in the focus of imperial ideology, and a re-evaluation of the primary sources, with a focus on the literary and epigraphic evidence, to determine if there was a political aspect to the factions. The study concludes that Cameron did undervalue the factions' political importance and outlines the conditions that were influential in their rise in importance.

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General Introduction

> I put aside serious things and chose the most disreputable instead...my enthusiasms were the brawls of the colours, the chariot competitions, the pantomime ballets. I even entered the wrestling ring. I travelled with such foolishness that I lost my cloak, my common sense and my honour.[1]

There have always been those who over-indulge in the excitement and frivolity of the games, but for 200 years the eastern empire witnessed a unique phenomenon, the rise and fall of a quasi-political unit within society, namely the Circus Factions. The factions have captivated scholars from ancient to modern times. The excitement of the races and unruliness of the partisans are common topics among ancient sources, and their role within society is an ongoing debate among modern scholars. They have been called a myriad of names, including soccer hooligans, religious sympathizers, political partisans, and local demesmen but none have achieved a consensus among historians. Alan Cameron has been the authority on the factions since his seminal study, *Circus Factions: Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium* and in it he does an excellent job of determining who the factions were, where they came from, and how they operated in society. However, recent scholarship has called into question some of Cameron's conclusions. The most notable is his argument that the factions did not have any political motivations behind their activities.

In a recent work on social conflict in the sixth century, Peter Bell outlines several of the problems with Cameron's argument.[2] He argues that Cameron's philological approach limits his perspective and as a result he is unable to recognize the wider political issues that are going on outside of the hippodrome. Furthermore, by focusing so heavily on the fact that the factions had no permanent loyalties, he overlooks some of their political significance, most notably their influence in voicing public grievances and their role in the legitimization of emperors. Secondly, he argues that Cameron undervalues the effect that the imperial presence had on the hippodrome in Constantinople. The increased civilian role in ceremonies, particularly in a society that uses ceremony to invoke a certain ideology and legitimate emperors, had a significant impact on the

[1] Men. Prot., fr. 1. I have used *PLRE* abbreviations for all available primary sources. Those sources that do not occur have been written out in full.
[2] Bell 2013: 143-145.

growing importance of the factions.[3] Finally, Bell points out that Cameron neglects the insight of Rambaud, a nineteenth-century scholar, who argues that the hippodrome provided a unique medium for citizens to exercise their freedom of speech (even against the emperor) and that the factions played an important part of this process.[4]

But what *was* the role of the factions in society? This is the question that has been the subject of much scholarly debate. Cameron's studies on the factions during the seventies (1973 and 1976) dismissed several early conceptions of their loyalties. He convincingly argues that the factions had no connections to any religious groups or local areas of Constantinople (demes), and that they were not linked to any specific social class.[5] However, although Cameron provides a detailed and thorough examination of the factions, he may have undervalued their political importance.

The factions rose to prominence during the sixth century, but their origins can be traced deep in Rome's past. It is difficult to determine when the factions actually originated, but it is clear that by the early Principate the *venues* that they would eventually dominate had begun to acquire greater social significance.[6] As these venues grew in socio-political importance, so did the influence of the patrons who put on the games.[7] It is this development that caused emperors to eventually become the sole proprietors of the games.[8] The games continued to be operated by the state during the third and fourth centuries, but because of the decline in the epigraphic habit, there is little evidence about the organization of the games.[9] What is clear, however, is that

[3] Cf. Dagron 2011:229-251.
[4] Rambaud 1870. This argument has been reasserted in recent scholarship, e.g. Dagron 2011: 201-228.
[5] For his arguments against the factions involvement in religious groups, see Al. Cameron 1976: 126-154; the demes, see Al. Cameron 1976: 24-44; and social classes, see Cameron 1976: 74-104.
[6] Emperors could demonstrate that they were a *civilis princeps* by patronizing races, attending the games, and holding festivals. *Civilis princeps* is usually translated 'First Citizen' and was a focus of imperial ideology in the early empire, see Bell 2013: 125-126; cf. Al. Cameron 1976: 5-8.
[7] Shows provided a means for members of the governing class to appease their subjects and gave competing politicians the chance to display their *civitas*, see Liebeschuetz 2001: 203-204.
[8] By the fourth century the patronage of the games had passed completely into the hands of the state. Even if an event was paid for by a private citizen, only the emperor could receive the gratitude of the people, see Al. Cameron 1976: 6-7.
[9] Although there is little evidence, it is believed that the gladiatorial games and wild beast shows stopped by the fourth century and it was chariot races and theatrical shows that were flourishing, see Rouché 1993: 25-28; cf. Liebeschuetz 2001: 204-205. The epigraphic tradition flourished during the first and second centuries but fell into decline in the third. For further details of this development, see MacMullen 1982.

sometime in the fifth century, there was a drastic change in the organization of the shows.[10] It is this re-organization that created an opportunity for the factions to rise in prominence.

The games were re-organized so that all the personnel, horses, and equipment became the responsibility of several empire-wide organizations.[11] These organizations, called the Circus Factions, were sponsored by the state, and likely received the majority of their resources from public funds.[12] This development caused an important change in civic politics. Previously, individuals had gained popularity by contributing to a civic cause or charity, but now, if one had political ambitions, one sought the support of the factions. Furthermore, the factions now mediated all private funds donated to public entertainment. This is significant because it would eventually allow them to rival the Church, an institution which handled all of the charitable contributions.[13] It is not known whether the re-organization took place across the empire all at once or if it started in Constantinople and then spread to the provinces, but it is clear that soon afterwards the factions began to grow in importance.[14]

In this thesis, I intend to re-examine the available evidence on the factions in order to determine their political significance during the fifth and sixth centuries. My methodology will be similar to Cameron's in that I will focus primarily on the literary and epigraphic sources available to evaluate the factions' role in society. However, I shall endeavor to also employ social theory to better understand this evidence and to provide a context for the acts of the factions that Cameron has determined non-political.

The first chapter will examine the violent aspect of the factions. In this chapter I shall seek to accomplish several objectives. First of all, I shall set out to provide a typology for riots in Late Antiquity. The goal of this section will be to create broad categories as a means to identify the motivations behind the riots that occur during the fifth and sixth centuries. I believe that this

[10] The re-organization is thought to have occurred during the reign of Theodosius II (408-450) because Malalas mentions that he rearranged the seating placements in the hippodrome, see Joh. Mal. 14.2.8-19. For further details on the reorganization of the games and the allocation of public funds, including an alternate interpretation that argues for an earlier date (fourth century), see Puk 2012: 123-127.
[11] Liebeschuetz 2001: 205. There were either two factions, the Greens or the Blues, or four, including the Reds and the Whites that are commonly held to be subsidiaries of the former two.
[12] For evidence of the factions receiving resources from public funds, see Cameron 1976: 219-220.
[13] Bell 2013: 134-141; cf. Liebeschuetz 2001: 206-7.
[14] Joh. Mal. 14.34.58-63. Recorded in the reign of Marcian (450-457), this is the first incident of the factions involved in a riot and an emperor favoring one faction over the other.

will prove beneficial when attempting to determine if any of the violent acts of the factions had political relevance. Secondly, I shall attempt to highlight the Hippodrome as a conduit between the emperor and the masses. I shall argue that it is essential to understand the role of the hippodrome in Byzantine society in order to understand whether or not the factions had any political influence. The focus will be on its dual purpose of entertainment and politics and how it acted as a medium for the voicing of popular grievances. Finally, I shall present the available evidence and evaluate the factions' political significance.

The second chapter will analyze the military aspects of the factions. Were the factions an extension of the army? Were they in a civic militia? Did their military involvement have any political benefits? I shall attempt to answer these questions by examining the factions' role in the defence of cities, such as Aykelāh and Constantinople. Furthermore, I shall determine whether or not their military involvement helped the factions to achieve a position of political authority.

The third chapter will look at the ceremonial aspects of the factions. First, I shall outline the transition that imperial ideology underwent during the fourth and fifth centuries from a military to a civilian focus. This will be presented in order to better understand the factions' rise in the ceremonial sphere. Second, I shall examine the evidence for their role in the acclamation of emperors. I will look at the conditions of the accessions in the fifth and sixth centuries and attempt to determine their importance in accession ceremonies. Finally, I shall determine if the factions' role in imperial ceremonial afforded them any social and legal leniency in the empire.

I have chosen to highlight these three aspects because I believe that Cameron has undervalued their connection to the factions' political significance. I will argue that when one considers their role in voicing popular grievances, their use as a civic militia, the political authority they achieved because of these functions, and their importance in imperial ceremonial, it is clear that although the factions may not have been political parties, they were certainly political institutions.[15]

[15] Bell 2013: 144-145.

Chapter 1: Faction Riots and the Role of the Hippodrome in Late Antiquity

Introduction

> Let us now turn to the idle and slothful commons… These spend all their life with wine and dice, in low haunts, pleasures, and games. Their temple, their dwelling, their assembly, and the height of all their hopes is the Circus Maximus.[16]

The growth of the circus factions in the sixth century has occasioned much debate as to their political importance and their role within society. From the reign of Leo I to the reign of Heraclius the factions witnessed not only a rise in influence but also an increase in the violence they perpetrated. This violence, usually in the form of riots, has been a topic of debate among modern scholars. Two modern views have emerged on the subject. The traditional view, argued by Alan Cameron (1976), represents factional rioting as essentially non-political and therefore compares the violence associated with factional riots with modern day soccer hooliganism. The opposing view, argued by Liebeschuetz (2001) in connection with his work on the decline of the city, attributes more importance to the political element of the factions and argues that while there are indeed some similarities between the factions of the Eastern Empire and modern day soccer hooligans, there are also significant differences that need to be taken into account when making comparisons.[17]

Although there is reference to factional violence earlier than the reign of Zeno (474-491), this chapter focuses on the period between 489 and 641 for several reasons.[18] First, the instances of factional violence before 489 are infrequent and the factions still seem to have been establishing themselves within society. There are only three references to factional disturbances in the sources (445, one between 450 and 457, and 473) before the reign of Zeno, and they are not mentioned with reference to any political motivations. Second, there is a drastic change in

[16] Amm. Marc. 28.4.28-29.
[17] The problems associated with this analogy are coherently outlined in a recent work by P. Bell. He argues that the analogy "ignores the political dimension of the factions" and that although there are some parallels, the comparison should not be taken too far, see Bell 2013: 146-148.
[18] For a background on incidents prior to 495, see Liebeschuetz 2001: 203-210, 257-260; cf. Al. Cameron 1973: 233-235.

both the frequency of factional violence and the political application of it beginning in 489 and continuing throughout the sixth century.[19]

After consideration of whether or not these riots can be classified as fanatical rivalries, incited more by the spectacles of the circus than by any political motivation, my aim is to re-evaluate the evidence available in order to provide a clear understanding of the factions' motivations when they engaged in violent altercations. Therefore, in this chapter I shall conduct a detailed analysis of the primary sources and place particular emphasis on instances when factional riots can be demonstrated to have a political motivation. I intend to argue that the factions did in fact have a significant political aspect during this period and that this can be clearly seen when examining the causes and motivations for their violent actions.

Before an analysis of the available evidence is presented, it is necessary to expand on two significant topics. First, a typology for the classification of Late Antique riots needs to be established, and second, the importance of the hippodrome as a meeting place between the emperor and the people should be emphasized.

Typology of Late Antique Riots

In the following study I shall divide riots into three broad categories, but I will divide the third category (political) into three sub-sections in order to emphasize the political role of factional violence.[20] Since the purpose of this chapter is to determine whether there were any political motivations for the factions' violent acts, particular emphasis will be placed on this third category. To convey the material more effectively, there are three sub-sections that will be discussed with regard to politics: the removal of officials, economic disputes, and the release of prisoners. The evidence for factional violence in each of these political sub-sections will be presented in detail later on in the chapter.

[19] Al. Cameron 1973: 233-235.

[20] This typology is a combination of two similar methods by Al. Cameron 1976: 271-272, and Greatrex 1997: 64-67. I have developed this combination by the use of the broad categories presented by Greatrex but also by connecting the economic category of Al. Cameron to the political one. While these should still be viewed only as broad categories, I have broken down the political category into three sub-groupings so that the different political motivations of factional violence can be presented as clearly as possible. See Bell 2013: 19-21, for the benefits of using social theory to help better understand the complexities involved in the conflicts that are analyzed.

The first category pertains to religious disturbances. During the fifth and sixth centuries, and particularly during the reign of Anastasius, these riots tended to be more concerned with doctrinal issues.[21] It has been asserted in the past by scholars such as Dvornik that the factions took sides in these doctrinal disputes (the Blues on the Chalcedonian side and the Greens on the miaphysite side),[22] but this stance has been effectively refuted by Cameron in his article "Heresies and Factions."[23] While there is no direct relationship between the factions and doctrinal disputes, it would be incorrect to assume that members of the factions were not involved. The point that needs to be emphasized is that they did this of their own accord and not on behalf of their entire faction. Furthermore, factional members may have used religious riots as a cover to conduct their own killings either for political purposes or inter-factional rivalry. This can be seen in 512, when Anastasius pacified a major doctrinal riot and called for rioters "to stop murdering and killing people at random".[24]

As Greatrex points out, although the murder of opponents was occasionally practiced in doctrinal disputes, such random killings were more often associated with the factions.[25] The eruption of doctrinal violence could therefore provide faction members with an opportunity to attack their own rivals.[26] Conversely, religious groups may have used factional rioting as a means to cover their own ambitions. There are few sources for this kind of action, but in the *Doctrina Iacobi nuper baptizati,* Jacob the Jew, a fictional character in the seventh-century dialogue, provides a glimpse of the kind of incidents that may have taken place.[27] Although this

[21] See Haarer 2006:115-183, for an overview of Anastasius' religious policies and the controversies surrounding them. See also Dijkstra/Greatrex 2009, for a more in-depth study of the causes and consequences for the doctrinal conflicts that took place in the reign of Anastasius.

[22] Dvornik 1948:6-7 "One thing is certain; the religious evolution of Byzantium and of the whole East is inseparably bound up with the rivalry between the foremost Circus parties." See also Baldwin 1978, for the argument that a passage in Malalas (Joh. Mal. 7.5) provides evidence for the religious sympathies of the Circus Factions.

[23] Al. Cameron 1974. Cameron points out the complete absence of evidence among ancient literary sources, such as the ecclesiastical historians, popular chronicles, and the lives of saints, that could connect the factions to religious disputes. Furthermore, he indicates a major flaw in the primary argument of this view (the alleged coincidence between the religious and factional sympathies of the emperor), namely that there are actually more emperors from Theodosius II to Heraclius that this does *not* apply to than those it does. For a summary of these emperors' factional and religious sympathies, see Al. Cameron 1974: 93-96.

[24] Joh. Mal. 16.19.32-35. To determine the difference between the dating and events of the first *staurotheis* riot of 511 and the second one of 512, as well as the difficulties in distinguishing between factional and ecclesiastical violence see Meier 2006; cf. Dijkstra/Greatrex 2009. For details of the riot itself, including the doctrinal matters surrounding the incident see Haarer 2006: 223-229.

[25] Greatrex 1997: 64.

[26] For the emphasis of random killings being attributed to the factions see Proc. *Anecd*. 6.25.

[27] *Doct. Iac*. 1.40: "When the Greens under Crucis burnt the Mese and committed that evil, again as a Blue I bashed the Christians, insulting them as Greens and calling them city-burners and Manichees. And when at Antioch

may be the case concerning doctrinal disputes, Peter Bell has convincingly argued that there were some confrontations between the factions and the church that can be ascribed to the fact that by the sixth century they had become rival institutions, each with its own political agenda.[28]

Finally, the method by which violence was utilized in doctrinal disputes during the fifth century provided a precursor to factional violence. The dramatic increase of violent incidents after 489 and the frequency of altercations during the sixth century raises the question as to why there was this sudden emergence. Although Cameron rightly argues that the rise of the factions was largely due to a re-organization of both the spectacles displayed at the games and the structure of putting on the games, he attributes the increase of violence orchestrated by the factions primarily to the "turbulence of the theatre."[29] However, the importance of doctrinal violence as a precedent should not be overlooked. Religious violence was relevant to the emergence of factional violence, not in the act itself (there had always been a level of violence associated with the games and there had always been religious violence), but in the manner in which it was used to achieve their goals. Religious groups were able to direct popular opinion, incite the populace to violence, and had divisions of monks that operated as the "hardcore fans" of the Church.[30] Thus, although there was no direct link between factional violence and doctrinal disputes, the religious violence of the fifth century had a lasting effect on the conduct of the factions in the sixth century.

The second category of riot is the general mayhem that resulted either from the excitement of the games or from inter-faction rivalry. This is the category of riot that Cameron has compared with modern-day soccer hooliganism. It is important to note that although this chapter seeks to emphasize the political importance of factional violence, there are still many incidents that can be classified as this type of hooliganism. Several examples of when riots broke out over the excitement of the games, either in the joy of triumph or the agony of defeat, can be found in the literary sources. Malalas records the great riot in 507 at Antioch after the victories of Porphyrius in the hippodrome and also in May 562 when the Blues attacked the Greens as they

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Bonosus punished and killed the Greens I went to Antioch and, as a Blue and supporter of the emperor, bashed numerous Christians and called them rebels," see Dagron/Déroche 1991: 17-248.

[28] See Bell 2013:134-139. By the sixth century they both had members from all levels of the society and were organized across the empire. This type of confrontation can be seen in Antioch between 577 and 588, see Evagr. *HE*. 5.18.

[29] Al. Cameron 1976: 214-224.

[30] Bell 2013: 134-139.

departed the hippodrome.[31] Furthermore, there are records of riots in 514 and 550 when the emperor cancelled scheduled races.[32] This type of riot, however, was never a serious threat. As Cameron points out, it was not a revolt against the emperor himself, as the emperor was the last person they wanted to alienate, it was foremost a battle between two factions. Although the person of the emperor was rarely targeted, these riots often escalated into considerable vandalism, especially in the form of arson, which would have been disruptive to the city. This form of vandalism and inter-factional rivalry is highlighted by Theophanes with two rhymes that were reportedly chanted by the factions:

> Burn here, burn there, not a Green anywhere.
>
> Set alight, set alight, not a Blue in sight.[33]

Although there are many examples of this type of riot in the sources, it is hard to find an unbiased account because of the opinion of many aristocrats who are coincidentally the authors of the available accounts. The elite often took a negative view of the factions and frequently commented on their lack of loyalty and the senselessness of their actions.[34] Procopius provides several examples of this. First, he comments that the factions care "neither for things divine nor human in comparison with conquering in these struggles,"[35] and later he comments on the senselessness of the violence in which they partake, saying,

> They fight against their opponents knowing not for what end they imperil themselves, but knowing well that, even if they overcome their enemy in the fight, the conclusion of the matter for them will be to be carried off straightaway to the prison.[36]

Cameron uses these and similar accounts to illustrate his point that most factional riots can be classified in the category of hooliganism.[37] He asserts that the exceptions are too few to indicate political involvement. However, he fails to highlight the problems and potential biases of the

[31] Joh. Mal. 18.138.20-23. For details of the events surrounding the victories of Porphyrius see Al. Cameron 1973: 240-252.
[32] Theoph. 226.33; cf. Al. Cameron 1976: 276.
[33] Theoph. 236; cf. Al. Cameron 1976: 91.
[34] Although this is often the opinion of the elite class, emperors did recognize the importance of the games. They took the peoples' mind off the hardships of life and were a popular of entertainment. For examples of emperors supporting the games, see Bell 2013: 125-127.
[35] Proc. *Pers.* 1.24.5.
[36] Proc. *Pers.* 1.24.3.
[37] See Al. Cameron 1976: 272-273, with further references.

elite towards the factions and plays down the political causes and implications that may have also influenced their actions.

The third category of riot and the one which will be examined in greater depth further in this chapter is the political motivations for rioting. These riots were the most dangerous because they always carried the chance that the emperor would be overthrown.[38] Moreover, as Greatrex points out in his article on the Nika Revolt, there was always the chance that the second category of riot could escalate into a full-blown political conflict if it was mishandled by an indecisive or heavy-handed emperor.[39] The most effective method that emperors employed to stop these riots from escalating was to throw their support behind one of the two major factions, the Blues or the Greens. While this gave one faction more room to exert its influence and target its opponents, it also served as a means to stop both factions from uniting against the emperor and thus becoming a mob beyond his control. This loss of control is apparent during the reign of Anastasius, who attempted to support the Reds in order to check the power of the Blues and the Greens.[40] The frequency with which he had to deal with factional violence can be at least partially attributed to his inability to suppress the influence of one faction and curry favour with the other.[41]

Justinian (527-565), who was a major supporter of the Blues during the reign of Justin I, changed his stance after his accession to the throne and attempted to take a neutral position and not support any of the factions.[42] Malalas provides a record of his initial policy in 527 towards the factions:

> He established a secure, orderly condition in every city of the Roman state and despatched sacred rescripts to every city so that rioters or murderers, no matter to what faction they belonged, were to be punished; thus in the future no one dared to cause any

[38] Joh. Mal. 16.4.46-61; see Haarer 2006: 223-229, for an account of the events leading up to the riot in 498, the escalation of a minor event into a full blown riot, and Anastasius' reaction; cf. Meier 2009.
[39] Greatrex 1997: 65, n. 27.
[40] Joh. Mal. 16.2.23-24; cf. Greatrex 1997: 66.
[41] There are two important cases when both factions rioted against Anastasius, namely in 499/500 at the celebration of the Brytae and in 515/16 over oil shortages. See Greatrex/Watt 1999: 1-4, for evidence of the factions rioting at the festival of Brytae and see Joh. Mal. 16.15, for oil shortages.
[42] See Vasiliev 1950: 117-120, where he indicates 523 as the date for the reversal of Justinian's policy towards the Blues. However, as Greatrex (1997:66) has pointed out this was the date for the appointment of a certain Theodotus, a harsh antagonist of the factions. Furthermore, he states that there was no direct action taken against them until his accession to the throne in 527.

> kind of disorder, since Justinian had struck fear into all provinces. And for a short period the factions of Antioch the Great were on friendly terms.[43]

However, his policy of neutrality backfired a short time later when the factions united against him in the well-known Nika Revolt of 532.[44] His policy may have in fact driven the opposing factions together, which resulted in the largest faction-related riot of the sixth century. After the reign of Justinian, emperors tended to take the side of one of the major factions in order to prevent a similar incident. This in itself demonstrates that it was necessary for the emperor to support at least one of the major factions and thus strongly suggests that there must have been political motivations behind the support of the factions.

The Hippodrome

The next topic to be discussed in order to better understand the political role of the factions is the importance of the hippodrome as a meeting place between the emperor and the people in Late Antiquity. Described by Gilbert Dagron as "Un jeu, un cérémonial, une configuration politique (l'hippodrome de Constantinople est tout cela à la fois),"[45] the hippodrome was the sporting center of the ancient world: but it is important to distinguish the difference between ancient and modern arenas. The key factor that Cameron does not sufficiently emphasize in regard to the factions is that the hippodrome served a dual purpose of entertainment and politics. During the early empire, the Circus Maximus had become established as a necessary link between people and emperor. This practice further evolved in several ways once Constantinople became the capital of the empire. It was formalized in the urban topography by linking the imperial palace to the hippodrome through a tunnel that emerged in the *kathisma* (imperial box), which created a symbolic link between emperor and people.[46]

The importance of the hippodrome was also reflected in its architecture. It was designed to symbolise a microcosm of the Roman state. The emperor had his box and was surrounded by his attendants and representatives according to their importance. There were also specific seating

[43] Joh. Mal. 17.18.42-48. For more information on the use of cruelty and fear as an acceptable method for Justinian to control the population and to enrich himself through the confiscations of the guilty see Scott 1985: 99-109.
[44] For a detailed account of the events of the Nika Revolt, see Greatrex 1997.
[45] Dagron 2011: 201.
[46] Av. Cameron 2012: 34-35; cf. Bell 2013: 125-127.

arrangements in order to reflect people's status in society.[47] Furthermore, there was specific seating for the Greens and Blues both to keep them away from each other and to provide them with the opportunity to voice grievances from a single location.[48] On a more symbolic level, the hippodrome could be seen as a representation of the Roman world, with the arena being the earth; the *spina* (especially its water-tanks) representing the sea; and the obelisk representing the sun. Moreover, the track was a circle as the year, having 12 *carceres* (starting blocks for race) for the 12 months, 24 races for the 24 hours in a day, and 4 colors representing the 4 seasons.[49]

One source of the factions' political influence was derived from the long tradition (dating back to Augustus) for the games as an occasion for the voicing of public grievances.[50] This practice was expanded in Late Antiquity by extending that privilege to the provinces. Grievances in the provinces were written down and sent to the emperor so that he could be kept informed about the conduct of officials in the provinces and be able to take a decision accordingly. Evidence compiled from *De ceremoniis,*[51] in connection with inscriptions of acclamations recorded at Aphrodisias, provides a glimpse at the fixed order of the demonstrations that took place in Late Antique arenas[52]. They began with the praise of God, after which honours were bestowed upon the emperor, followed by any high officials or dignitaries that were being honoured on that particular occasion. After the praise was completed, the crowd was given the

[47] See Roueché 1993:83-84, the front seats were reserved for city officials and there were *proedria* or preferential seating for honoured members of society. Furthermore, the seats of the general *cavea* were also strictly regulated according to the status of common citizens. For a detailed study on the regulations for seating and the progression of the policy from Augustus to Late Antiquity see Rawson 1987.

[48] Epigraphic evidence (mainly graffiti and inscriptions on seats) collected from Aphrodisias reveals that there were specific seating areas set out for the Blues and the Greens. For a complete record of the epigraphic evidence concerning the seating arrangements at Aphrodisias, see Roueché 1993:85-119. There is also literary evidence which demonstrates the segregation of the Blues and Greens. See Proc. *Pers.* 1.24.2: "In every city the population has been divided for a long time past into the Blue and the Green factions; but within comparatively recent times it has come about that, for the sake of these names and the seats which the rival factions occupy in watching the games..."

[49] Al. Cameron 1976: 231; cf. Dagron 2011: 53-61.

[50] Liebeschuetz 1996: 179-182; cf. Futrell 2006: 36-42. After the establishment of the Principate, the number of formal opportunities for the average citizen to participate in politics was greatly reduced. As a result, the games became the best venue for interaction between people and emperor by giving them direct access to the emperor. See Crowther 1996, for significant developments of the arena and the sporting events held in Rome and Constantinople between 31 BCE and 1453 CE.

[51] *De Ceremoniis* was written or produced for the Emperor Constantine VII and provides a detailed description of ceremonial procedures and court protocols. The work also provides insight into the role of the factions when voicing popular grievances and at which times it was appropriate to do so, see A. Moffat and M. Tall 2012.

[52] See Roueché 1984, for a study of the uses of acclamations in Roman society and its development from the early Empire up to Late Antiquity.

opportunity to voice praise, requests, or grievances.[53] Although the support of the factions was not required to voice a particular grievance, their participation, especially the use of their large chorus of professional supporters, would have definitely made the claim more powerful.[54]

Thus, the factions had a legitimate role in allowing the grievances of the common citizen to be heard not only in the capital but also in the provinces. Their violent reactions, therefore, took on a political aspect when riots occurred because of a breakdown in the communication between people and emperor and the people were left with no other means to express their displeasure.

Now that the typology of the Late Antique riot and the significance of the hippodrome have been established, it is appropriate to examine the evidence available in the primary sources. This analysis will seek to provide justification for classifying instances of factional violence to one or several of the political sub-categories.

Sources

The main source for factional violence is the *Chronographia* (Χρονογραφία), composed by John Malalas in the sixth century, but evidence will also be drawn from sources such as Procopius, Theophanes, and Theophylact Simocatta.[55] There will be a noticeable gap in the evidence between the years of 565 – 600. Although there has been some speculation that factional violence drastically receded during this period, Liebeschuetz correctly points out that this is more likely attributable to a lack of available sources than any decline in factional violence.[56] Malalas ends his history in 565, while sources covering the period after 565, such as the *Chronicon Paschale* (ca. 630), record little or no details about the involvement of the factions in the urban affairs of Constantinople. Other sources, such as Theophanes, tend to avoid recording the factions' activities in the provinces. The visibility of the factions in the sources after 600 comes in part from the significant role they played in the downfalls of Maurice and Phocas, and in part from the availability of sources concerning the provinces, such as John,

[53] Roueché 1984: 189-190.
[54] Liebeschuetz 1996:180-182.
[55] See Jeffreys 1990, for a detailed study on the life and works of John Malalas with emphasis on his sources and the structure of his chronology.
[56] Liebeschuetz 2001: 251.

bishop of Nikiu.[57] The purpose of reviewing this evidence will not be to dispute the fact that many incidents of hooliganism took place but to show that factional violence cannot be restricted solely to this category and that there was in fact a tradition of political violence perpetrated by the factions in Late Antique society.

Removal of Officials

The first sub-category that will be examined concerns the use of rioting for the removal of public officials. Since there were no formal public debates in which factions could have participated, the political activities of the factions were involved less with specific issues than the eighteenth-century riots described by Rudé.[58] Therefore, they addressed issues primarily by demanding the removal of the officials responsible for unpopular policies rather than by a protest against the actual policies themselves.[59] However, it is important to note that the factions rarely targeted the emperor himself. The groups realized that although they were becoming an important voice for the people, they still required the support of the emperor to achieve their demands.[60] Furthermore, the displeasure of the emperor could result in harsh consequences such as the removal of faction members from public office, the torture and execution of members, or loss of life through the intervention of the army. Procopius relates the problems that could arise if a faction displeased the emperor by stating, "But the factionists (Blues), from then on, became the most discreet persons in the world. For they could no longer bring themselves to commit the same outrages as before..."[61]

Although these interventions tended to be short-lived, clearly it was more prudent to target their accusations at officials, so that changes could be demanded while still respecting the authority of the emperor. It is difficult to determine specific causes for the factions' attempts at the removal of officials because entries in the sources tend to be more focused on rioting and

[57] Liebeschuetz 2001: 251.
[58] Although factional rioting shared many characteristics with the eighteenth-century riots of London and Paris, there is a notable difference in the lack of anything similar to the Parliament of Paris. For more information see Liebeschuetz 2001: 216 n.81; also Rudé 1964: 59-63.
[59] Liebeschuetz 2001: 216. For an early example of the people demanding the death of an unpopular official during the reign of Constantine, see Eunapius 462.18-463.19. Although this incident took place in the hippodrome, it is unclear whether the factions played a leading role or were simply a part of the crowd.
[60] E. Hobsbawm has documented a similar situation in his study of seventeen and eighteen century Russia. He stresses that the mob's underlying loyalty is to the ruler, who is viewed as just even if his administrators are not. This loyalty only tends to subside if the ruler chooses to ignore the mob, see Hobsbawm 1959: 118-120: cf. Greatrex 1997: 61-62.
[61] Proc. *Anecd.* 9.43-44.

vandalism. Even though a cause may not be evident in every case, the evidence that officials were in fact removed from office adds weight to the political dimension of the factions. However, there are several cases where the cause has either been provided for us in the sources or can be extrapolated by the policies or position of the official in question. These causes will be dealt with when possible on a case by case basis.

The first notable instance when the factions had influence over the appointment of officials took place in 494/495.[62] Hierios, the praetorian prefect, appointed his relative Calliopius as *comes Orientis*. After his appointment, he was attacked by the Greens at Antioch in the *praetorium* and although he managed to escape, when the Emperor Anastasius heard about this affair, he immediately appointed a new *comes Orientis* Constantius of Tarsos. The reasons for this removal of office are unclear, but as Malalas mentions that Calliopius was a relative of Hierios, it is possible to speculate that perhaps an unqualified appointment was made based on family ties. Even though Malalas states that Anastasius gave Constantius of Tarsos "full authority over life and death since the Green faction, which was rioting in Antioch, was attacking governors," it is likely that Calliopius had had similar authority but was unable to appease the factions.[63]

Next, in 498, after the rioting of the Green faction at Constantinople had escalated to the point where there were significant incidents of arson and vandalism, Anastasius pacified the mob by the appointment of Plato, a patron of the Greens, to the office of city prefect.[64] It is important to note that although many Greens were arrested and punished, those men or someone associated with them were still able to receive an official appointment. In 507 an incident occurred when the Green Faction was in direct opposition to the *praefectus vigilum* Menas.[65] The Greens were upset at being punished after attacking a Jewish synagogue in Daphne. After rioting, the Greens sought refuge in the church of Saint John outside the city of Antioch. Afterward, Menas entered the church with a force of Goths and brutally murdered one of the perpetrators named Eleutherios and then reported the incident to the *comes Orientis* Procopius. When the Greens heard of the incident there was a battle between them and a combined force of Blues and men of

[62] Joh. Mal. 16.2.
[63] Joh. Mal. 16.2.18-19; cf. Haarer 2006: 223-229.
[64] Joh. Mal. 16.4.
[65] Joh. Mal. 16.6. The *praefectus vigilum* was the head of the *vigilies urbani*, those who operated as the police and firefighters of the ancient city.

the *praefectus vigilum*. After the Greens had won, they not only destroyed several government buildings but publicly and brutally executed Menas.[66] The repercussions of this incident were that once again a new *comes Orientis* Eirenaios Pentadiastes, was appointed to office.

Can this be seen as a faction sending a message of intimidation to those who would oppose them? In this instance, it appears that the factions are using violence not only as a means to take revenge against a troublesome official but also to present a message of intimidation to those who would seek to oppress them. These actions distinctly display characteristics of gangsterism and organized crime. Although the factions had a position of influence within society, they occasionally misused their power for personal gain.[67] The fact that the factions were able to directly oppose unwanted officials, by executing them or by destroying government buildings, indicates that they were a body with significant military power.[68] Furthermore, it demonstrates that the factions were entities that were able to use violence and intimidation in order to achieve their political goals and thus can be compared to modern crime organizations.

Several other incidents occurred from 522-525 when the Blue faction was reported to "have rioted in all the cities of the East, attacking officials in every city."[69] The rioting continued until the appointment of several new officials, including Theodotus as city prefect of Constantinople. Although numerous riots have been brought together by Malalas, it is difficult to determine the individual causes. However, when one considers that Justinian had not yet established a power base of his own, his ascension to emperor had not been firmly established and that he was a large supporter of the Blues early in his career, it is clear that there is validity to Michael Whitby's claim that men of influence attempted to make arrangements with the factions in order to receive personal benefits or political authority.[70]

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[66] See Joh. Mal. 16.6.18-25: The Green faction seized Menas, slit him open and disembowelled him. Then after dragging his corpse around, they hung it on the bronze statue known as the Kolonisios, in the middle of the Antiforum. The Antiforum is not a widely recognizable feature in Late Antique society. There is only reference to it in three cities of the Empire (Antioch, Edessa, and Daphne) and it has been argued that they were enclosed areas, more similar to a bazaar, and that they were simply used in place of a traditional Forum, see Whitby 2000: 164 n. 90.

[67] Liebeschuetz 2001: 218.

[68] Bell 2013: 154-160.

[69] Joh. Mal. 17.12.27-30.

[70] Whitby 2006: 445. For further details on the domestic policies of Justin I and Justinian's rise in the political sphere, see Croke 2007: 559-575; cf. Vasiliev 1950: 102-135.

The events surrounding the Nika Revolt in 532 deserve some mention in this section. As Greatrex relates in his article, the cause of the revolt was more the indecisiveness of Justinian to act rather than the policies of his officials.[71] However, there are several features that help clarify the relationship between the emperor and the factions. First, the removal of unpopular officials does not always need to be lasting. After the removal of John the Cappadocian and the appeasement of the mob, he returned to office within the year. Second, it is not always unpopular officials that are removed. Tribonian was not necessarily seen as unpopular but was connected to unpopular policies of the emperor. Finally, the removal of officials did not always have the desired effect. The rioting was not quelled at all by their removal and did not end until a full attack was made by the soldiers of the emperor. After the Nika Revolt there is a noticeable break in the frequency of factional violence until it remerges in 562-563 near the end of Justinian's reign.[72]

In 562-63 there was an attack by the Greens on the new city prefect, Andreas.[73] The factions attempted to stop his appointment by stoning him as he left the palace of Lausos. After the rioting began, Justin II was sent in and dealt with the rioters swiftly and harshly. The quick resolution after Justin II's involvement demonstrates how the mob could be controlled if an official were to act quickly and decisively. However, all incidents against city officials did not stop on account of Justin II's actions. Later in the year, riots that had begun over the punishment of a faction member (Kaisarios) led to a confrontation between the Greens and Blues and the city guard.[74] Once again the city prefect, Zemarchos, was removed from office and his replacement, Julian, took up the former stance of treating one faction (Greens) much more harshly than the other in order to maintain control and prevent them from uniting. This is where Malalas ends his account and although the factions play a role that is documented in the removal of Maurice from office in 602 and the removal of Phocas in 610, these incidents are different in that they consist of the removal of an emperor, not one of his officials, and are not instigated by the factions. They will thus be further examined in Chapter 2.

[71] The demand for the removal of John the Cappadocian and Tribonian does not occur until several days after the incident had begun (phase 5 in the timeline set forth by Greatrex): see Greatrex 1997: 71-72.
[72] This is understandable because of the massacre that ended the revolt and the ban on the circus that was imposed for the next five years, see Evans 2000: 119-125; cf. Evans 2005: 15-20; Maas 2005: 69-73; and Greatrex 1997.
[73] Joh. Mal. 18.146; cf. Theoph. 239.
[74] Joh. Mal. 18.150.

The factions' role in the removal of officials helps to demonstrate the degree of political influence that they had achieved. Since they were able to have officials removed on the basis of unpopular policies, they were able to influence the change of these policies post facto. Thus they can be seen to have a level of influence at the curial level.

Economic Riots

The next sub-section concerns the evidence of factional violence in response to economic disputes. These riots are more easily distinguished in the sources because in most cases the causes for them are clearly indicated by Malalas. The most common causes for these incidents were lack of resources, such as bread or oil, and inflation protests. Economic riots were unusual because in many cases it was both factions rioting together against the authorities rather than against each other. This demonstrates that the factions could in fact put aside their differences when the situation was beneficial to both parties, especially since food shortages would have affected all classes involved in each faction and thus gave more motivation to present a strong, united front to the emperor. However, when categorizing these riots it is important to remember that even though there is evidence in the sources pointing to economic factors, most riots would have been instigated for a variety of reasons that are unavailable to us.[75]

The first example of an economic riot during the reign of Anastasius comes in 515-516. Malalas records a riot in Alexandria because of a shortage of oil.[76] The factions joined together to riot and murdered the *praefectus augustalis*, Theodosius. The result of the incident is unclear. All that is stated by Malalas is that the emperor became angry and punished many Alexandrians for rebelling against their emperor. Although it is possible that this ended the protest for oil, the fact that no oil shortages are mentioned in Alexandria over the next 40 years suggests that the shortage was in fact eliminated.

The next riot, related by Procopius, takes place in 540 in Cilicia.[77] A local official used his position to requisition wealth and property from the Cilicians:

[75] Whitby 2006: 444-445.
[76] Joh. Mal. 16.15.
[77] This incident is discussed twice in this study. It is used here to highlight the factions' ability to network between late antique cities. Below, it is used to demonstrate Justinian's loyalty towards the Blue faction, see pp. 48-49.

> He (Malthanes) plundered their wealth and sent some of it to the emperor while claiming the rest for his own enrichment. But while others endured this silently, the Blues among the people of Tarsos, emboldened by the license granted to them by the emperor, publicly chanted abuse against Malthanes in the marketplace when he was absent.[78]

The Blues in Cilicia relate their problems to the Blues in Constantinople who in turn pressure the emperor to do something about the situation. The complaint does get through to the emperor who then sends instructions for the act to be investigated and the official punished. Although in this particular incident nothing was done, it was not a breakdown in the system that nullified the punishment; rather, it was the emperor receiving a substantial bribe from the father-in-law of Malthanes, Leon.[79] However, the bribe itself provides evidence that the emperor was in fact pressured to act in some way. This incident offers a perfect example of how the factions in the provinces could have their petitions heard in the capital.[80]

The following incident, recorded again by Malalas, was in 556 and concerned bread shortages at Constantinople.[81] Once again the factions are together in this protest. They unite to petition the emperor during the city's anniversary festival in the hippodrome. However, since the Persian ambassador is in attendance, the emperor reacts harshly and instructs the city prefect to arrest and punish some of the prominent members of the Blue faction. Malalas states that this bread shortage lasted only for three months, so although the emperor reacted in anger because of the insult in front of the Persian ambassador, he may still have heeded the message and taken steps to end the food shortage.[82] Another bread riot occurred in 559 though under different circumstances.[83] On the ninth of September, a rumour broke out that the emperor had died when he returned suddenly and did not receive anyone. This started a panic and according to Theophanes the factions "seized the bread from the bread shops and bakeries, and at about the third hour no bread could be found in the city." This riot was handled by the prefect who had

[78] Proc. *Anecd.* 3.29.26-38.
[79] As Procopius (*Anecd.* 3.29.34) states, "the emperor was infuriated at what had happened and immediately fired off instructions that Malthanes' official acts be investigated and punished." Although Malthanes was exempt from punishment because his uncle gives Justinian a "pile of gold," he still receives a severe beating by the Blues (who escape punishment for this act) at the Imperial Palace (*Anecd.* 3.29.36-38). Thus, the Blues in the capital fiercely protected the rights of their counterparts in the provinces.
[80] For further details on the factions' use of networking and its potential benefits, see Bell 2013: 154-160.
[81] Joh. Mal. 18.121.
[82] Joh. Mal. 18.121.48-49.
[83] Joh. Mal. 18.131.24-39; cf. Theoph. 234.

lights lit throughout the city in order to proclaim that the emperor was still alive. The bread shortages were restored quickly but this riot demonstrates one of the dangers of having such an unstable means of communication between the people and the emperor. Even a case of misunderstanding could lead to violence and panic.

The last example is related by Theophylact Simocatta to have happened in 602 at Constantinople.[84] In this incident the factions were upset with the actions of Constantine Lardys, a tax official, and chanted for his dismissal. When the rioting broke out, the factions burnt down the home of Lardys and forced him to flee with Maurice. Although there is no direct reference to economic reasons for this riot, Lardys had recently been placed in charge of the taxes for the East by the emperor and it is plausible to suppose that the factions' displeasure was related to his actions or policies.[85]

Economic crises provide a case to observe the factions in their political capacity of voicing popular grievances. The fact that these causes are mentioned by the chroniclers and that in each of these incidents there was heavy rioting indicates that the economic problems were a concern among the entire populace. It is in these situations that the factions can be seen as a link between the emperor and the people. Their ability to bring public issues to the attention of the authorities and the factions' violent reaction if those issues were ignored provides further evidence for the political roles of the factions.

Release of Prisoners

The factions' ability to demand the release of prisoners is the final sub-section that will be explored. It is important to note, that in almost all cases the factions were not demanding the release of political prisoners but members of their own ranks. Even these faction members cannot be seen as unjustly persecuted because many of them are recorded as being convicted killers and rapists. Thus, the goal of this section is to determine whether or not they were successful at achieving their demands and what the imperial response was when factions rioted for the release of fellow members.

[84] Theophylact Simocatta 8.9.5.
[85] Theophylact Simocatta 8.9.6; cf. Whitby 1988: 24-27.

The first instance of an attempt at the release of prisoners is in 495. The Greens appealed to Anastasius for the release of some of their member who had been arrested for throwing stones at officials. The emperor grew angry and as a result sent his troops to attack the partisans. The situation escalated until a member of the Greens threw a stone at the emperor and he (the partisan) was subsequently dismembered by Anastasius' *excubitores*.[86] Then the riot was dissolved and in this instance the prisoners were not released.[87] The next attempt at the release of prisoners is in 532 and is viewed as one of the main causes of the Nika Riot.[88] There were seven faction members set to be executed (all convicted of murder) but when they were hanged two of the ropes broke and one member from each of the Blues and the Greens escaped. The two factions called for mercy from the emperor but he offered no response. The Blues and Greens ended up uniting to set fire to the *praetorium* and then broke the prisoners out of custody (Joh. Mal. 18.71 and Theoph. 182-186). Although Justinian never officially pardoned the criminals, his failure to act in any way except to try and hold more games indicates that in this instance, the factions were able to liberate their own against the wishes of the emperor.

The last instances to be examined are recorded by Malalas under the year 563. First, early in the year there was a large disturbance by the factions that resulted in them breaking into prisons and fighting with the guards.[89] Although there is no mention of specific prisoners being released, there are few reasons that can be suggested for why the partisans would break into prisons and it is reasonable to assume they were releasing fellow members. Later in the year a member of the Green faction was sentenced to be castrated for raping a girl.[90] While he was being paraded, he was seized and taken into the Great Church for asylum. After there was much turmoil in the church, Justinian decided to grant clemency and thus once again the factions were able to release a convicted member of their association. It is clear that the factions not only sought the release of their convicted members but also were prepared to riot if their request was ignored. Clemency for faction members was not achieved through political debate or by proving the member's innocence (in fact, in all cases there is no doubt as to the member's guilt) but by intimidation and violent demonstrations. Liebeschuetz points out that these incidents show

[86] The *excubitores* were the imperial guards of early Byzantine emperors.
[87] Joh. Mal. 16.4.
[88] Greatrex 1997: 67-69.
[89] Joh. Mal. 18.146.
[90] Joh. Mal. 18.150.

distinct characteristics of gangsterism. The factions had obtained an unofficial power and they used it.[91]

Conclusion

After an analysis of the evidence it is clear that there was a political aspect to many of the riots perpetrated by the factions. The rioting of the factions can indeed be classified as political when it was directed at the authorities to remove unsatisfactory officials, to demand the release of prisoners, or to express public economic concerns. This violent application of the factions' influence arose from their role in voicing public grievances and the power that they attained because of it. Although the factions achieved a level of political status, it would still be incorrect to think of them as modern-day parties. Liebeschuetz, attempting to connect them to a more modern phenomenon, compares the use of the factions to that of the modern media. He points out that each of these entities bears the task of voicing public grievances and providing entertainment. They both also perform a necessary service to society and although they perform this function for the people, they are often criticised as not representing the interests of the people when it coincides with their own ambitions.[92]

The use of violence was a necessary step when the voice of the people was ignored by the authorities, the more so during an era where the voices of the masses were frequently silenced by the force of the elites. Although the factions occasionally attempt to misuse their power for their own gain, their violent actions tend to have the most influence when they are in fact representing the voice of popular grievances. Economic crises and injustices in the provinces that are presented by the factions receive more acceptance and tolerance from the emperor, while demands for the release of convicted faction members are often met with brutal force.

The focus of this chapter has been the violent application of the factions' political influence. In the following chapters we shall take a closer look at the factions' military aspects and their role in the recognition of emperors.

[91] Liebeschuetz 2001: 252, n. 13.
[92] Liebeschuetz 1996: 182; cf. Dagron 2011: 17-25; Bell 2013: 125-127.

Chapter 2: Military Aspects of the Factions

Introduction

> To put it simply, does not the flower and beauty of the state, as most people say – and, I would add, its strength – rest in bodies? Or is it not through a large or limited number of people that a state is, and could be said to be great or small? Of the three components of the state – counsel, people, and money – that of the people is recognised either as the most essential or, at any rate, no less important than the other two.[93]

The statement above is part of a sixth-century treatise in which the two participants, Menas and Thomas, are debating how to handle most effectively the growing influence of the youths who comprised the groups known as the Circus Factions. This treatise was written by an anonymous author in the sixth-century. It was heavily influenced by the Platonic tradition of the philosopher ruler and the Roman political philosophy focused on the elements of an ideal Republic. It offers insight into the political and intellectual culture of the sixth-century and is particularly focused on the reign of Justinian.[94] Unfortunately, a lack of evidence makes the precise dating of the treatise difficult. Averil Cameron has argued that since the treatise seems to be written with the interest of the senate in mind, it could have been composed either in the context of the Nika revolt and its aftermath or late in Justinian's reign, when little regard was given to the senatorial class.[95] Peter Bell continues Cameron's argument for a later dating for several reasons. First, the fact that problems with recruitment shortages are being discussed suggests a date after the plague when the army had more difficulty recruiting. Second, the advice given to the emperor on how to handle the unruliness of the factions is more likely referring to the problems that re-emerged towards the end of Justinian's reign, not the aftermath of the Nika revolt (this also fits alongside the senatorial grievances that were more prominent at the end of his reign). Finally, the insights

[93] *Peri politikes epistemes.* 5.99. A sixth-century treatise, *Dialogue on Political Science,* which originally consisted of six books of which fragments of books IV and V survive. There have been previous assertions that the author was the diplomat Peter the Patrician, see Mazzuchi 1982, but it has now been credited to an anonymous source of the mid-sixth century, see Av. Cameron 1985: 248-250.
[94] Bell 2009: 1-4
[95] Av. Cameron 1985: 250-251; cf. Bell 2009: 24-27, for a summary of Mazzucchi's counter-argument for an early dating.

and the issues addressed are more plausible when the author is given the benefit of hindsight rather than assuming he is an incredibly prescient contemporary.[96]

The context of the treatise does raise two important points about the factions in general: one, they were a recognisable fighting force, not just a band of unruly citizens, and two, they were popular enough among the urban youth that they had become a hindrance to the recruitment of soldiers into the army.[97] It is clear from the treatise that the aim of the author was to advise the emperor to incorporate the factions into an official military division in which their energies could be directed against the enemies of the empire. Although there is early scholarship that argues that this did in fact take place, Alan Cameron has successfully disputed the claims made by scholars, such as Manojlović, who argues that the factions constituted a special branch of the military.[98]

However, despite the fact that the factions never became an official part of the military, I believe that Cameron goes too far in his counter-argument. He argues that at most "the factions constituted a small (and unreliable) paramilitary body, based not on the municipal organization of Constantinople as a whole, but on their natural focus in the hippodrome."[99] I agree that the factions were not based on any municipal organization within Constantinople or the provinces but I shall argue that the unique conditions of the sixth century did allow the factions to function as a civic militia.

This chapter will seek to accomplish several objectives. First, I shall look at several earlier examples of ordinary citizens being called on to defend a Roman city. Secondly, I shall argue that the factions were used by the state in the capacity of a militia when the regular army was either unavailable or when the state had an insufficient number of troops at its disposal. Finally, I shall argue that the military aspects of the factions allowed them to act as an institution with political authority towards the end of the sixth-century.

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[96] Bell 2009: 19-27. Furthermore, Bell points out that the Platonic and Ciceronian tradition that heavily influenced this treatise was to set an early date when composing dialogues, see Bell 2009: 26-27.
[97] Fotiou 1988: 76
[98] See Al. Cameron 1976:106-125, cf. Martindale 1960: 63-100. The argument put forth by Manojlović is primarily based on the assumption that the 'demes' was closely associated with the factions and made up a regular military guard. However, as Al. Cameron points out, there is no evidence of any consistent military duties and he convincingly argues against the claims that Heraclius had a military guard made up of the factions and that by the end of Justinian's reign the factions could field a unit of trained cavalry. For Manojlović's complete argument, see Manojlović 1936.
[99] Al. Cameron 1976:105-106.

Sources

The main literary evidence comes from three ancient sources: Procopius, Theophanes, and John of Nikiu. Procopius and Theophanes tend to focus only on the factions' actions in Constantinople but John of Nikiu provides a unique look at their role in the provinces. Theophanes has been discussed in chapter one but some of the potential biases and textual difficulties of Procopius and John of Nikiu need to be outlined before examining their evidence. Procopius, being a member of the aristocracy, has been known to take a negative stance against the factions. This view should be taken into consideration when evaluating his evidence. Although he presents the factions in a negative light, he provides a glimpse into the rise of their influence and the methods they used to attain it.[100]

Certain aspects of the text of John of Nikiu also need to be taken into consideration. The text is problematic partly because it has been translated at least three times, from Greek into Arabic, from Arabic into Ethiopic, and from Ethiopic into English. As a result of this several ambiguities have arisen with the use of proper nouns and administrative titles. It also makes it difficult to determine whether specific references to the circus factions have been missed because of different interpretations of Greek terms like δῆμος and δῆμοι that can refer to the people in general or to the partisans of the factions.[101] Furthermore, the evidence of the so-called Aykelāh revolt and the Egyptian civil war, which will be discussed in detail below, needs to be considered carefully. The events can at times seem obscure but can promote a general impression of the political conditions in the provinces involved.[102]

There are also several epigraphic sources that provide evidence for the political involvement of the factions. Inscriptions in the seating areas of the hippodrome at Aphrodisias provide evidence for the social structure and seating arrangements at the games and inscriptions

[100] See Procopius, *Anec.* 7.1-42 and *Wars* 1.24, for his views on the factions, their methods, and some of the benefits they received from the state during the reign of Justinian. For a discussion on the difficulties associated with interpreting Procopius with regard to the factions, including dating, biases, and the necessity to "read between the lines," see Bell 2013: 8-19.

[101] Booth 2012: 557-558. The English translation available is a version by R. Charles in 1916. This translation is problematic because, as Booth points out in his article, there is an absence of detailed annotation. Furthermore there are four new references to the factions that have been outlined in Booth's article that will be taken into consideration in this paper. See Booth 2012: 555-602, for the reasoning behind adding these references. When these references are used, they will be identified in the footnotes.

[102] Liebeschuetz 2001: 269-271.

at Ephesus and Oxyrhynchus help illuminate the political views of the Blues and Greens during the Egyptian civil war.[103]

Early Examples of Citizens Defending a City

There are several examples early in the sixth century, prior to the first military use of the factions, which show ordinary citizens being called upon to defend their city. Joshua the Stylite, writing in Syriac at the beginning of the sixth century, provides the first piece of evidence of civilians defending the walls of a city (Edessa).

> Some few of the villagers who were in the city went out against him [Kawad] with slings, and smote many of his mail-clad warriors, whilst of themselves not one fell. His legions were daring enough to try to enter the city; but when they came near its gates, like an upraised mound of earth, they were humbled and repressed and turned back.[104]

In this instance the citizens were successful in defending their city against the Persian invasion. However, events did not always work out in their favor. Procopius records another example of the townspeople defending the city of Amida in 502-503.

> Now the citizens of Amida had no soldiers at hand, seeing that it was a time of peace and prosperity and in other respects were completely unprepared; nevertheless they were quite unwilling to yield to the enemy, and showed an unexpected fortitude in holding out against dangers and hardships.[105]

Although the city of Amida eventually fell to the Persians, the citizens were able to hold out for eighty days and if Procopius' anecdote is true, had the Persians on the verge of retreat at one point.[106] The early success is important to consider when analysing the tradition of using non-military defenders that became prevalent in the sixth-century. The precedent of success, even the limited success of Amida, would have likely made the option much more attractive to future emperors. Furthermore, as the factions became more accustomed to acting as a mediator between

[103] For the seating inscriptions at Aphrodisias, see Roueché 1993:85-119. For the inscriptions at Ephesus and Oxyrhynchus see Booth 2012:594-596.
[104] Josh. Styl. 63.
[105] Proc. *Wars* 1.7.2-8.
[106] Procopius states that the defenders stopped the Persians initial siege effort but when they were making ready to retreat, the citizens began to taunt them from the walls and ended up goading them into continuing the attack, see Proc. *Wars* 1.7.13-33.

officials and the people, it is a logical step that Roman leaders would use them as intermediaries when they needed to organize the masses for defense of the city. Now it is necessary to examine the evidence for the factions' military involvement and the political benefits they received because of it.

Evidence for Military Involvement

The first evidence of military involvement by the factions is preserved in a series of epigrams from one of the monuments erected in honor of Porphyrius the charioteer. The most important of these is epigram 350, which reads as follows:

> Not only did divine Victory crown thee on the race-course, but in war, too, she showed thee to be victorious, then when the Emperor, with the Greens to assist him, warred with the furiously raging enemy of the throne; when the savage tyrant fell, as Rome was on the point of perishing, and the light of Latin liberty came back. Therefore the Monarch gave to the Greens the privileges they formerly had, and the artist wrought and polished thy image, Porphyrius.[107]

Cameron has successfully connected this epigram with another that was previously ignored by scholars.[108] It is ignored because in modern editions it is labelled as xv. 50 and refers to an anonymous charioteer. This epigram provides an important piece of information, namely that the battle against the tyrant was a sea-battle (ναυμαχία).[109] After examination of this evidence, it is clear that the tyrant in question was Vitalian and that the sea battle referred to was Vitalian's final defeat in 515.[110]

There are two important pieces of information that can be deduced from these events. First of all, the fact that this was a naval battle brings up an important question, namely, how would the emperor have used the factions in this context? The conditions of the battle are important when analysing this question. It is known that in 515 Vitalian launched a large-scale naval attack on the city of Constantinople itself. Furthermore, at this point there is no evidence

[107] *Anth. Gr.* xvi. 350.
[108] The two previous works on the epigrams of Porphyrius by Beckby and Vasiliev fail to make this connection; see Vasiliev 1948. For Al. Cameron's reasoning on the connection, see Al. Cameron 1973: 127-128.
[109] *Anth. Gr.* xv. 50.
[110] Cameron 1976: 107.

that the Byzantines had any of the naval superiority they would later possess.[111] While it is unlikely that he would have used unskilled citizens as part of the imperial navy, it is plausible that he would have used them as a contingency to man the walls in case of defeat. Therefore, these epigrams provide the first evidence of a practice that would be used more frequently towards the end of the sixth century, namely to use the factions as a last resort militia in the event that the regular army (or navy) failed to stop invaders. Furthermore, the fact that Vitalian was stopped at sea may explain the lack of evidence in the chronicle of John Malalas.[112] Although he usually comments on the role of the factions at Constantinople, it is clear that in this instance they played a relatively minor role. This role still would have been an important accomplishment for the factions (epigram 350 indicates that they gained prestige from it), but since they did not take part in the actual fighting, there is not much mention of their role in the literary records of the battle.

The second important piece of evidence that is presented in the epigram is the indication that the Greens benefitted from their role at the battle.[113] Malalas provides evidence that Anastasius "supported the Red faction at Constantinople and took measures against the Greens and the Blues everywhere when they caused disturbances".[114] It is evident that although the Greens played a minor role in the battle with Vitalian, they still received a level of prestige from taking part. Unfortunately a lack of corresponding written evidence makes it unclear what these privileges were, but based on similar examples it is likely that they consisted of a rise in social status and a more receptive response from the emperor when making demands or avoiding punishments. Therefore, these epigrams provide the earliest evidence of a faction's involvement in military activity and the benefits that it could receive from being a part of it.

[111] This is one of the first recorded instances where the Byzantines are victorious by using something akin to Greek fire. Greek fire was an incendiary weapon that was particularly effective in naval battles because it could burn on water (true Greek fire is credited to Callinicus, an arcitect from Heliopolis in AD 672). Malalas records Vitalian as having a large force of men and ships but is defeated at sea because the the Byzantines attacked them with an "elemental sulphur" that was given to them by an Athenian philosopher Proclus, see Joh. Mal. 16.16.30-95.
[112] The unique conditions of the battle (elemental sulphur) may also have diverted his attention away from the factions.
[113] It has been suggested by early scholars, such as Vasiliev, that the Greens took part because they favored monophysitism and that Anastasius favored the Greens because of this fact as well, see Vasiliev 1948. However, it has been well argued that the Greens had no religious sympathies and were not favored by Anastasius until after this event, see Al. Cameron 1976: 126-153.
[114] Joh. Mal. 16.2.24-25.

The next piece of evidence that needs to be examined comes from Procopius and concerns the defense of Antioch during the Persian siege of 540. Procopius relates that there was a group of the youths from the populace that joined the soldiers at Antioch to make up the core of the resistance. "The Romans were fighting them back with all their strength, not soldiers alone, but also many of the most courageous youths of the populace".[115] Procopius does not use the traditional terms for the factions in this instance, but he does clarify his statement several lines later when he speaks again of the youths' defense; "Now many men of the populace who in former times had been accustomed to engage in factional strife with each other in the hippodromes descended into the city from the fortification wall".[116]

Although this is another example of the factions being used in a military context to defend the walls of a city, there are two points raised by H.G. Beck that should be taken into consideration. Beck argues that in this instance the factions cannot be considered a traditional militia because: 1) they were not armed by the local government and 2) they were operating on their own and not under the command of the military.[117] However, I believe that the factions can in fact be considered a militia for two reasons. First of all, even though it is not explicitly stated by Procopius that the citizens were armed by the government, the conditions of the battle seem to imply that they were. In his description of the battle Procopius points out that "those who were attacking the wall there were engaged in a battle on even terms with their enemy".[118] After consideration that the Roman defeat was caused by a structural weakness in the city's defenses,[119] it seems unlikely that the partisans could have engaged in an even battle with the Persian army without those on the walls having been armed in some fashion.

Secondly, the citizens were not operating on their own until *after* the walls had been abandoned by the military and the defenders were retreating from the wall. Furthermore, in both earlier instances when Procopius speaks of the youths defending the walls of the city he refers to them as πολλοὶ νεανίαι τοῦ δῆμου and later, when he speaks of the unarmed citizens fighting the Persians after the walls have been abandoned he refers to them as πολλοὶ νεανίαι τῶν

[115] Proc. *Wars.* 2.8.11.
[116] Proc. *Wars.* 2.8.17.
[117] Beck 1965: 37-38.
[118] Proc. *Wars.* 2.8.12.
[119] Proc. *Wars.* 2.8.15.

’Αντιοχέων.[120] Considering that Procopius states that only a small portion of the population was able to retreat with the soldiers, it is likely that this group he identifies as “the young men of Antioch” were the citizens remaining in the city.[121] This group undoubtedly contained members of the factions, but only as part of the remaining populace and not specifically those who were defending the walls earlier. Therefore, the defense of Antioch does provide evidence of the factions being used in a military role; however, in this instance no potential benefits can be seen because the defense failed and the city was soon captured over by the Persians.

The next evidence of military involvement is in 601 when Maurice set up a defense of Constantinople in response to a possible Avar attack. There are two sources that mention the involvement of the factions, Theophylact Simocatta and Theophanes. It is important to note that although Theophanes uses Simocatta as one of his main sources, he does have a supplementary source for Maurice, John of Antioch, and is able to add an important piece of evidence. The two pieces of evidence are as follows:

> But the emperor took with him the bodyguards, whom Romans designate *excubitores*, assembled the army, and garrisoned the Long Walls; he also had with him a very large portion of the factions at Byzantium.[122]

> The emperor, taking the *excubitores* and having assembled an armed band, kept guard at the Long Walls. The people [factions] were guarding the city.[123]

The extra information provided by Theophanes is important because it specifies that the factions were not a part of Maurice’s special levy or a regular part of the army. It implies that the factions were once again used as a last resort militia to defend the city proper in the event that the military failed (in this case Maurice was able to reach a peaceful settlement with the Avars so no military action was needed). The fact that they were not a part of the main defense on the Long

[120] For the references to the youths defending the walls, see Proc. *Pers.* 2.8.11 and 17. For the reference to the unarmed citizens, see Proc. *Pers.* 2.8.28.
[121] Proc. *Wars.* 2.8.26.
[122] Theophylact Simocatta 7.15.7.
[123] Theoph. 279. 19-20.

Walls suggests that they did not have the special military training required to serve as a main line of defense and acted in the capacity of a city militia.[124]

There are two final references when the factions are used as a militia to defend the city walls, the revolt of Phocas and the subsequent revolt of Heraclius. The revolt of Phocas took place in 602 and was caused by unrest among the army. Maurice had ordered the army to remain north of the Danube for the winter and to obtain food and spoils from the land of the Sclaveni so that he would not have to provide supplies for the soldiers.[125] After hearing the orders, the army rebelled and acclaimed Phocas as their new leader.[126] Once Maurice learned that he had lost control of the army, he turned to the factions to defend the city walls.

> Then the emperor having armed them [factions] and calmed them with soothing words, ordered them to guard the city walls with the demarchs.[127]

The factions were unsuccessful in defending the walls. They deserted Maurice when it became apparent that defending the walls will consist of taking on the Roman army.[128] This event is important because it provides another example of the factions acting in the capacity of a civic militia. Furthermore, it provides evidence that they were not a part of the regular army or Maurice's special levy because he had to enlist their support "with soothing words" and they desert at the first sign of serious conflict.

The factions act in a similar capacity during the revolt of Heraclius in 610. Once Phocas learned that Heraclius had launched an expedition by sea and had captured the city of Alexandria, he commanded the Green faction to defend certain parts of the city (the harbours of Sophia and Caesarius and the Palace of Hormisdas).[129] However, the Green faction deserted their posts long before Heraclius attacked and instead they welcomed him into the city. It is possible that the Green faction deserted because of its sympathies with its counterparts in the provinces

[124] See Mango and Scott 1997: 406 n.13, for the interpretation of the people as the factions and the factions' involvement on the Long Walls.
[125] Theoph. 286. 15-25.
[126] The proclaimed Phocas as their leader by raising him up on a shield, a practice that was in fact proclaiming him emperor, see Mango and Scott 1997: 416 n. 30.
[127] Theoph. 287. 21-25. Theophylact records the numbers of the faction members: 1500 Greens and 900 Blues, see Theophylact Simocatta 8.7.11.
[128] Theoph. 288. 16-18.
[129] Theophylact Simocatta 8.7.8-9.12.

(the polarization of the Blue and Green factions during this event will be discussed below). John of Nikiu reports that Heraclius had the support of the Green faction in the provinces and made several stops along the way to Constantinople to add them to his ranks; "And when he touched at the islands and the various stations on the sea coast, many people, notably those of the Green Faction, went on board with him".[130] Although the Greens did desert their post before any confrontation took place, we do see them being used once again in the capacity of a militia.

Unfortunately the evidence available can at times be scarce, but it is clear that a tradition of using the factions as a militia can be traced throughout the sixth century. This tradition was developed by the need for a last line of defense when the regular military was unavailable or otherwise engaged. As a result of this, the factions gained an unprecedented level of political authority towards the end of the century that will be now be discussed.

Evidence of Political Authority

The first evidence of the faction's acting with political authority is presented in the reign of Maurice (582-602) during the so-called Aykelāh revolt. In this instance, the factions are not called upon to man the walls against an outside invasion force but are seen as playing a role in the politics of the cities involved. At Aykelāh, four members of a prominent house (Abaskīrōn, his brothers Menas and Jacob, and his son Isaac) were appointed as pagarchs by the *praefectus augustalis* John.[131] The official status of these men and their public affairs are unclear, but after their appointment they proceeded to attack the Blue faction at Aykelāh and sacked the cities of Benā and Būsīr (it is unclear if they attacked the Blue factions at these cities as well).[132] When the emperor found out about these events he ordered the *praefectus augustalis* to remove them from their positions at which point the four men gathered a small force, rebelled, and began to harass the food supply of Alexandria.[133] John was then removed as *praefectus augustalis* and recalled to Constantinople to justify his actions. At this point another group of prominent citizens, the two factions at Aykelāh, and the orthodox bishop of Būsīr began secret negotiations

[130] Joh. Nikiu 109. 25.
[131] See Liebeschuetz 2001: 270. It is unlikely that they were all made pagarchs because pagarchs had to be approved by the emperor and the revolt itself only included one or two cities, whereas a revolt of three or four pagarchs would have included three or four cities.
[132] Joh. Nikiu 97. 1-4.
[133] Joh. Nikiu 97.7.

with Eulogius the Chalcedonian patriarch of Alexandria, Ailas the deacon, Minas the assistant, and Ptolemy the commander of the barbarians to deal with the situation.

> And many people, that is, Tananikun, and Lakurin, and Elmatridin Elmasr, and the Blue and Green Factions, and the enemy of God from Busir—all these mustered in the city of Aikelah, and took counsel with Eulogius, Chalcedonian patriarch in the city of Alexandria, and with Ailas the deacon, and Minas the assistant, and Ptolemy the commander of the barbarians, but the inhabitants of the city of Aikelah were not aware of this procedure.[134]

The negotiations were concerned with the appointment of the new *augustalis* in Alexandria but there is a conflict in the available translations concerning whom they wanted to be appointed.[135] The resolution of the event came when John was re-instated and defeated the inhabitants of Aykelāh. The leaders were executed (with the exception of Isaac who was exiled) and the cities Aykelāh and Abūsān were destroyed by fire.

This event is important when evaluating the political role of the factions for several reasons. First of all, although they are not being employed in a military context, they are nevertheless a political player in determining the unfolding of events. We are told that once the four prominent men are promoted by the *augustalis* they proceeded to attack the Blue party. There is no connection between this event and the public displays at the Hippodrome; they are attacked specifically because they are a rival to the new ruling family.[136] Secondly, both factions (Green and Blue) were main players in the secret negotiations that took place with the leaders of Alexandria. Here they are clearly negotiating as a group with political authority at the provincial level. Finally, when John the *augustalis* returns to confront the leaders of the city of Aykelāh, he released a certain Cosmas son of Samuel from prison to convince many of the supporters to abandon the defense.[137] This Cosmas was a leader of the Blues who would later support Phocas

[134] Joh. Nikiu 97. 11-13.
[135] See Liebeschuetz 2001:271. If Zotenberg's translation is correct, John's reinstatement was exactly what they were seeking. If Charles' translation is correct, they tried to prevent John from returning to his role as *augustalis* because they feared retribution for the actions of the current leaders. For Zotenberg, see Chapter 97. fo. 120. For Charles, see Chapter 97.12. It should be noted that P. Booth, who is currently working extensively with the original text, believes that Zotenberg's translation is the correct one.
[136] It is possible that the prominent family was supported by the Green faction, but it is not stated in the text.
[137] Joh. Nikiu 97. 15-17.

in Bonosus' army and who would also lead a force of Blues jointly with Menas and a force of Greens to besiege the city of Misr in 640.[138] Therefore the Aykelāh revolt began with an attack on a prominent group, the Blues, and ended with the release of a prominent figure from prison, Cosmas, who then re-aligned his party's support with the imperial administration.[139]

The next evidence for the factions acting in a political capacity is presented by Simocatta towards the end of the reign of Maurice. Maurice addresses the leaders of the factions to attempt to determine the size of the force of partisans he can call upon to help defend the city against Phocas.

> On the fourth day the emperor summoned to the palace the faction-leaders, whom the multitude is accustomed to call controllers of the factions; these men were called Sergius and Cosmas; and he inquired the precise number of the faction members.[140]

This is the earliest reference to the emperor addressing formal faction leaders. It is clear that by 602 the factions were considered a political entity that was recognized even by the emperor. Furthermore, the events recorded by Theophanes later in the year would suggest that the Blues and the Greens operated as independent political organizations. Germanus attempted to persuade Sergius to support him in his bid for emperor, promising honors for the Greens and benefits for Sergius himself. However, Germanus is rejected on the grounds that he has always been a fervent supporter of the Blues and Sergius does not believe that he will switch sides.[141] The fact that the Greens would throw their weight behind Phocas, who does in fact become emperor, demonstrates that the factions had become a significant political organization and had the ability to play a role in imperial politics.

The final piece of evidence that will be examined is the political role the factions played in the Egyptian civil war.[142] Cameron argues that neither side of the conflict received any substantial help from the Greens or the Blues and that there was no genuine loyalty to one side or

[138] Joh. Nikiu 107.37, 109.15.
[139] Liebeschuetz 2001: 272.
[140] Theophylact Simocatta 8.7.10.
[141] Theoph. 289. 3-7.
[142] I have labelled the events from 608-610 the Egyptian civil war because the uprising began with the Exarch of Africa Heraclius and ends with the victory of his son Heraclius. However, it should be noted that the conflict expands beyond the borders of Egypt.

the other.[143] However, recent work by Phil Booth may suggest otherwise. It appears that during this civil war the factions did demonstrate political loyalties (Greens for Heraclius and Blues for Phocas) and that these loyalties were consistent in many of the cities in the East. If this is the case, it would imply that by the late sixth century the factions could lend political and military aid to whatever leader they supported.

The key piece of evidence that supports Cameron's argument is a report of an assault by the Blues on the notables of Manuf and the seizure of all the properties of Aristomachus the "confidant of the emperor," which indicates the Blues' support of Heraclius at Alexandria. Booth points out that the notables of Manuf may not have actually been supporters of the pro-Phocan policy of the *apellon* (military commander). He argues that Aristomachus may have in fact been the confidant of the Emperor Maurice and can then be connected to the suppression of the Egyptian Blues after Maurice rose to become emperor.[144] Even if this is not the case, a reconstructed reference to the actions of the Blues can provide illumination to their political preferences:

> And all the people of Egypt and the Blues were awaiting help from those people who came by land and on ship by sea. And they were coming in ships from two branches of the river, and were setting out as we said before.[145]

In light of this new translation it seems that the Blues were awaiting reinforcements and therefore indicates that there was in fact consistent Blue support for Phocas.

John of Nikiu provides further evidence for this polarization of the factions later in the *Chronicle* when he states that Nicetas "got together a numerous army of regulars, barbarian citizens of Alexandria, the Green Faction...and they prepared to fight Bonosus in the environs of the city."[146] Taking into consideration these passages, we can see that Nicetas had put together a militia of Greens to rival Bonosus' force of Blues.[147] Furthermore, the available evidence

[143] Al. Cameron 1976: 284.
[144] Booth 2012 :589-590.
[145] Joh. Nikiu 107.33. The translation has been changed from Charles' "all the people of Egypt and the East" based on the textual evidence presented by Booth. For a detailed account of why this change has been made, see Booth 2012:590-591.
[146] Joh. Nikiu 107.45.
[147] Booth 2012: 591-592.

suggests that during this conflict the Greens and Blues took on a similar level of polarization at Antioch and other cities across the Levant. At Ephesus in the Marble Street there are two inscriptions that support this view of polarization. One reads, "Lord help Phocas and the Blues," while another states "Heraclius and Heraclius our God protected rulers, and the Greens."[148] It is important to note that in each of these cases the evidence always presents the Blues in support of Phocas and the Greens in support of Heraclius (and never the reverse). Thus, the evidence from John of Nikiu not only provides an example of the factions being used as a militia outside their traditional roles of manning the walls in times of crisis but also depicts them as two polarized political groups that arise because of the conditions created during the Egyptian civil war.

Conclusion

After an analysis of the available evidence it appears that the factions did serve an important function as a militia throughout the sixth century. There is evidence of them serving on the walls in defense of Constantinople as early as 515 and towards the end of the century as troops in a protracted civil war. The success of ordinary citizens defending cities such as Edessa early in the sixth century likely led to the practice becoming more widespread as the century progressed. Furthermore, the need for officials to be able to communicate with and organize a large body of the population in a limited amount of time provided the factions with an opportunity to grow both as a potential military outlet and as a political power. Unfortunately, a lack of sources makes it difficult to determine when the factions began to operate as a political unit; the first direct reference to the leaders of the factions does not appear in the sources until 602. However, their participation in the events at Aykelāh suggests that they were politically involved in the affairs of state some time before that. Furthermore, the events of the Egyptian civil war suggest that given the right conditions the Blues and the Greens could in fact represent competing political groups not only in a particular city but throughout the Eastern Empire. Thus, the sixth century presented a unique opportunity for the factions to grow beyond their role at the circus and develop into a viable political organization.

[148] Grégoire 1922: 40; for the Blues, see no. 133b-c and for the Greens, see no. 114a. There is further evidence to support this polarization of the factions during the Egyptian civil war, such as an epigram from a statue that the Greens erected in honor of Nicetas and an inscription on a column at Oxyrhynchus, see Booth 2012:594-596; cf. Bell 2013:156.

The focus of this chapter has been the military application of the factions and their political involvement in the empire. The third chapter will analyze their role in imperial ceremonial and the recognition of emperors.

Chapter 3: Imperial Ceremonial and the Factions' Role in Acclamations

Introduction

> When Romus [Romulus] saw members of any faction supporting the populace or senators who were disaffected and opposed him because of the death of his brother, or for any reason whatever, he would decide to support the other faction, and so he secured their favour, and their opposition to the aims of his enemies. From that time the emperors of Rome after him followed the same principle.[149]

The rise of the factions' influence in the political sphere is linked to their growing importance in imperial ceremonial. There had always been an important connection between the games and the social and religious life in Roman society but from the mid-fifth century onwards one of the requirements to be proclaimed emperor was to receive the acclamation of the people.[150] The factions' function was to lead the people in these acclamations and thus they became more and more influential in the recognition of emperors.[151] In the passage above, although it is a clear anachronism, Malalas indicates the importance he placed on securing the favour of one or more of the factions. It is difficult to gauge how important this function was in imperial politics. Was it the ceremonial formality that became the practice in the eighth century or was it a constitutional requirement that legitimized the emperor? Cameron argues that the factions only exercised a "special and restricted power" at the time of usurpers and that they normally functioned as a formal representative of the people. Furthermore, he states that the factions' role only became political briefly in connection with these usurpers and that their role in the sixth century was very

[149] Joh. Mal. 7.5.19-25.

[150] Liebeschuetz 2001: 210-211; cf. MacCormack 1981: 242. For a detailed discussion on the relationship between the games and Roman social life over a longer time span, see Al. Cameron 1976: 157-192; cf. Dagron 2011: 201-217. For a broader context, see Dagron 1974: 314-347.

[151] Previously, acclamations were led by small bands of partisans that were members of the theatre factions (which were different groups than the circus factions) called theatre claques. Although the specific functions of the theatre claques are disputed, it has generally been accepted that their roles became the responsibility of the circus factions after the re-organization of the games. For a discussion on the differences between the theatre factions and the circus factions and details on when and why they were merged into one group during the mid-fifth century, see Al. Cameron 1976: 193-229. For the transition of the theatre claque to the late antique claque (circus faction claque), see Al. Cameron 1976: 230-249; cf. Dagron 2011: 47-51.

similar to their role in the eighth.[152] Although the factions had an increased level of influence in the recognition of usurpers, I believe that Cameron undervalues the political influence of the factions' acclamations in the sixth century.

When there was a clear succession between emperors, it is true that the acclamations in the Hippodrome were more of a formality, but it is important to point out that from 450 to 641 there was rarely a clear successor to the throne.[153] It is during this period that the acclamations became important and that the factions gained a significant level of political power. The factions did not obtain the influence to elect or overthrow an emperor on their own, the acclamation ceremony was not to select an emperor only to legitimize him, but they did become an influential player in the debate over which of the potential candidates would accept the throne.[154] This chapter will seek to accomplish three objectives: first, it will be argued that the character of imperial ideology transitioned from a predominantly military to a more civilian one and that, because of this shift, the factions, as representatives of the civilian population, became a more prominent player in imperial ceremonial. Second, it will be argued that this new function allowed the factions to play a significant role in the legitimization of emperors between 450 and 610 and that they obtained a unique level of political influence because of it, and finally it will analyze the level of social and legal leniency that the factions received during this period.

Sources

The main evidence for this chapter comes from the *Book of Ceremonies*, a tenth-century work attributed to Constantine VII. The work consists of two "books" and each has a preface that was composed by Constantine himself. Although the work as a whole is credited to Constantine, it is widely accepted that it was a compilation. Constantine outlines in his preface that the goal of his work was to 'save from oblivion' knowledge that had become fragmented over time and was in danger of being lost.[155] He believed that the elements of imperial ceremonies needed to be

[152] Al. Cameron 1976: 269-270.
[153] See Liebeschuetz 2001: 211-212, between Theodosius II (402-450) and Heraclius (610-641) only one emperor was succeeded by his son and his reign only lasted ten months (Leo II in 474). For details on the reign of Leo II, including his accession and the succession of Zeno, see Croke 2003: 559-575. For the accession of Anastasius, see Haarer 2006: 125-127; cf. Meier 2009. For Justin, see Vasiliev 1950: 68-82; cf. Croke 1997: 13-22.
[154] For an analysis of the officials who were in charge of selecting a viable candidate to succeed the emperor, see Frank 1969: 163-164, 212.
[155] Moffatt and Tall 2012: xxiii. For details on the life of Constantine VII and his literary heritage, see Toynbee 1973; cf. Kazhdan 1991: 502-503.

preserved in a coherent fashion in order to 'bring renown to the emperor and the senate' and to provide a compilation of the records of imperial customs and rituals which could be easily accessible for himself and future generations.[156] The *Book of Ceremonies* is an important work not only when attempting to evaluate the transition from military to civilian ideology but also when analysing the faction's role in the succession of emperors.[157]

Military to Civilian Ceremonial

The growth of the factions' political influence, emerging in the mid-fifth century, was largely due to a shift in the focus of imperial politics. Before Constantinople became the capital of the empire in 330, the typical pattern for selecting a new emperor consisted of a proclamation by the army, either the praetorian guard or the provincial army, followed by a formal recognition by the senate.[158] All the ceremonial aspects of the proclamation were conducted by the military. Although the civilian population had little to no influence over imperial recognition, there is an early precedent where the citizens assembled in the Circus in an attempt to repudiate an emperor. In 193, Didius Julianus was elected emperor by the praetorian guard, but was unable to maintain his claim because of his unpopularity with the people.[159] After his ascension to the throne, the people refused to acknowledge him as emperor and according to Cassius Dio,

> They seized arms and rushed together into the Circus, and there spent the night and following day without food or drink, shouting and calling on the remainder of the soldiers, especially Pescennius Niger and his followers in Syria to come to their aid.[160]

This incident is important because it demonstrates one of the first instances when the civilian population played a significant role in the recognition of an emperor. Although they played no formal role in the proclamation or repudiation of Julianus, the evidence suggests that their actions in the hippodrome must have influenced the attitudes of the senate and the army. Certainly it was the defection of the senate and the praetorian guard that sealed the throne for

[156] Moffatt and Tall 2012: xxiii. For a brief summary of *De Ceremoniis,* including a comprehensive chart that outlines the details of each chapter, see Kazhdan 1991: 595-597.
[157] It is important to note that the accounts of the Byzantine accessions of the fifth and sixth century which are important to this paper are typically credited to Peter the Patrician, see MacCormack 1981: 240-241; cf. Bury 1907: 211-213.
[158] Al. Cameron 1976: 261-262. For details on the transition from Rome to Constantinople and the influence Rome had on the ideology of the hippodrome, see Dagron 2011: 29-51.
[159] Al. Cameron 1976: 187-190.
[160] Cass. Dio 74.13.5.

Severus but when one takes note of the lengths he went to appease the people as well as the senate and army, it is evident that the civilian population was becoming more of a factor in the recognition of emperors.[161] As recognition from citizens became more important, certain ceremonial aspects of the coronation process also took on a more civilian symbolism. Important aspects of military ideology were gradually phased out and replaced. Next, I shall analyze this transition in three important rituals: the act of shield-raising, crowning with a *torque* and the emperor's *praesentia* for victory.

The act of proclaiming a new leader by raising him up onto a shield seems to have been derived from Germanic coronation ceremonies. This view is supported by two pieces of evidence. First, the earliest literary reference to the ritual is in Tacitus when he describes the ascension of Brinno, a new leader of a Germanic tribe.[162] Second, the ritual developed into a Roman custom in the provinces during the fourth century, at a time when many of the auxiliaries were made up of people with Germanic descent and adopting this custom would have helped Roman emperors gain acceptance among their soldiers in the provinces.[163] The earliest reference to a Roman emperor being proclaimed by shield-raising is Julian in 361.[164] The event is noted by Ammanianus Marcellianus (contemporary) and Zosimos (sixth century) and both describe the ceremony and coronation as a strictly military endeavour.[165] Philostorgius (early fifth century) describes a similar situation for the coronation of Valentinian at Nicea in 364 and similarly, he considers the ceremony a military affair. Unfortunately there are no further references to shield-raising again until Anastasius in 491. A lack of sources makes it difficult to determine how much continuity existed between Valentinian and Anastasius, but given that it was still being practiced when more and more of the coronation duties were becoming civilian and that it was used later in military usurpations, it seems likely that it was practiced continuously throughout the period. Although the ritual was practiced by several emperors during the sixth century, Justin II was the

[161] Severus held a series of games and a lavish funeral for Pertinax, an emperor who was extremely popular with the people, see Herodian 2.14.5; cf. Al. Cameron 1976: 187. For Pertinax's rise to popularity, see Potter 2004: 75-76. For the events of 193, including Severus' accession to the throne and details of the funeral games which he held, see Birley 1971: 89-107.
[162] Tac. *Hist.* 4.15.
[163] For details on the developments of the army in the fourth century and the use of barbarians in the auxiliaries, see Southern 2006: 245-260.
[164] For a summary of the debate on whether there was a tradition of shield-raising in the empire before Julian, see Walter 1975: 157-158.
[165] Amm. Marc. 20.4.17; Zosimus. 3.9.4.

last to be raised up in this manner. The ceremony was occasionally used thereafter, but only in military usurpations and not in connection with the civilian ceremonial at Constantinople.[166]

Crowning a new ruler with the *torque* also developed out of a Germanic custom. It was an ornament of the Germanic barbarians, worn by several of their deities, and had a symbolic significance which allowed it to be used as a substitute for a diadem.[167] Once again Julian is the first Roman emperor known to have been crowned in this fashion and Ammanianus' account indicates that it was used as a substitute simply because a diadem was unavailable.

> Then, being placed upon an infantryman's shield and raised on high, he was hailed by all as Augustus and bidden to bring out a diadem. And when he declared that he had never had one...a standard-bearer of the Petulantes, took off the neck-chain which he wore as carrier of the dragon and boldly placed it on Julian's head.[168]

Although the torque was used by Julian in an ad hoc fashion, it set a precedent that would last for the next two hundred years as a part of military coronation ceremonies. The torque continued to be used during the sixth century, but its significance faded as the civilian parts of the ceremony became more prominent.[169]

The *Book of Ceremonies* provides an interesting glimpse of this transition over the course of several emperors. The first emperor of note is Leo I. His accession consisted of a double coronation and there is clearly a combination of military and civilian elements to it.

> Bousalgos, a *campiductor*, placed his torque on his head, and another torque was given to him for his right hand by Olympios, likewise a *campiductor*.[170]

> Straightaway, protected on the tribunal by the *kandidatoi* in testudo formation, he put on the imperial dress, and wearing the diadem, he appeared thus to the people.[171]

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[166] MacCormack 1981: 240-241.
[167] Walter 1975: 241. The diadem had become an imperial insignia during the reign of Constantine, see MacCormack 1981: 194-195.
[168] Amm. Marc. 20.4.17.
[169] MacCormack 1981: 242-243.
[170] *De Cer.* 91.411.5-8.
[171] *De Cer.* 91.411.13-16.

It is important to note that in this coronation, Leo appeared to the army and the people separately in order to receive acclamations.[172] Although the military is still addressed separately, this is the first observable shift towards the civilian ideology that gained ground in the sixth century.

This transition would continue in the coronations of Anastasius and Justin I. Their coronations followed the same outline as Leo I's but had two notable differences. First, the nature of their acclamations are not recorded in the *Book of Ceremonies* so it is not possible to determine if they had military and civilian distinctions and secondly, there is no mention of the emperors appearing before the army and the people *separately*.[173] The last emperor to be crowned in this fashion was Justin II (565). Afterwards, the military aspects drop out of official coronations and tend to only be used in military usurpations that take place outside of Constantinople.[174]

Thus the sixth century is a key turning point in the development of imperial ceremonial. The military aspects of the ceremony that were so important during the fourth century were gradually phased out as coronations took place more frequently in Constantinople. Although the Church would eventually rise to take on the role as a representative of the people in the eighth and ninth centuries, this shift in the focus of imperial politics allowed the factions to gain a level of influence during the sixth and seventh centuries as representatives of the people during coronation ceremonies.[175] Before examining the evidence of the factions' influence in emperor-making, it is important to mention one more aspect of imperial ideology that was taking on a more civilian nature, the *praesentia* of the emperor.

The emperor's *praesentia* or presence on foreign campaigns was heavily publicized during the third and fourth centuries. It was believed that the emperor's personal presence at the battle would ensure the safety and success of their troops.[176] There is literary evidence of this concept in works such as the *Panegyrici Latini* and visual evidence on monuments such as the

[172] *De Cer.* 91.410-412. For further details on the accession of Leo I, see Olster 1993: 159-161.
[173] *De Cer.* 92.417-93.430; cf. MacCormack 1981: 242-245.
[174] In 602, Phocas is raised on a shield and crowned with a diadem when he is proclaimed emperor while campaigning in the Balkans: Theoph. 287.6-8.
[175] For the development of Christianity in the Eastern Empire, see Brown 1992: 118-158.
[176] MacCormack 1981: 242.

Column of Marcus Aurelius and the Arch of Constantine.[177] In all these sources there is a heavy emphasis on the connection between the emperor's presence in battle and the ultimate victory of the troops. As the focus of imperial politics shifted to Constantinople, the emperor's personal presence at military victories became replaced by his presence at the victories in the Hippodrome, which in turn became a representation of imperial victory.[178] Consequently, this development increased the political importance of the Hippodrome and opened up an opportunity for the factions to rise in influence. Now it is prudent to analyze the available evidence to determine the extent of the factions' rise to power.

Evidence for Emperor Making

There are several examples during the sixth and seventh centuries that demonstrate the factions' rise in influence. It is important to reiterate that the factions never had the ability to select their own emperor, and thus they had a much smaller role in the few instances when there was a clear line of succession between emperors. Their influence grew when there was no clear successor and acclamation by the people was required to recognize a new emperor. It is in these situations that the factions were able to make a real difference in which of the potential candidates became emperor. Furthermore, this influence allowed them to gain a level of political clout that was accorded to no institution other than the army and the church.[179]

The first example of the factions influencing the selection of an emperor is with the accession of Justin I in 518.[180] The *Book of Ceremonies* provides a detailed account of the events leading up to the coronation of Justin and comments on the role the factions played. In this instance, the factions are able to exert their influence in several ways. First, the Blues are able to challenge the acclamation of a tribune named John and ultimately prevent him from becoming emperor.

[177] For the *Panegyrici Latini* and the Arch of Constantine, see Van Dam 2011: 101-154. For the Column of Marcus Aurelius, see Beckmann 2011.
[178] MacCormack 1981: 242. For an in-depth analysis of the concept of imperial victory and its connections to the hippodrome, see Dagron 2011: 228-251.
[179] Liebeschuetz 2001: 211-213; cf. Bell 2013: 134-139.
[180] For further details on the accession of Justin, see Vasiliev 1950: 68-82; cf. Croke 1997: 13-22.

> The *exkoubitores* up in the Hippodrome proclaimed as emperor a tribune and friend of Justin of divine memory, John, who after this became bishop of Herakleia, and they raised him on a shield. But the Blues were dissatisfied and pelted him with stones.[181]

This event is significant because it is the first piece of evidence where the factions are able to prevent a candidate from becoming emperor. Although John more than likely had other influential opposition to his claim, it is clear the factions are an important factor in his failure to accede the throne.[182]

The second important piece of evidence that this incident provides is the fact that both the Greens and the Blues were present at the discussion that determined Justin would become emperor.

> Otherwise the opinion of all, of the senators and soldiers and demesmen, prevailed, and he was carried up to the Hippodrome and both Blues and Greens agreed to him, and the *koubikoularioi* immediately sent the apparel.[183]

The dissenters mentioned were several *scholarioi* who were dissatisfied with the decision. Their numbers are not mentioned but it is interesting to note that the factions were able to prevent a candidate from becoming emperor while the *scholarioi*, who were troops of the imperial regiment, were not. Furthermore, the fact that the Blues and Greens were both present at the talks indicates that they had moved up the political ladder to a point of real influence.

The next evidence that demonstrates the political influence of the factions is during the events leading up to the acclamation of Phocas in 602.[184] In this instance, the factions play a role in electing a replacement for the unpopular Maurice. However, it is important to point out that the factions did not set out to overthrow Maurice on their own, but were called upon for support by rival claimants once the decision to dispose of him became a viable option.

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[181] *De Cer.* 93.427.14-17.
[182] Liebeschuetz 2001: 211.
[183] *De Cer.* 93.428.15-19.
[184] I have chosen not to discuss the events of the Nika revolt in this section. Although scholars such as MacCormack have highlighted this event as a "civilian usurpation" that the factions influenced, the events that culminated in the Nika revolt were caused more by inaction on the emperor than an organized civilian coup. For MacCormack's argument, see MacCormack 1981:244-245. For a discussion of the Nika revolt, see chapter one of this thesis with reference to Greatrex 1997.

After Maurice had commanded his forces to remain on campaign in the Balkans throughout the winter of 602, he became unpopular with the army. His soldiers refused to obey his command and began to search for a new emperor. There were two prominent candidates for the crown: Germanus, the father-in-law of Maurice's eldest son Theodosius, and a centurion named Phocas.[185] Germanus approached the Green Faction leader Sergius and attempted to obtain his support.

> He [Germanus] sent Theodore to Sergius (at that time, this particular Sergius was in fact faction-leader of the green mob) and asked the faction to fasten on him the royal crown upon certain conditions and written agreements...and rejected his request...because of his exceedingly passionate commitment to partisanship for those called Blues.[186]

Theophylact provides three important pieces of evidence in this passage. First, the fact that Germanus is clearly a more legitimate candidate but still must go seek out support of the factions and that he is able to be rejected by them demonstrates that by the beginning of the seventh century the factions were an institution that was taken very seriously by potential emperors. Second, although it is often assumed that when a potential candidate lobbied for the support of the factions they would receive some political or economic benefits, here is the only surviving reference that mentions not only the potential benefits for electing an emperor but also that written agreements were prepared. This evidence is particularly important because it implies that the factions were in fact being treated like a political institution. Finally, the Greens rejection of the proposal based on Germanus' previous support for the Blues suggests that Green leaders knew that they could suffer politically if an emperor was biased towards the opposing faction. Thus, it is clear that the support of the factions was increasing in value. Furthermore, the fact that Phocas is proclaimed emperor over Germanus demonstrates that their support played a significant role in the selection of a new emperor.[187]

Theophanes provides further evidence that the factions were sought out when an emperor's popularity began to wane. In 605/606, Phocas' popularity began to decline and

[185] Theophylact Simocatta 8.6.2-7.1.
[186] Theophylact Simocatta 8.9.14-15. Translated by M. Whitby and Mary Whitby.
[187] For further details on the accession of Phocas and the Greens role in supporting it, see Olster 1993: 49-65.

another potential usurper, a patrician named Germanus, sought to gain the support of the Greens.[188]

> A man from the palace took the empress Constantina and her three daughters and sought asylum in the Great Church at the instigation of the patrician Germanus, who was reaching after the imperial office...Germanus sent a talent of gold to the demarch of the Greens that he might co-operate with his party; but the leading men of the deme did not consent to this.[189]

Once again we see the potential influence the factions possessed in emperor-making. It is evident that if Germanus was sending money to the Green leaders, he must have believed they were able to make a difference in his bid for emperor. Theophanes does not indicate why the Greens rejected this claim but theoretically, if the Greens had a deal put in place by acclaiming Phocas in 602, it is reasonable to assume they decided to maintain it rather than risk the chaos that accompanied usurpation.

The next incident that highlights that faction's influence in emperor-making is when Heraclius usurps the throne from Phocas in 611/612. Although it appears that there was a large degree of polarization during the Egyptian civil war (discussed in the previous chapter), the Greens' role in aiding Heraclius' claim to the throne should not be overlooked. John of Nikiu records the large amount of support that Heraclius received from the Greens during his voyage to and at Constantinople.

> At the suggestion of Nicetas [Green demarch] the people accepted Heraclius as their emperor, the people of Africa lauded Heraclius...and hearing these demonstrations, the

[188] Liebeschuetz maintains that this Germanus is the same man that contended with Phocas for the throne in 602, but Theophanes records that the former Germanus mentioned is killed after a battle with the Persians in 603/604. Furthermore, the latter Germanus is introduced in 605/606 as the "patrician Germanus," an epithet that I believe is introducing a new person. For Liebeschuetz using both Germanus' as the same person, see Liebeschuetz 2001: 211-212; the PLRE leaves the question open to interpretation. It records two separate entries but indicates that it is possible they are the same person. However, for this to be the case, Germanus would have had to have been restored to a military command position shortly after the army mutiny of 588. Thus, I believe that they were two different individuals, see Martindale 1992: 529-530, 532. For Theophanes' reference to the former Germanus being killed, see Theoph. 292.5-25; for the introduction of the latter Germanus see Theoph. 293.8-28.

[189] Theoph. 293.8-15. Translated by C. Mango, R. Scott, and G. Greatrex.

> Green Faction and the inhabitants of the city of Byzantium, who were on the sea, assembled their ships and pursued the Blues.[190]

Theophanes adds that it was the factions who "seized the latter [Phocas], killed him, and burnt him at the Bovis [forum]."[191] The Greens demonstrate their political clout by proclaiming a usurper emperor to the people and by executing a former emperor in the forum. Here we see the height of the faction's power. The Greens and the Blues are leading players in imperial politics (although less is recorded about the Blues, their role in attempting to keep Phocas in power should be noted) and it is clear that they are both operating as political institutions.

After Heraclius' accession, the factions lost this level of political authority and began to take on the more ceremonial role described by Cameron.[192] The influence the factions obtained as a result of the turmoil of the sixth century declined largely because of the length and stability of the Heraclean dynasty. This stability, particularly the clear lines of succession that dominated the seventh century, relegated the factions to their ceremonial role of leading the acclamations at coronation ceremonies.[193] The final section of this chapter will look at the level of social and legal leniency that the factions obtained during the sixth century.

Social and Legal Leniency

The factions could express their displeasure towards the emperor in a way that only the army and church could rival. Furthermore, when a particular faction was in the emperor's favor, their members are recorded as having a great deal of legal clemency when caught breaking the law. There are several literary sources that highlight the level of freedom that the factions received.

Procopius states that the Blues had a wide range of freedom during the reign of Justinian that resulted in many crimes going unpunished.

[190] Joh. Nikiu. 105.1-3.
[191] Theoph. 299.7-8.
[192] Al. Cameron 1976: 230-270.
[193] For details on the decline of the factions and their transition from a political to a purely ceremonial role, see Al. Cameron 1976: 297-308; cf. Liebeschuetz 2001: 218-219.

> As there was no response to the crimes on the part of the urban authorities, the audacity of these men continuously reached new heights... that is how things were for the Blues.[194]

Although Procopius was biased against the factions, it is likely that the Blues did receive some level of legal clemency from Justinian's administration. Procopius records another incident early in Justinian's reign that supports this claim. An incident occurred at Tarsas that brought the local government into conflict with the Blue Faction.[195] The governor of Cilicia, Malthanes, was using his troops to force citizens into paying their taxes. The Blues protested this and 'emboldened by the licence granted to them by the emperor, publicly chanted abuse against Malthanes in the marketplace when he was not present.'[196] Malthanes heard of this and went directly to the forum and there was a night battle with many casualties including a leader of the local Blues organization. The Blues complain to Justinian, who originally shares their outrage, but relents after being bribed by Malthanes' father-in-law. Although Justinian fails to act officially, he also chooses to ignore the Blues in Constantinople who 'attacked him [Malthanes] in the very palace and would have killed him, if some of their party, who had been bribed by Leo, had not stopped them.'[197]

There are two important points to consider from this passage. First, the Blues did expect Justinian to respond to their original grievance, which suggests that there was some precedent to the Blues receiving support from Justinian. Furthermore, Procopius is using this incident to show the hypocrisy of Justinian. The fact that he highlights that Justinian would betray his loyalties for gold also suggests that there was actually some form of loyalty to betray. Second, not only were the Blues able to assault Malthanes in the palace at Constantinople, but they also received no punishment for doing so.

Cameron argues that the Byzantine emperors "did not pay the respect to the petitions from the factions they are popularly imagined to have paid" and there are many instances where this is the case.[198] However, later in the sixth century when the emperor's position was not as

[194] Proc. *Anec.* 7.19-22.
[195] Proc. *Anec.* 29.27-38.
[196] Proc. *Anec.* 29.30. An example of claque chanting, see Al. Cameron 1976: 235-238, 286.
[197] Proc. *Anec.* 29.36.
[198] Al. Cameron 1976: 287. For an example of Anastasius rejecting an appeal for the release of some Greens, see Joh. Mal. 16.4; for Justinian rejecting an appeal for bread, see Joh. Mal. 18.121. However, it should be noted that

secure, the complaints of the factions were taken much more seriously. Two days after Phocas had been proclaimed in the Hippodrome, a confrontation broke out between the two factions over a question of station.[199] When Phocas decided to side with the Greens, the Blues threatened that they might return their support to Maurice. Phocas was so concerned with the threat that he was "roused to frenzy for the murder of the emperor" and ordered Maurice and his five sons killed on the following day.[200] There is one other conflict during Phocas' reign that deserves mention. In 608/609 Phocas has another confrontation with the factions.[201] The Greens insulted him at the chariot races, calling him a drunk and shouting that he had 'lost his mind.' Although Phocas had the Greens punished harshly, it is possible he went too far.[202] Liebeschuetz argues that the severe punishment caused the Greens to throw their support behind Heraclius.[203] In light of the polarization that took place between the factions during the year before Heraclius seized the throne, this incident may have been a factor in the Greens' decision to side with Heraclius.

These two incidents demonstrate the risks an unpopular emperor ran when he decided to alienate one of the factions. It is true that an emperor with a secure hold on his reign had more flexibility to punish the factions as he saw fit, but in times of turmoil or when the emperor's legitimacy was called into question it was important for emperors to garner the support of the factions.

Conclusion

The transition of imperial ceremonial from a military to a civilian ideology clearly was an important step in the factions' rise to power. As the focus of imperial politics became centered in the Hippodrome, the factions came to hold a level of influence comparable to the military and the clergy. Furthermore, this influence allowed them to become a prominent player when selecting a new emperor from potential candidates. Their role in emperor-making brought the factions many benefits. They received political positions, leniency in regards to their criminality, and the ability to criticize the emperor's administration. Another aspect that should be

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both emperors had reasons for not granting the requests: Anastasius was a supporter of the Reds and Justinian did not want to lose face in front of a Persian ambassador.

[199] Liebeschuetz 2001:212-213; Theoph. 289.24-290.11

[200] Theophylact Simocatta 8.10.2-8.11.6.

[201] Theoph. 296.17-297.10

[202] Theoph. 297.4-5. Phocas went the extra step of barring the Greens from holding public office. For the meaning of the term πολιτεύεσθαι which is central to this passage, see Cameron 1976: 288-289.

[203] Liebeschuetz 2001: 213, n. 66.

highlighted was the factions' ability to bounce back from major setbacks. All riots and major disturbances were put down by force and there were usually harsh penalties for those involved, but it is important to note the speed with which the factions recovered from these incidents.[204] Even the Nika revolt, which ended in a tremendous loss of life for the factions and the military, only caused the races to be suspended for five years. When one considers the fact that the factions lost most of their influence during the stability of the seventh century, the turmoil of the sixth century and the lack of clear successors to the throne during this period must also be considered factors in their rise to power.

[204] Liebeschuetz 2001: 213.

General Conclusion

Now that we have looked at the various aspects of the circus factions that can be considered to be political, it is necessary to re-evaluate the validity of the original argument. I set out to prove that the factions did have a significant degree of political influence during the fifth and sixth centuries and I believe this to be the case for several reasons.

The fifth and sixth centuries provided a unique opportunity for the factions to increase their importance in society. This opportunity was the result of a number of factors that culminated in the sixth century. First of all, the re-organization of the games needs to be highlighted. This development essentially created the factions that operated in Byzantine society by creating the institution of the factions. It is true that they did exist before the fifth century, but it is this re-organization that allowed them to develop into empire-wide organizations and to control the state's funds allocated for public entertainment. Secondly, the shift in the focus of imperial ideology from the battlefield to the hippodrome cannot be overstated. This transition brought the frontline of imperial politics to the stadiums and because of their reorganization, the factions were already in a position to influence events connected to the hippodrome.[205]

Furthermore, the decision of Emperor to reside in Constantinople changed the character of imperial ideology. Concepts that were heavily publicized in the fourth century, such as the *adventus* and *praesentia* of the emperor, were replaced by the idea of imperial victory being represented in the hippodrome. This was a significant development for the factions because it caused the emperor to become even more bound to the politics of the stadium. It ensured that the emperor would often be present at the races and as a result it gave the masses a rare opportunity to have their voices heard by the most powerful man in the empire. Finally, the increased civilian role in imperial ceremonial should also be noted. The factions came to be representatives for the masses and as such, they led many of the ceremonies that took place in the hippodrome. This is important because it gave their power a symbolic recognition. Although these factors did not affect the factions directly (with the exception of the re-organization of the games), they

[205] The factions had assigned seating areas in the hippodrome that gave them a prime position to be recognized and heard by the emperor. For a discussion on seating structure, how the crowd was organized at the games, and the epigraphic evidence left in the hippodrome at Aphrodisias, see Roueché 1993.

nevertheless created a niche in Byzantine society that had to be filled. The factions were in a perfect position to take advantage of the opportunity and that is exactly what they did.

The question that remains is: did this new position in society grant the factions a level of political influence? To answer this I first analyzed the violent aspects of the circus factions. The riots perpetrated by the factions did not always have a political motivation, but it is clear that in many cases they did. The factions became the voice of the masses when they desired the removal of unpopular officials or wanted to express public economic concerns. When this voice was not heard, rioting gave the factions a means to express their displeasure to the governing class. It is true that disagreements often resulted in bloodshed, but it is important to remember that in a class based society, this was one of the only means for the lower classes to be recognized by the ruling elite.[206] The factions can also be seen to utilize this influence for their own gain. They used their position in society to receive legal leniency and on several occasions rioted for the release of convicted criminals simply because of their association with a certain faction. The evidence for the factions' use and abuse of their authority makes it clear that in many cases their violent actions did have a political motivation.

Secondly, I analyzed the military aspects of the factions. After examining the factions' role in the defense of cities, it is evident that they were not a 'special unit' of the army, but did serve on occasion as a militia. The factions also acted as a mediator between officials and the populace when they needed to organize a large body of people in a short amount of time. This function developed out of a need to defend the walls of a city when the regular army was unavailable. The epigraphic evidence indicates that there were political benefits associated with these roles. Although the exact benefits are unclear, the fact that they were given at all adds weight to the argument for the factions' political influence. Furthermore, it is clear from the evidence at Aykelāh and during the Egyptian civil war that by the end of the sixth century the factions were engaging in military conflicts with a certain level of authority. The military involvement of the factions may have begun out of a need to defend vulnerable cities, but it certainly increased their political status within the empire.

[206] Rudé 1964; cf. Hobsbawm 1959: 116.

Finally, I examined the factions' role in the making of emperors. The factions never achieved the influence to elect an emperor on their own, but they did become an influential player in the accession ceremonies of the fifth and sixth centuries. They provided a means for potential emperors to legitimize themselves in the eyes of the people. Furthermore, as their role in imperial ceremonial increased in importance and their opinion in selecting potential emperors became more influential, the support of the factions began to be sought out by ambitious individuals. Thus, the factions gained another degree of political significance and as a result received social and legal leniency from those who sought to gain their favour.

Now that the political involvement of the factions has been firmly established, I would like to conclude by making two comparisons, an ancient and a modern one.

The ancient comparison is put forth by Peter Bell in a recent study.[207] Bell highlights the factions' role as a political institution by drawing comparisons with another institution in Byzantine society, the Church. The Church is an interesting point of comparison because although it served a spiritual role in society, its members also acted politically. By the end of the sixth century, both of these institutions had similar qualities. They both operated in public spaces and were required to manage the populace by ritual and ceremony. Furthermore, they both could incite the populace to violence in order to achieve their goals. They had organizations throughout the Eastern Empire and they were particularly efficient at networking between different cities. Both organizations inspired fanatical devotion from their followers and by the late sixth century they each had militant divisions within their organizations to carry out their objectives. Finally, it is clear that the the two institutions played a role in imperial politics by exploiting the 'acclamation culture' that existed during this period. Bell is the first to make a detailed comparison of these two institutions and by doing so he highlights the political significance of the factions. It has long been established that the church took an active role in imperial politics, but by demonstrating how similar these two institutions actually were, Bell adds important context to the political motivations of the factions.

The following modern comparison is my own and helps to demonstrate how a non-political entity can become a political one given the right conditions.

[207] Bell 2013: 134-141.

Militant Egyptian football fans, called Ultras, have grown to constitute one of Egypt's largest civic groups.[208] After investigation into these groups it is apparent that they bear some striking similarities to the factions. They are typically made up of adolescents from lower classes, who are prone to violence and use the games as a means to escape from the drudgery of everyday life. The larger groups have specific sections of soccer stadiums closed off for them, they are constantly blamed for hooliganism by the upper class, their games have been suspended by the government in an effort to punish them, and there have been incidents that escalate to the point where the military (or police) is brought in to disperse them.[209] These groups have traditionally defined themselves as non-political, but recent events in Egypt have begun to challenge this notion.

Although they issued a statement in 2011 that declared their non-political intentions, they were a major political element in fighting the police to secure Tahrir Square for demonstrations several days later. Furthermore, over the past two years the Ultras have protested President Hosni Mubarak, the first military interregnum, and Muslim Brotherhood President Mohamed Morsi.[210] The Ultras have recently re-declared their "official" policy to remain non-political, but it may not be possible given the situation in Egypt.[211] The importance of political demonstrations to potential leaders and the instability of the succession between those leaders, will undoubtedly lead ambitious individuals to seek out the support of the Ultras. In a setting where the collective voice of the masses can be a powerful tool of statecraft, the Ultras have the potential to raise their political significance.

The Ultras provide an interesting modern example of how a sporting group can raise itself to have political importance. Zirin describes them as "political street fighters who just basically love soccer" and I believe this to be an apt description for the factions in the sixth century as well; they were "political street fighters who just basically loved the races."[212]

[208] It is interesting to note that similar to the factions, there are two prominent groups within the Ultras that support rival teams, the Ultras Ahlawy and the Ultras White Knights, see Dorsey 2013.
[209] In the most extreme cases, similar to Constantinople albeit on a smaller scale, the intervention of the army resulted in the deaths of many Ultras, see Dorsey 2013. In 2012, 74 members of the Ultras Ahlawy were killed in a riot that broke out in Port Said.
[210] Zirin 2013.
[211] Elgohari 2013.
[212] Zirin 2013.

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