A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

Translating the text of the Commentariolum Petitionis is no easy task. The Latin is at times obscure, while the manuscripts passed down to us have been corrupted at several points. I have tried to make my translation accessible, colloquial, and as clear as possible to modern readers, while remaining faithful to the sense of the original text.

There is also the problem of Roman social and political vocabulary. Many of the Latin terms have no clear equivalent in modern languages. The Latin equites, for example, literally means “horsemen” and reflects an origin in cavalry service. Because
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of this it is often translated as “knights”—but for most readers this evokes a misleading image of King Arthur and his Round Table. In Cicero’s time the designation of *equites* had moved far beyond a connection to horses and referred instead to the social class of moderately wealthy citizens just below senators, to whose ranks they could rise as Cicero did. Most of them were businessmen, so I have used the term “business community” or similar in my translation. Likewise for the diverse social groups of *sodalitates* or *collegia*: I have used terms such as “organizations” or “special interest groups” that best approximate their role in first-century BC Rome. For the Latin *optimates* and *populares*—literally, “best men” and “men of the people”—I have respectively used the terms “traditionalists”
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and “populists” since these would be the closest modern equivalents. I refer readers to the glossary for a more detailed explanation of these and other terms.