

Aristocracy: A Very Short Introduction
By William Doyle

This *Very Short Introduction* shows how ideas of aristocracy originated in ancient times, were transformed in the Middle Ages, and have only fallen apart over the last two centuries. The myths in which aristocracies have always sought to shroud themselves are stripped away, and the true source of their enduring power revealed. Their outlook and behaviour affected the rest of society in innumerable and sometimes surprising ways, but perhaps most surprising was the way in which a centuries-old aristocratic hegemony crumbled away over the last two hundred years. In this *Very Short Introduction* William Doyle considers why this happened and what remains today.

Questions for thought and discussion

- Why has belief in good birth been so persistent?
- Why have Roman models and examples been so influential in the history of aristocracies?
- How were aristocratic ideals and practices able to survive so many crises and challenges?
- Why did challenges to aristocratic hegemony become so much more serious in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries?
- Why has it taken so long for aristocracies and aristocratic ideals to lose their power?
- Do you agree that the main historic function of aristocracies has been to make new money respectable?
- Why have aristocrats been so addicted to myth-making about their own origins and history?
- Why are fighting and bloodshed so important in the noble scale of values?
- Are kings and nobles natural enemies or natural allies?
- What does the modern world have most to thank aristocracies for?
- What have been the most undesirable influences and legacies of aristocracies?
- Can aristocracy be abolished?
- What distinguishes aristocracy from an oligarchy?
- What distinguishes it from other forms of elite?
- What are the sources of deference?
- Why do nobles affect to despise effort?
- How far do you agree with James Lees-Milne's judgment on the last page of this book?

Other books by William Doyle

Aristocracy and its Enemies in the Age of Revolution (OUP, 2009)

Further reading

P.A. Brunt, *The Fall of the Roman Republic* (Clarendon Press 1988)

Jack Goody, Joan Thirsk and E.P. Thompson, (eds.) *Family and inheritance. Rural Society in Western Europe, 1200-1800*, (Cambridge University Press 1976).

Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (Yale University Press 1984)

H.M. Scott (ed.), *The European Nobilities in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (2nd. Edn, I B Tauris & Co Ltd 2007)