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Augustus through the Ages

Receptions, Readings and Appropriations
of the Historical Figure of the First Roman Emperor



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Augustus through the Ages

Introduction

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1. *Augustus' Reception History and the Augustan Bimillenary of 2014: A New Impetus*

As everybody knows, the bimillenary of Augustus' death on the 19th of August 14 AD in Nola was commemorated in 2014 all around the world with conferences, exhibitions and publications.¹ Many scholars already have contributed with books and papers to this spectacular profusion of publications and scientific events about Augustus in 2014. Let us mention one of the most remarkable of these cultural and scientific events: the exhibition which took place first in Rome, then in Paris, and which was entitled 'Augusto' (devised by Eugenio La Rocca), or 'Moi, Auguste, empereur de Rome...'. In the catalogue of this exhibition, the very beginning of the introduction consists of a reference to another 'Augustan exhibition' organised in Rome: the *Mostra Augustea della Romanità* of 1937-38, which commemorated another Augustan bimillenary – the bimillenary of the birth of the first emperor. It is well known that this *Mostra Augustea*, which was visited by hundreds of thousands of people, was designed as a display for the Fascist regime and his leader, the 'Duce'. So, commemorating Augustus in 2014 inevitably implied to think about the distance between the commemoration of the Thirties and the present one. What did the figure of Augustus mean in the context of the Fascist Rome? And what does it mean in the present world? More generally speaking, the year 2014 strongly invited to examine the evolution of the perception of Augustus through the ages.

It is well-known that Italian philosopher and historian Benedetto Croce held a rather intransigent opinion on research carried out on the reception of historical figures into the arts: devoid of usefulness, it thus lacked scientific interest.²

¹ See the list of the events of the year 2014 drawn up online by Penelope J. Goodman on the website *Commemorating Augustus Project*: <https://augustus2014.com/2014-events/>.

² CROCE (1904): 'Comprendo bene quel certo interesse storico che spinge a ricercare la fortuna avuta, nella letteratura e nell'arte, da personaggi e avvenimenti, storie o leggende

History and art and – as a consequence – also literature and architecture, according to Croce's aesthetic principles, are unable to communicate, for there is no consistency between them, and one always prevails on the others. For this reason, Croce would have judged the principles underlying the following pages as a-critical, if not useless. A study discussing in detail how Augustus had been perceived through time would have been seen as rhetorical, thus lacking hermeneutic substance.

Far from Croce's trenchant judgement, modern interdisciplinary research is commonly praised and encouraged, for it holds the unique capability of approaching this and other topics from a variety of viewpoints – something not achievable without the competences and knowledge specific to different and yet complementary disciplines. This miscellaneous volume aims at building a bridge between different research fields that – using a variety of theoretical approaches – analyse a specific theme: the reception of the model of Augustus in a long-term perspective.

The reception of Augustus' historical figure is not a new topic in the now well-established field of the 'reception studies'. Many scholars devoted studies of various extents to several episodes of the first emperor's 'posthumous history'. Among the episodes which have drawn the most attention, we can certainly mention the Carolingian reference to Augustus and the Augustan Age developed in the aftermath of Charlemagne's imperial coronation on Christmas Day 800, and the famous legend of Augustus and the Sibyl, whose Christianised version was popularised in the 12th century by the *Mirabilia Urbis Romae*, as well as the appropriation of Augustus' figure by Mussolini and the fascist regime during the *Ventennio*. Scholars of various disciplines have dedicated a great number of punctual and isolated studies to these topics and many other aspects of the reception of Augustus and 'his' century across Western history. Yet, at the time of the Augustan commemorations of 2014, a broad and comprehensive treatment of this topic was still lacking. To the best of our knowledge, with the exception of a couple of pages in the article 'Herrscher' in the *Neue Pauly's* volume over *Rezeptions- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte*,³ the only overview over the long-term history of Augustus' reception was given in a short monograph (64 pages) by the German philologist and historian Karl Hönn (1883-1956) entitled *Augustus im Wandel zweier Jahrtausende*. This is the publication of a lecture given at the Bibliotheca Hertziana (whose official designation was then *Kaiser Wilhelm-Institut für Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaft*

che sieno. E, quantunque tali indagini restino di qua da ogni problema di vera critica letteraria, comprendo anche la curiosità che si desta innanzi a un'opera importante o nuova, di ricercare come la stessa materia, storica o leggendaria, sia stata trattata da altri autori. [...] Ma, ripeto, l'istituzione di siffatti confronti non è la critica e non serve alla critica, tranne che in modo secondario ed incidentale'.

³ STROTHMANN (2000), col. 396-400. We could also mention a short paper published in a popularising journal: CARTER (1983).

Bibliotheca Hertziana) in Rome on 25th April 1938 – that is in the very year in which was held the *Mostra Augustea della Romanità*. The synchronism is, of course, not fortuitous, as it immediately appears in the introductory sentence:

“Was ist alle Geschichte anderes als das Lob Roms?”... dieser oft zitierte Satz Petrarca⁴ gilt auch für das Problem, das in dem Jahr der zweitausendsten Wiederkehr des Geburtstages des Augustus sich aufdrängt: wie vollzog sich in den zwei Jahrtausenden, die seit seiner Erscheinung und seinem Wirken vergangen sind, Gestaltwerdung und Gestaltwandel des Namens und Mannes, mit dem Rom und die Welt für alle Zeiten den Begriff römischen Glanzes, römischer Größe und römischer Macht verknüpft?

Unsurprisingly, these words express a vision of Augustus as embodiment of Roman glory and power which fits perfectly with the ‘official’ image of the Princeps conveyed by the Fascist regime, especially in the year of the *Mostra Augustea* (see the contribution by Jan Nelis in this volume). In this respect, it is worth stressing that Karl Hönn chose to conclude his lecture, whose last part makes an inventory, country by country, of the major contributions to the Augustan research from the 19th century onwards, by praising with admiration and enthusiasm the many contributions of the ‘new Italy’ (*das neue Italien*) to the posthumous glory of Augustus, the culmination of which being in his eyes the great exhibition of 1937-1938.

In a way, the present volume can be seen as a contribution to the necessary update, critical revision and deepening of the survey briefly sketched by Karl Hönn. In retrospect, it appears that the ‘second bimillenary’ of 2014 gave the impetus to a large-scale development of what we could now call the field of ‘Augustan reception studies’. Indeed, in the bibliographical boom generated by the numerous conferences and events of 2014,⁵ at least two volumes (published in 2018) focus exclusively on the reception of Augustus. The first one, edited by Penelope J. Goodman under the title *Afterlives of Augustus AD 14-2014*, originated in the ‘Commemorating Augustus’ conference held at the University of Leeds in August 2014.⁶ It contains 19 studies embracing the two millennia of the first emperor’s posthumous history, one of the papers even dealing with the exhibition held in Rome and subsequently in Paris, which we already mentioned, and analysing its differentiated receptions.⁷ The second volume, *L’empereur Auguste et la mémoire des siècles*, contains the proceedings of two conferences held in Dijon and Arras under the direction of Anne Daguet-Gagey and

⁴ *Quid est enim aliud omnis historia quam Romana laus? (Invectiva contra eum qui maledixit Italie 15).*

⁵ On several important publications over Augustus and his time that appeared already in 2014, see the *Forschungsbericht* by BORGNA (2015).

⁶ GOODMAN (2018).

⁷ CLAREBORN (2018), in particular p. 333-335.

Sabine Lefebvre.⁸ It shows a narrower scope than the former one, since out of its 13 contributions, only 4 deal with the post-classical era, from the Middle Ages to the 19th century.

Other collective volumes that originated in the bimillennary's celebrations of 2014, even though not focused on 'Augustus after Augustus', contain several studies about the reception history.⁹ However, the growing importance of the history of reception in the field of the Augustan studies – at least in French scholarship – is shown most clearly by the fact that two recent biographies of Augustus include substantial chapters on the 'posthumous life' of the emperor. Thus, in his monograph *Auguste. Les ambiguïtés du pouvoir* published in 2015, Frédéric Hurlet dedicated the third part – the longest – to the 'transformations of the Augustan myth'. In his preface, the author explicitly states that this unusual approach was dictated by the 'spirit' of the collection in which the book was to appear ('Nouvelles biographies historiques', at Armand Colin).¹⁰ One wonders if Hurlet's book has not opened up a new way for the biographical treatment of Augustus' figure since the most recent (2020) *Auguste. Prince républicain* by Philippe Le Doze – a pupil of Hurlet – ends with a chapter on 'Augustus' legend'.¹¹

The present volume intends to be part of this dynamic historiographical trend initiated in 2014. It should be said at once that this book does not purport to be a complete history of Augustus' reception from Antiquity onwards. Convinced that exhaustiveness is anyway unreachable in such a topic, the organisers of the 2014 Brussels conference and editors of this volume aspired to provide, through a collection of specific insights, as varied an overview as possible of the different interpretative dynamics at work throughout the posthumous history of Augustus. Even more than the usual term of 'reception' alone, the combined concepts of 'reception', 'reading', and 'appropriation' used in the subtitle of this book (there in the plural) seemed to us likely to reflect the various contents and functions of the references to Augustus' figure across diverse media, cultures and political regimes.¹²

In the following, we will provide a short overview over a series of central formal aspects defining key elements of the reception of the 'Augustan age' in the later Western civilisation in order to provide a framework through which the following papers can be better contextualised and understood. We will focus on

⁸ DAGUET-GAGEY / LEFEBVRE (2018).

⁹ See in particular BALTRUSCH / WENDT (eds.) (2016); FLECKER *et al.* (eds.) (2017); SEGNI (ed.) (2018).

¹⁰ HURLET (2015), in particular p. 5 and 17; the third part runs from p. 153 to p. 257.

¹¹ LE DOZE (2020), p. 407-448.

¹² On the extraordinary diversity in the range of classical receptions, which requires a varied vocabulary to describe "how the reception in question and its context relate to the classical source and its context", see HARDWICK (2003), in particular the first chapter: 'From the Classical Tradition to Reception Studies', p. 1-11 (quote at p. 9).

architectural memories, the long shadow of Caesar, and Augustus' place in literary and textual history.

2. *Building a Reference Model: The Language of Augustan Architecture*

Aside from historical continuities, the memory of an Augustan *saeculum aureum* was also conveyed through changes, and tangible ones: in architecture and in the urbanistic layout *Vrbis et Orbis quoque*. Such changes set out parameters against which all following 'renaissances' were to be measured: the time of Constantine, the Carolingian and the Ottonian 'renaissance', even up to the Italian Renaissance and the modern concept of the 'Classical'. Thus, a study of Augustan architecture in Rome is a study of visual communication media, an enquiry into a communication structure based on a series of reference models which are applicable to other periods in history. Hence, to understand them means not only to get a better insight into cultural and social issues during Antiquity, but also into how Antiquity was perceived and assimilated during the following centuries.

As Tonio Hölscher¹³ suggested, architecture during the reign of Augustus can be seen as a 'system' where Classicism was both a model and the most perfect expression of the Roman imperial civilisation. Thus, reading the 'language' of architecture through a functional and historical lens will shed more light on the concept of 'Classicism', especially if taking into consideration all its inner components. Most prominently, the adoption of Classicism in its double significance of parameter of style and ideological reference: by recalling the looks of Athens under Pericles, the architects also meant to nudge at the ideals of that time – 'democracy' and imperialism. Strictly, 'Classicism' signifies any revival of Greek 'classical' art (5th-4th centuries BC), with special reference to the decades of Phidias and Polycleitus, taken as a reference model. In this respect, Classicism refers (with varied degrees of agency) to a-temporal elements – such as order and measure – complying with strict rules and often driven by pedagogical aims. It is well-known that this concept underlies the official representations of the emperor, as evident from the sculpture known as Augustus of *Prima Porta*, which could be considered the first example where such classical and formal language, dating to the 5th century AD, and with reference to Polycleitus, was used.

2.1. A Counterpoint Between Literary Sources and Archaeology

The Vitruvian idea of *auctoritas*,¹⁴ with its related concept of *magnificentia*, lay behind the stylistic choices of Augustan Classicism: the extraordinary prestige

¹³ HÖLSCHER (1987).

¹⁴ VITR., *Praef.* 1.2.

of public buildings (*egregiae auctoritates*) being a reflection of the prominent role of the empire (*maiestas imperii*¹⁵). The choice of appropriate architectural models is as important in politics as the style of rhetorical expression: if one applies what Cicero states about Asianism¹⁶ to the appropriateness of public buildings (*opportunitas publicorum aedificiorum*), we can see how Classicism (and the architecture inspired by it) reflected a political choice – to show order in the state organisation. This is to say that Augustan architecture is the expression of both *grauitas* and *auctoritas* emanating from all Roman magistrates, and especially from Augustus. Livy¹⁷ underlines that *grauitas* was the key-idea in the construction of an Augustan ideology: originally regarded as a patrician-only virtue, by the time the civil wars were over, it could be seen as belonging to the whole of the Roman population as opposed to non-Romans, who lacked it completely. People gifted with *grauitas* are worth of dignity and respect, while the opposite *tumultus* – that is excitement – was commonly associated with the plebs and, later, to non-Roman peoples living within the Roman Empire. For this reason, the *grauitas* of public buildings was meant to convey a feeling (*suspectus*) of respect and admiration, not only towards the buildings, but also towards those who had erected them.

The narrative of forms set up during the late reign of Augustus created a new style of representation which was to become *the* model for Classicism up to the 20th century. This patrimony of architectural images provided the appropriate backdrop for all official State functions – ‘appropriate’ as it displayed the right degree of decorum (*dignitas*). For example, the temple of *Mars Ultor* was where magistrates with *imperium* started their journey for the provinces they were meant to run; there, winning generals symbolically left standards, sceptres and crowns.¹⁸ However, this style developed gradually and embodied ideals and symbols laid out after the late republican time, that is, the time of the triumvirate. Whereas then the temple of *Apollo in Circo* was one of the most representative buildings,¹⁹ the new style aimed at conveying a cosmic ideal of serenity and calm through the buildings’ *maiestas* (an overarching regal tone), the regular rhythm of the columns, the choice of materials and their disposition (*pondus*).²⁰ Such sense of tranquillity became the leitmotiv for contemporary narratives too. While the purpose is still to surprise the audience – as it happened in Asianic rhetoric, Hellenistic and late-republican architecture as well as in pre-Augustan coinage –, there is also the will to convince, to reassure the onlookers. We can talk about ‘intellectual architecture’ as opposed to the mainly

¹⁵ CAVALIERI (2002), in particular p. 17-29. Most recently also, CAVALIERI (2020).

¹⁶ CIC., *Brutus* 95.327.

¹⁷ LIV. 5.41.7 s.

¹⁸ SUET., *Aug.* 29.2

¹⁹ VISCOGLIOSI (1996).

²⁰ QUINT., *Inst.* 5.12.20.

‘emotional’ one of earlier times, when elegance and sobriety of the forms are the norm, albeit with exceptions of some relevance.

Different methods were put in place to express this set of ideas: decorative patterns were repeated, their lines neatly carved by using a technique which – while formally correct and precise – resulted somehow algid and lacking the freshness of nature. Aside from the choice of colours and the images portrayed, surfaces were worked so to convey a more or less clearly defined idea of ‘classic’, and – in so doing – pass on the taste and ideological stand of the *princeps*. Carrara marble, still very much unusual up to Caesar’s times, became a typical architectural feature under Augustus, for it combined the characteristics of a versatile construction material with those of *laetitia*. It was this combination which, translated from the material to the object, gave also religious significance to architectures and ornaments, and played a relevant role even later, in further expressions of ‘Classicisms’. The leaves of acanthus, almost omnipresent as an ornament during the Augustan era, conveyed a sense of vitality and force to Corinthian columns, to modillions and to the cornice.²¹ This plant became the symbol of the Golden Age, as theorised by Virgil: it brought it to life in architectural buildings, and set up a canon of style which was to last into the following centuries. The connection between symbols and the ideals from which they stemmed can be seen in the external peristasis of the temple dedicated to *Mars Vltor* or in the *ara Pacis*, where they are inextricably connected with the *marmor lunense*. The presence of the divine, a warranty of power, was thus somehow materialised through the extensive use of the Corinthian order, carved in blocks of marble: all elements referred to a semantic system which was accessible to, and understandable by everyone. In so doing, the *marmorea Vrbs* described by Suetonius²² became in fact the carrier of deeper meaning and significance,²³ and Augustan architectural features became *per se* an unequalled, ideal model that was to last in times to come.

Augustan architecture, however, not only took on Greek models, but also experimented with new features which were then made into models for public Roman architecture: alongside imitation there was creativity, too. During the monumental and long-lasting building of the *Forum Augustum* (42-2 BC), the Corinthian order was shaped, that is, a fixed succession of architectural elements where, among the most prominent features, was the Corinthian capital. This capital, as shown in the *pronaos* of the temple dedicated to *Mars Vltor*, was mainly employed in its most standardised and plain version. This is important: it seems in fact that a standardisation of the Corinthian style into an order did not happen in Greece itself, where – although the earliest occurrence of a marble *kalathos* decorated with acanthus foliage dates back to the 5th century BC,

²¹ SAURON (1993).

²² SUET., *Aug.* 28.

²³ GROS (2016).

in Arcadia – this style should be regarded as not more than a variation of the Ionic order. All in all, therefore, architectural decorative features found in the *Forum Augustum* would turn into the paradigm and last through the centuries, becoming also the architectural canon against which later ‘renaissances’ were measured and to which they referred.

2.2. The Genotype of Augustan Architecture through the Ages

Among them, the Humanistic ‘renaissance’: during the second half of the 15th century, architects such as Giuliano da Sangallo, truly fascinated by Roman Antiquity, systematically studied and copied Roman Augustan buildings, striving to provide consistency to the city’s architecture, while not always being able to cross-reference them with the norms stated by Vitruvius.

In this light, while the very concept of ‘Classicism’ applied to Augustan architecture is formally correct, it is not so from an ideal point of view. Greek aesthetic models from the classical period were in fact employed in a context that was different from the one where they saw the light: in Rome, in fact, they were meant to convey *gravitas*, and *dignitas*, both typically Roman values. By using these models, Roman architects did not mean to bring back the ancient Athens and Greece. Their choice was deliberately made, and in the knowledge that Rome was living a pivotal time of its history; their purpose was to shape visually the contents and language of Augustus’ ideology of power. Besides showing historical awareness, Augustan architecture became in itself a ‘system’ for visual communication, a codified and therefore easily understandable set of universal parameters applied first in Rome, then in the provinces, and lastly during the later centuries. Within the Roman Empire – a huge and heterogeneous organisation –, such communication ‘system’ responded to urgent practical needs, first of all being easily understandable by so many people with different cultural backgrounds. Later on, however, as this ‘system’ survived in time, it became in itself ‘classical’, helping the identification of the formal and ideological message it conveyed. For instance, while the architectural model of the temple of *Mars Ultor* became a rule thanks to its diffusion, it nevertheless changed its significance through time, by acquiring a wider range of nuances according to the ideologies it was meant to serve. Among them, for example, the medieval ‘renaissances’ – when it embodied the rebirth of an ‘ancient Rome’; or the 15th century architectural treatises – where it was indicated as the theoretical paradigm of *uenustas*;²⁴ up to Mussolini times, when the architectures of the regime were inspired by Roman classical times. At least from 1937 onwards, by conjuring up buildings ‘in the style of Augustus’, Fascism meant to evoke a bright imperial future to come.

²⁴ ALBERTI (1485).

The general atmosphere of *renouatio Urbis* of the 1st century BC was the springboard for a new architectural language used to express new ideas. This in turn was the result of centuries of assimilations, rejections or re-adjustments of other styles, according to different needs and occasions. This style peaked in the mid-Augustan era, when single buildings or monumental complexes (i.e. *Forum Augustum*, theatres, and *Campus Martius*) provided a huge architectural portfolio of models and norms to be exported to the whole of the Empire. It can be defined a ‘deliberate architecture’, for it recalls classical Greece, while being intrinsically and ideologically Roman – there is a degree of awareness of the importance of monumental buildings to convey a message of power and organisation.

The Fascist period was a crucial moment marking the reception of Augustan models into the 20th century: one can talk about a true beginning for Rome’s architectural development, for better, for worse. As Augustus embellished the city, turning it into the capital of the Empire, Mussolini tried to do the same through urban renovation. His planning program was clearly set out and announced from the very early months of the regime. ‘Il Duce’ stated that Rome was to look beautiful again, admired all over the world: ‘*Vasta, ordinata, potente, come era stata ai tempi del primo impero di Augusto*’.²⁵ 1937 represented the climax for the Fascist *Saturnia regna*: in the bimillenary of Augustus’ birth on the Palatine hill (23 September 63 BC), an exhibition on *Romanitas* was inaugurated (*Mostra Augustea della Romanità*), celebrating the ideals of Augustan times, and enjoying enormous success, with nearly a million visitors crowding the pavilions. During this important event, Augustus was looked at from many different viewpoints, with particular emphasis on the architecture and building strategies of his empire, which were seen as the essential backdrop for arts and enterprises. Within this cultural climate, Rationalism – the typically Fascist style which was meant to embody the revolutionary soul of the Fascist message – started losing ground among the regime’s leaders. With its decline, a new type of architecture was taking over: one that could recall explicitly the classical Roman ancestry from a stylistic, aesthetic and ideological point of view. The most forceful proof of this trend is provided by the winning entries to the 1942 architectural competition for the building of E.U.R.

2.3. The Reception of the Augustan Ideal and Modernity

What were the origins of this contemporary Classicism which – as we shall see later on – can reasonably be defined as ‘international’? Post-unification Italy is certainly where it saw the light: as the 50th anniversary of the birth of a national

²⁵ ‘Vast, organised and powerful, as it had been at the time of the early Augustan empire’. B. Mussolini, Speech given in *Campidoglio* (Capitoline Hill) to mark the inauguration of the first Governor of Rome (31 December 1925).

state was celebrated, the eclectic style marking the end of the 19th century was abandoned. Architecture went back to neo-classical formulas, as shown in the *Vittoriano* or in the Vittorio Emanuele II bridge in Rome, both inaugurated in 1911, but planned as early as the 1880s. As had previously happened during the Renaissance (when archaeological discoveries were followed by a revival of Antiquity) and during the 18th century (when Herculaneum and Pompeii were discovered), a wave of archaeological finds is always followed by a 'renaissance' of Classicism. In this specific case we are referring to the excavation of Olympia in 1875: when the metopes and the sculptures of the pediment of the temple to Zeus became widely known, a general change in academic taste followed. The earliest example of this shift in fashion, applied on a large scale, is represented by the buildings and monuments erected in Rome in 1911.

The following stage – the assimilation of classical models into fascist aesthetic – followed quite naturally from here, and for two main reasons. First, as Rome was the natural scenario for this shift: it all was happening there. Second, because from the very earliest years of the Fascist era, Mussolini rejected 1920s Rationalist architecture with its 'revolutionary' message. With a clear ideological and political turn, he opted for the most classic of all classical styles: the Augustan one. As a consequence, this neoclassical wave spread all over Italy. The *Foro Italico*, the E.U.R. district in Rome, the *Augusto Imperatore* square, as well as palaces, renovated areas and 'sanitised' ones saw the light in the capital (see the contribution by Klaus Tragbar in this volume). In Milan, *Piazza San Babila*, *Piazza Affari* or the *Palazzo di Giustizia* followed the same pattern. A new generation of architects dominated the scene: Vittorio Morpurgo and Marcello Piacentini were amongst the most prominent ones, and their work influenced and inspired followers in years to come. And yet, Fascism was not the sole responsible for this revival of Augustan Antiquity: Fascist propaganda, following a deliberate aesthetic and stylistic choice of the regime, joined in fact a widespread trend spanning, between the 1930s and 1940s, from America to Europe. Clear examples can be seen in the Federal Reserve building and the Jefferson Memorial in Washington DC, and in Paris, with the *Palais de Tokyo* (1936-7) and the *Faculté de Médecine* in *Rue des Saints-Pères*.

Augustus, who tamed the chaos of late-republican times through rules and regulations, the ambiguous emperor who sent out a message of peace while concurrently restricting republican *libertas*, appears to our modern common imagination the one who advertised a 'new Rome' made out of marble, light and *ratio*. The city he left in inheritance to his successors and to the world was in fact like that. However, the ambiguities found in this historical character match those in the architecture he promoted, as it was perceived throughout history. Whereas its ideological implications were progressively neglected, Roman Augustan architecture established itself as *the* paradigm of Classic, particularly as long as Greek culture was far from being rediscovered. The alleged shadow cast by Augustan Classicism upon Classical Greece and its architecture

founded on Ideas persisted in some scientific approaches, even after the Winckelmann ‘revolution’, or the discovery of Pompeii and German post-Romantic archaeology. For this reason, Augustan Classicism was seen as the foundation of Fascist architecture of the second half of the 1930s. Yet another ‘Golden Age’, whose origins will be discussed hereafter, in this volume of studies...

3. *Augustus and the ‘Long Shadow’ of Caesar*

It is an irony of history that Augustus, to put it simply, spent such huge efforts in distancing himself from the image of his adoptive father and tried by all means to blur the memory of his actual political aims and measures, only to find himself thoroughly occulted by the long shadow of Caesar at least since the late Middle Ages. Indeed, it is not Augustus, but Caesar who entered posterity as the ‘first’ Roman emperor, who gave his name to the highest political office in Western civilisation, and whose writings are used to initiate school children to classical Latin literature, whereas Augustus, whom historians consider as one of the great empire builders of Antiquity, as the inventor of an imperial constitution that was to last for centuries, and as the *spiritus rector* of Latin Classicism, is generally much less remembered as a historical figure than as mere political ‘background’ of the age that bears his name.

The reasons for this evolution, which is paradoxical only at first view, are multiple, but their impact upon our knowledge of Augustus tremendous, and it seems inevitable that any serious treatment of the reception history of Augustus is tributary to at least a short reflection on the question not only of the why and the how, but also of the consequences of Caesar’s and Augustus’ ‘competition’ for the place of the most remembered Roman ruler in posterity. The problem is doubly complex, as we do not only have to deal with a very long period of time, reaching from Antiquity through the Middle Ages and Early Modernity up to today and thus dependent on numerous changes of cultural paradigm in memory history, but also have to take into account the intimate relationship between the evolution of memory and the conservation of sources, as it is not only the state of sources that conditions historical memory, but also the evolution of memory that triggers the selection and thus the conservation of sources.

Let us have a short look at some chosen examples illustrating to some extent the complex situation sketched above.

3.1. Literary Memories

Probably the first and most obvious factor in the slow occultation of the memory of Augustus by the remembrance of Caesar seems to be – not surprisingly, given the primordial importance of written sources in our knowledge of the past – a literary one: Caesar has been remembered for two millennia not the

least because of the important corpus of historical writings associated with his name (despite the fact that they have been for long attributed to other authors during the Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages), whereas the much shorter and drearier Augustan *Res gestae* are not only much shorter, but have also only been discovered in the 16th century (see below). However, such an assertion would be not only simplistic, but also utterly false for a series of reasons. First of course, we very well know that Augustus, too, left the contemporaries with a non-negligible number of writings – most importantly, beside his *Anticato*, the autobiographical *De uita sua* – which might, under other conditions, have become as crucial to the conservation of his memory as were Caesar's *Commentarii*. However, we would be also wrong in attributing the loss of Augustus' writings and thus an important factor in his potential reception history purely to the hazard of manuscript transmissions, as it could be said, not without a certain degree of probability, that posterity would never have stopped re-copying Augustus' autobiography if the demand for the text would not have been quite limited. Of course, we know that the selection criteria of manuscripts throughout the imperial, late antique and medieval period were not only subject to rational factors, but also, to a certain extent, to exterior elements such as the material destruction of libraries. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the fact of Caesar being already considered by his contemporaries as a perfect example of a style as well simple and clear as elegant (Cic., *Brut.* 262: *nudi enim sunt, recti et uenusti, omni ornatu orationis tamquam ueste detracta*), and of the centuries-long usefulness of the *commentarii* as a brilliant handbook for any general up to the 19th century, must have been an important factor in their conservation, even more so as no such praise has been attached to Augustus' autobiography which, even in Antiquity, seems to have been used rather as a more or less anonymous quarry for historical facts than as a shining example of exemplary Latinity, and whose practical usefulness for later generations must also have been quite reduced. Put in other words: Caesar has been re-copied for centuries because he had gained very early the status of a canonical writer so that his writings were scarcely ever menaced by material extinction, while Augustus' *De uita sua* might indeed have enjoyed a greater prestige than we know, but never really acceded to the same status, the severing of the manuscript link becoming thus a threat much more probable and, indeed, and very unfortunately, actual.

At the same time, we may also wonder to what extent this fact does not only reflect a difference in literary style, but rather the result of a chosen policy, where Augustus did not even endeavor to compete with Caesar in stylistic brilliancy or in the singling-out of his own individual acts, but rather took a point of honour in consciously and conscientiously shaping his own *persona* after the classical stereotypes of moderation and balance instead of Hellenistic heroic and generally tragic individualism. Thus, Augustus would have considered as contrary to his self-stylisation to endeavor to enter the pantheon of Roman

literature with a description of his own military or political successes or – contrarily to Nero – even with a series of poetical works such as his epos *Sicilia* or his tragedy *Ajax*, as he was rather so keen in making forget the late Republican past and to confer a mysterious aura of un- or super-temporality to his own period. Even the *De uita sua*, after all only covering the years from his political debuts up to the Cantabrian War and probably first composed as an apology of his political career, must have been considered by himself, once firmly settled in his power after the settlement of 23 BC, an unnecessary reminder of his not very convincing claim to power, so that we can quite confidently suppose that the missing sequel to the autobiography was not due to mere reasons of time or talent, but rather to a conscious decision to shift the attention of his public from his past, scarcely decorous performances during the terrible Civil Wars, to the new era of peace, prosperity, stability and extemporal Classicism.

3.2. Military Feats

A further and obviously equally important factor in the evolution of reception history is the consideration traditionally attributed, at least in Western culture, to military feats and strategic talent. Once again, at first view, it seems quite obvious why it was Caesar and not Augustus who was remembered for his prowess, the first being generally associated with his systematic conquest of Gaul, whereas the latter is generally only remembered for his victory in the Civil Wars, his alleged decision to put an end to the Roman world-conquest even at the price of an amiable settlement with the Parthians (considered as iniquitous even by the contemporaries), and finally the ultimate defeat of his endeavor to include Germany into the empire. However, once again, such a view would be simplistic and reductionist (though we could scarcely deny the fact that, at least to the French audience so important in shaping the 17th and 18th century view of Roman history, the conquest of Gaul had, for obvious reasons, an identitary appeal never to be equaled by any potentially lost *commentarius* dealing with the conquest of Iberia or the Danube region). On the one hand, we have to insist on the fact that the conquest of Gaul by the technically highly superior Roman forces did not only take nearly a decade, but proved also very unstable in the light of the efforts Augustus and his lieutenants had to undergo in order to re-include these territories into the empire again. On the other hand, it is generally forgotten that Augustus, far from limiting his military aims to the mere victory over his Roman competitors, was the driving force behind the conquest of foreign territories much larger than the mere *Tres Galliae*, as he not only consolidated Roman power over Gaul, but finalised also the conquest of Iberia, added the numerous mountainous territories up to the Danube to the Roman empire, conquered Egypt and led expeditions into Nubia and Arabia. Of course, it will be said that Caesar led his military campaigns himself, whereas Augustus is rather associated with the military talents of his second in

command, Agrippa. However, it should not be forgotten that Caesar, too, had the benefit of being surrounded by excellent military commanders and that the everyday-life hardships he underwent as well as the (sometimes dangerously deficient) strategic talents he claimed are essentially the result of his own literary stylisation.

Of course, it would be exaggerated and most certainly erroneous to pretend that Augustus, as his uncle, was a military genius and an exemplary soldier, as most sources concord in insisting on the fact that his capabilities were rather on the propagandistic, diplomatic and political than the military field; however, Augustus might have had ample opportunities during his long life to create for himself the nimbus of an invincible strategist had he wished to. That he did not do so seems less a result of our sources than of Augustus' own self-stylisation: even on the armour he wore on the *Prima Porta* statue, whose symbolism's importance is also mirrored by the contemporary coins, he did not represent his successes in conquering the large Barbarian territories reaching from the Gulf of Biskaya through Gaul, the Alps and the Danube up to the Black Sea, but rather the diplomatic settlement he reached with the Parthian Empire, resulting in decades of peaceful coexistence of the two world-empires rather than in (yet another) dangerous attempt of emulating Alexander the Great. Hence, if posterity remembers essentially about Augustus as the founder of the *pax Augusta*, the dedicatee of the *ara Pacis* and the third person in Roman history to have closed the Arch of Ianus, this is not the result of the hazard of transmission, but rather of a deliberate aim to pass on a message of peace, order and prosperity, even if to the detriment of military *uirtus*.

3.3. War and Peace

A last crucial figure in the slow displacement of the memory of Augustus by the memory of Caesar is the simple biographical fact that the actual vita of Caesar seems, at first view, a spectacular succession of political agitation, military prowess, a splendid victory over a host of foes, and, finally, a tragic death by the hand of his own friends, whereas the history of Augustus has essentially left the memory of a more or less surreptitious rise to power, followed by half a century of calm stagnation. Indeed, everything in Caesar's life seems the consequence of his allegedly greater-than-life character and leading up to his final apotheosis: his descent from Venus, his popular politics, his brilliant campaigns, his alleged treason by Pompey, his conquest of large parts of the Mediterranean from the hands of Pompeian governors, his legendary love-affair with Cleopatra, his high-strung magnanimity towards his former enemies, his building-projects, his gigantic plans of imperial expansion to the East and North, his assassination by those who had benefitted from his clemency, and finally, his apotheosis confirmed by divine prodigies: everything seems extraordinary and inimitable. Augustus, however, has been considered already

early on as a young schemer of obscure descent and conceited nature, who managed only by betraying multiple times as well his Caesarian followers as his Republican allegiance to rise to power and, after being directly or indirectly responsible for the death of a large part of the Roman aristocracy, forced his contemporaries by essentially military means to take parts in the charade of the *res publica restituta*, while at the same time tinkering continuously with his own monarchical succession.

Once again however, such a biographical explanation of Caesar's popularity over Augustus would be too short-sighted. On the one hand, one should not forget that Caesar, at least until his informal alliance with Pompey and Crassus, was not much more than an average Roman politician whose ruthlessness was only matched by his debts, and whose real career, beginning with the Gallic Wars, started at a moment when Augustus had long become first man of Rome, and that, when it comes to enumerate tragic or surprising reversions of fortune, Rome's first *princeps* certainly more than stands his ground. If history has tended to leave a wholly different memory of Caesar than of Augustus, it is not due to reality or even the sources, but mainly to a self-representation initiated by the historical actors themselves. As outlined above, whereas Caesar was keen in basing his political success on a systematic super-elevation of his own character and abilities, closely following the example of the *theios aner* set by Alexander the Great and his successors whom it seems he wanted to emulate by the adoption of the title of 'king', Augustus, to the contrary, tried to make forget, during the years between 31 and 23, his stellar rise to power through deceit, ruthlessness, betrayal, mass-murder and war, and imposed a clear symbolic break unto the memory of his contemporaries. Decades of war were to be replaced by a durable *pax Romana*, the constitutional irregularities by a return to the precepts of the old Republic, and the moral and biographic horrors of the declining Republic by the strengthening of the *mos maiorum*, so that Augustus himself reshaped his own image in order to stylise his own, disrupted biography into a sequence of classical exempla, as summarised by his own *Res gestae*: *multa exempla maiorum exolescentia iam ex nostro saeculo reduxi et ipse multarum rerum exempla imitanda posteris tradidi*.

3.4. The Aftermath

We could conclude in claiming that the eclipsing of Augustus by the memory of his adoptive father in terms of literary, military, and biographical fame was less a result of an actual reality than rather a paradoxical and somewhat ironic consequence of the self-representation of Augustus himself. Learning from Caesar's tragic death that his own power could only be consolidated by sharing it, at least partially, with the Roman senatorial and equestrian aristocracy and by insisting, however fictitiously, on his equality with the other nobles, he had to put such an emphasis on his own depersonalisation that, as a result, his fame

became overshadowed, in the long run, by the memory of the historical Caesar he so desperately tried to ban from his construction of legitimacy.

Nevertheless, the shifting of memories and thus the construction of the general image of Augustus in the present-day Western World is not only a direct result of his own self-presentation, it is also tributary to subsequent evolutions linked to cultural paradigms quite disconnected with Roman history.

Thus, already the consolidation of imperial power in the aftermath of Augustus' death and the gradual weakening of the Republican façade of the new regime contributed to a shift in public attention, as Augustus' respect for the senatorial order seemed, with the hindsight of the anti-senatorial stance taken by emperors such as Caligula, Nero, or Domitian, increasingly deceptive and calculating, with the consequence that the opposition between Caesar's overt military grasp for power and Augustus' diplomatic elaboration of a prudent compromise transformed gradually into a comparison between Caesar's honest militarism and clemency and Augustus' scheming hypocrisy, as expressed in Seneca's *De clementia*.

Another factor in the evolution of memorial history is constituted by the impact of Christianity; an impact defining not only the presentation and comparison of both rulers in Late Antiquity, but also during large parts of the Middle Ages. Of course, for obvious chronological reasons, neither Caesar nor Augustus had any material relationships whatever to the rise of Christianity or even the biography of Christ, but the vague temporal coincidence between the establishment of the principate and the birth of Christ, immortalised by Luke's famous *factum est autem in diebus illis exiit edictum a Caesare Augusto ut describeretur uniuersus orbis* (Lk 2.1), led to the fact that Augustus came to occupy a central role in the political theology of Christianity. Thus, already quite early, the Christians, willing to express their loyalty to the Roman empire while condemning their persecutions by diverse emperors, stylised Augustus into an earthly avatar of the Christ himself, first as unwilling tool of God, then increasingly as a conscious believer as described in the legends around Augustus' alleged conversion to Christianity (as e.g. in the *Legenda aurea*; see below) and thus his status as 'first Christian'.

This instrumentalisation of Augustus as common forefather of the imperial idea as well as of Christianity assured the emperor an important status within the Church for centuries, but also paradoxically resulted in his ultimate supersession by the memory of Caesar. Indeed, as the *Augustus Christianus* was so closely linked to the idea of the emperor's submission to the faith, the deep conflict between Pope and Emperor motivated the latter and his followers to gradually invest the memory of Caesar whose memory remained free from any associations with Christianity, positive or negative. It is thus no wonder if Caesar appears as well amidst the nine 'preux', the canonical mediaeval list of the chivalric heroes of the past (with Hector and Alexander), as well as in Dante's *Inferno* as the immediate earthly equivalent of the Christ, as the Devil

is said to torture in his own mouth not only Judas Iscariot because of his treason of the Christ, but also Brutus and Cassius, the murderers of Caesar (c. 34.61-67):

*Quell'anima là sù c' ha maggior pena',
disse 'l maestro, 'è Giuda Scariotto,
che 'l capo ha dentro e fuor le gambe mena.
De li altri due c' hanno il capo di sotto,
quel che pende dal nero ceffo è Bruto:
vedi come si storce, e non fa motto!;
e l'altro è Cassio, che par sì membruto.*

This attitude should also be prevalent during the Renaissance, when the 'pagan Caesar' seemed in intense political as well as literary competition with the 'Christian' Augustus, until the moment when the rise to power of Napoleon definitely changed the balance in favor of Caesar, explicitly considered by the first French emperor as his favourite role-model when he rejected the title 'Augustus' proposed for an inscription on a triumphal arch after the victory of Wagram by curtly explaining: 'Auguste n'a eu que la bataille d'Actium' and explaining, that:

Le seul homme, et il n'était pas empereur, qui s'illustra par caractère et par tant d'illustres actions, c'est César. S'il était un titre que l'Empereur pût désirer, ce serait celui de César. Mais tant de petits princes ont tellement déshonoré ce titre (si cela était possible), que cela ne se rapproche plus de la mémoire du grand César, mais de celle de ce tas de princes allemands aussi faibles qu'ignorants et dont aucun n'a laissé de souvenirs parmi les hommes. (Note sur des inscriptions proposées pour l'arc de triomphe, 3 octobre 1809)

There are still some augustan motifs in Napoleon's public image: see the contribution of Agnieszka Fulińska in this volume; it is not surprising that the vision the 19th century entertained about the historical place of Caesar and Augustus was deeply conditioned by their vision on contemporary issues such as the place of Modernism and the *Ancien régime*, the curious blending between Republicanism and 'progressive' military dictatorship becoming known as Caesarism and celebrating its most important victory with the rise to power of Napoleon III who, incidentally, decided on exploiting, in the preface to his (unfinished) biography of Caesar, the analogies between himself and his uncle on the one hand and Augustus and Caesar on the other in order to legitimate his own rule.

The curious association of Caesar with a 'modern', progressive society, as opposed to the allegedly 'boring' academism and Classicism of Augustus also explains the obvious sympathy with which the late 19th century Classical Studies have treated Caesar and the loathing for the 'backward' nature, the 'Advokaten-tum' of Cicero, prominently expressed by Theodor Mommsen as well as Andreas Alföldi. Only since the 20th century, when the focus shifted, once again, from

Caesar to Augustus, this time under the influence of the longing for stability and order as opposed to the threat of communism, the potential of Augustus as the 'real' revolutionary force of the Late Republic has been fully rediscovered, as is shown not only by the place of Augustus in fascist propaganda, but also by his re-interpretation in historiography, most notably by Ronald Syme.

The end of fascism brought a sudden end to the idealisation of Augustus as well as Caesar and a return of a more de-politicised reception, mostly confined to the domain of general fiction. However, the sudden rise and fall not only of the Third Reich, the fascist *Impero* or the Soviet Union, but also the impending decline of the USA in particular and the Western World in general in the early 21st century has once again put Augustus upon a broader agenda, though less as historical person than rather as a typical aspect in the transformation of expansionist states into stabilised empires. Thus, Spengler, followed by Toynbee, were amongst the first to identify Augustus not only as an individual, but as a morphological 'type' recurrent in all major civilisations, and recent research, focusing essentially on the analogies between ancient Rome and pre-imperial China, has coined the notion of the 'Augustan threshold' in order to define this crucial period in the creation of an universal world-empire²⁶ – a transformation from the individual into the typological which, paradoxically, fits quite neatly the self-stylisation of Augustus himself and has led the evolution of his reception history full circle.

4. *The Sources of the Varied Images of Augustus in the Middle Ages and the Modern Period*

The complex process of formation and evolution of the posthumous image of an historical figure depends to a large extent on the sources that are available (or preferred) at different periods of time, so that a brief insight into the tradition and reception of the various authors who inform us about Augustus' life and deeds appears as a necessary prerequisite for further investigations. We will first focus on the main classical and post-classical texts that formed the medieval image of Augustus before highlighting the transformation of this image brought about by the humanist *renouatio studiorum*. Then, we will survey the sources that were progressively rediscovered in the humanist period and contributed to a renewed image of the princeps in early modern literature as well as to the 'scientific' approach developed by the *Altertumswissenschaft* from the 19th century onwards.

²⁶ Cf., e.g., ENGELS (2017) and ENGELS (2020).

4.1. The Sources of the Medieval, ‘Christian’ Augustus

Much has been written about the reception of Suetonius’ *De uita duodecim Caesarum*; however, scholarly discussion has frequently overlooked the time-span including the Middle Ages and the Renaissance; an example of this recurrent attitude are the proceedings of the congress *Présence de Suétone*, an otherwise extremely interesting volume, which nonetheless disregards an entire millennium and skips directly from Antiquity to the modern and contemporary times.²⁷ And yet, the history of Suetonius’ reception offers a very typical case study, showing the multiple facets of the transmission of classical literature through the medieval and the early modern times. The medieval manuscript tradition of this text is fairly well documented. Its archetype is probably the *codex Memmianus* (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 6115), dating from the 9th century, which has belonged to the abbey of Saint-Martin in Tours.²⁸ Two other manuscripts occupying the upper branches of the *stemma codicum*, *Gudianus* and *Vaticanus*, date from the 11th and the beginning of the 12th centuries respectively. The other copies are full of interpolations, glosses and commentaries that show the typical exegetic attitude of medieval copies.

But the main track of Suetonius’ medieval circulation consists in the *florilegia*, i.e. collections or anthologies. Among those collections it is worth quoting the *Florilegium Gallicum*, preserved in twelve manuscript copies, which contains an anthology of several classical authors.²⁹ Among them, Suetonius occupies the penultimate place. The author of the collection had selected the extracts by omitting anecdotes and details that he considered too circumstantial, while retaining and preferring elements that, due to their exemplar value as moral teachings, could be of broader interest for a large audience. Throughout the Middle Ages, classical authors were considered as particularly eminent repositories of knowledge. The *Florilegium Gallicum* is very important in this regard because it was widespread throughout Europe (this diffusion being confirmed by the presence of manuscripts in a wide area, including France, Germany and Spain), and because it was used by the Dominican friar Vincent of Beauvais in his *Speculum historiale*, the most important historical compilation of medieval Western culture.³⁰ Preserved in about 250 manuscripts, this historical encyclopaedia played a role of paramount importance in the circulation of knowledge

²⁷ POIGNAULT (ed.) (2009).

²⁸ AILLOUD (1931), p. xlii-xlvi. Cf. ROCHEBOUET (2011).

²⁹ ROUSE (1979), p. 135. The *florilegium* is preserved in 12 manuscripts. Mattia Cavagna has examined ms. Paris, BnF latin 1703, which includes an anthology of the following Latin authors, in this order: Prudentius, Claudian Ovid, Tibullus, Horace, Juvenal, Persius, Martial, Petronius, Virgil, Calpurnius, Terence, Sallust, Boethius, Cicero, Quintilian, Seneca, Plautus (inserted under the label *Querulus*), Macrobius, Aulus Gellius, Caesar, Sidonius Apollinaris, Cassiodorus, Suetonius, Donatus.

³⁰ Cf. ULLMAN (1932) and, more recently, CAVAGNA (2020).

in medieval Europe, and acted in particular as a crucial vector of knowledge concerning ancient history, its authors and its protagonists.

However, the medieval and early modern portrait of Augustus was drawn from several sources. The second author we must focus on is certainly Seneca. In his *De clementia* (1.9-11), Seneca presents the famous 'Plot of Cinna'. In 16 BC, Gnaeus Cornelius Cinna and Aemilia Lepida, Marcus Aemilius Lepidus' granddaughter, were discovered while plotting a conspiracy against the emperor. Augustus forgave both of them, following the advice of his wife Livia and the inspiration of a dream; Cinna became a consul and Augustus' close friend and advisor. Seneca's narrative includes a night scene, a premonitory dream, and an episode testifying the mercy of the emperor, a virtue that was highly valued in Christian aesthetics: all those ingredients ensured a broad echo of this story in the Middle Ages (and further: see the article by Ida Gilda Mastroianni). Furthermore, Seneca is also mainly the most popular classical author during the Middle Ages, and he was often included in *florilegia* and in historical compilations.³¹

But it is thanks to the famous disciple of Saint Augustine, the Christian historian Orosius, that the figure of the emperor Augustus has been durably projected from the history to the myth. His *Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, based, among others, on Caesar's *Bellum Gallicum* (which he regards, however, as a work by Suetonius) and on Titus Livius' *Ab Urbe Condita* (at least the *Periochae*), had a great impact on historiography during the period between Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Through the theory of the 'four kingdoms', Orosius focused on the intervention of God in History, for an eschatological purpose. Augustus is presented therefore as the peacemaker of the empire and thus the one who, by creating the necessary conditions provided for by the Old Testament, opens the way for the birth of Christ. Orosius' theory is based on the Gospel of Luke (2.1) and on the Book of Isaiah (2.4).

The same perspective is taken by two Church Fathers, namely Saint Ambrose, bishop of Milan, and Bede the Venerable. Their commentaries on the Gospel of Luke have been included in the collection of Biblical glosses, added in the margins of the Latin Bible – the Vulgate – and known as *Glossa Ordinaria*. For several centuries, from the Carolingian period up until the 14th century, this collection of glosses was considered as a sort of standard commentary on the Bible in Western Europe; it has been used as a manual, a source of inspiration for preachers and for monastic meditation, and it had a great influence on Western Christian theology and culture. The commentary on Luke 2.1 indicates Augustus as the instrument of God in creating the conditions of peace for the arrival of Christ. This means that Augustus finds his place, so to speak, in the very Canon of the Scriptures.

³¹ Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum historiale* devotes 35 chapters to Seneca, 27 to Cicero and 17 to Ovid.

Another mediaeval best-seller contributes to increase the fame of Augustus. It is the *Golden Legend*, the most famous medieval collection of hagiographies, compiled around 1260 by the Franciscan friar Jacobus de Voragine. More than a thousand manuscripts of this text have survived, confirming its wide reception in medieval Europe. In the legend 6, relating the birth of Christ (*De natiuitate Domini*), Jacobus de Voragine tells that the Tiburtine Sibyl had prophesised to Augustus the birth of Christ, and relates the foundation of *Santa Maria in Aracoeli* (see the article by Mattia Cavagna).

The image of a Christian Augustus also engenders a movement of re-reading and interpretation of another great classical author, namely Virgil. His fourth eclogue depicting the announcement of the Cumaean Sibyl was interpreted as a prophecy prefiguring the coming of Christ. The most influential work containing this interpretation was certainly Augustine's *De ciuitate Dei* (10.27), which ensured this tradition a great echo for centuries (for the Christianised interpretation of Virgil, see the article by Mattia Cavagna).

The Middle Ages essentially inherit the image of an inspired, peaceful and beneficent emperor. In the literature he is often referred to in opposition to the persecutors of Christianity, who have had a very large success both in the historiographical works and in the theatrical performances.

4.2. The 'Re-historicisation' of Augustus as a Model of Good Government

Between the 14th and 16th centuries, the image of the prudent and clement prince gradually imposed itself on that of the visionary and subsidiary prince of Christ. The writings of Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374), the father of humanism, show a varying image of Augustus that is emblematic of this evolution: having, so to say, a foot in the Middle Ages and the other in the Renaissance, Petrarch deserves a particular attention here.³² In a poetic epistle addressed to Pope Clemens VI in 1342, Petrarch, who the year before had been crowned as *poeta laureatus* on the Capitol in Rome, used the famous etiologic legend of the church *Santa Maria in Aracoeli* as one of numerous arguments aimed at persuading the Pope of leaving Avignon for Rome (*Epystole* 2.5.129-143). In Petrarch's version of this legend that had been popularised by the *Mirabilia urbis Romae* and the *Legenda Aurea*, Augustus personally prays the Christ Child to grant universal dominion to Rome in return for the cult that he will institute, so that, centuries later, the Pope is urged to assume the 'Augustan inheritance' of Rome as the (Christian) world's capital.³³ In her contribution to this volume, Susanna de Beer analyses two previous metrical letters addressed

³² On Petrarch's praise of Augustus in his various works, see BLACK (2018), p. 181-186 (who, however, does not mention the metrical epistles to Popes Benedict XII and Clemens VI).

³³ ASSENMAKER (2020), p. 105-106.

to Pope Benedict XII (*Epystole* 1.2 and 5), in which, by means of a subtle inter-textual play with the poets emblematic of the Augustan age (especially Horace and Ovid), Petrarch modelled the Pope after Augustus, conceived as a symbol not only of the Roman Empire, but also of the advent of a new Golden Age.

Within the enormous corpus of Petrarch's correspondence in prose, a long letter written in the last months of his life to Francesco da Carrara, Lord of Padua, can be pretty much regarded as a 'mirror for the prince' (*Seniles* 14.1, dated 28th November 1373). Augustus is one of the numerous figures from the Roman history that Petrarch gives as examples (or counter-examples) of the ideal moral virtues and righteous behaviour of the *rector*. In every single passage, the humanist enjoys quoting with a truly virtuosic erudition the most varied Latin sources – not only the inescapable Suetonius, but also Livy or Macrobius' *Saturnalia*, as far as Augustus is concerned. In so doing, he gives an image of the founder of the Empire that turns out to be remarkably well documented, already "modern" and far removed from the nebulous medieval legends. It is interesting to note that Petrarch, at the beginning of this letter, sketches a comparison between Julius Caesar and Augustus – *qui, licet uirtute minor bellica, certe imperio maior fuit* (§ 5) – in terms that remind us of the *Triumphus Fame* (1a.22-25; see the contribution by Marco Cavalieri) and pre-figure the modern judgements on both figures (see above). Remarkably enough, Petrarch concludes his list of the ideal ruler's qualities by insisting on the necessity of surrounding oneself with *litterati homines* – surely not a completely disinterested advice... Here, the *exemplum* of Augustus is developed at the greatest length. This prince, Petrarch says, attracted the greatest talents of his time by treating them as his equals, and this illustrious company contributed to his *aeterna fama* more than his military power: *non minus quam omnibus Romanis legionibus illustratus hoc doctorum hominum comitatu* (§ 104). So, in the eyes of Petrarch, literary patronage turns out to be a quite specific Augustan virtue.

The Petrarchan view of Augustus as an unsurpassed model of righteous government remained vivacious – even if not exclusive³⁴ – in the early humanist period. So, the story of Cinna's plot, emblematic of Augustus' clemency, is already the focus of the *Romuleon*, by the Italian historian Benvenuto da Imola, a notable compilation of Roman history composed around 1361-64, which has been translated into French first by Jean Miélot (1460) and then by Sébastien Mamerot (1466). From the 15th century onwards, the printed editions of Suetonius multiplied and the comments became more and more focused on the question of good government, and related to the tradition of the 'mirror for the prince'. Ida Gilda Mastroianni (cf. her article) reports the erudite compilations of Remigio Nannini and Jean Bodin, as well as Scipione Ammirato's *Discorsi sopra Cornelio Tacito*. Regarding the canon of modern French literature, it was

³⁴ On the contrasted views of Augustus in humanist literature, see the contribution by Marco Cavalieri in this volume and BLACK (2018).

above all the celebrated tragedy of Pierre Corneille, *Cinna, or the clemency of Augustus* (1643) that established Augustus as the very incarnation of the good ruler's leniency (see the article by Jelle Koopmans). As Taillerand reported, Napoleon claimed to know this piece almost by heart (see the article by Agnieszka Fulińska).

4.3. Beyond the Medieval Corpus

An important date in the history of Augustus' reception is surely 1515, the year of publication of the complete *editio princeps* of the extant parts of Tacitus' *Annals*, containing the text of books 1-6 which had survived in only one manuscript (the *Mediceus I*, i.e. the *Laurentianus plut.* 68, 1, of the 9th century). Although they only consist of a brief survey of Augustus' reign, chapters 2-5 of the first book, which convey the darker portrait of a hypocritical and calculating Augustus, gravedigger of the Republican *priscus et integer mos*, provided the negative view of the first princeps, which had been developing since the Florentine humanism (see the contribution by Marco Cavalieri), with a new classical authority.

Besides Tacitus, several Greek sources of the utmost importance for the historical study of Augustus and his time were totally unknown in the Middle Ages and rediscovered only in the humanist period. It is well known that Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, already translated in Latin, Spanish and French in the 15th century, became one of the most popular ancient works in the Renaissance thanks to the French translation of Jacques Amyot published in 1559 (upon which was based the English version of Thomas North, an important source of Shakespeare's Roman plays: see the contribution by Elizabeth Oakley-Brown). However, Plutarch's biographies do not rank among the main sources regarding Augustus, since the future emperor only plays a secondary role in the lives of Mark Antony and Brutus (the biography that the Chaeronean writer had dedicated to Augustus is unfortunately lost). We have to admit that the Greek historical works dealing more directly with Augustus and his time did never reach the degree of popularity of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* and have not shaped to the same extent the general view of Roman history.

A crucial source on Augustus' principate, Cassius Dio's *Roman History* (in particular the books 45-56, the only extant continuous narrative of the period running from 44 BC to AD 14), was first read in translation: an Italian version was carried out by the physician and humanist Niccolò Leonicensio before 1488 and was printed in Venice in 1533. The jurist Andrea Alciato, in his treatise *De magistratibus ciuilibusque et militaribus officiis liber unus* published in 1529, was the first to use Cassius Dio's work, which he was able to read in Greek, in order to study the nature of Augustan power.³⁵ At that time, Dio's text was still

³⁵ FERRARY (2015), p. 5-6.

circulating in manuscripts, since the *editio princeps* was published by Robert Estienne only in 1548.³⁶ Ten years later appeared the Latin translation of Cassius Dio's *Roman History* by Wilhelm Xylander, professor of Greek at the university of Heidelberg. Even if discreet, the fortune enjoyed by Cassius Dio in the Modern Period is not insignificant. For instance, it has been shown that, next to Seneca's *De clementia*, the *Roman History* was possibly a direct source of inspiration of Corneille for his play *Cinna*.³⁷

For the events running from 44 to 35 BC, the books 15-17 of Appian's *Roman History* (i.e. books 3-5 of the section entitled *Civil Wars*) are the second major source. As for Cassius Dio, this author was first accessible through translations. In the middle of the 15th century, the Italian humanist Pier Candido Decembrio carried out a Latin translation which was soon severely criticised for its obscurity and many errors, among others by Claude de Seyssel, a jurist and ecclesiastic, counsellor of King Louis XII of France, who gave a French version of Appian around 1506 (a highly successful work which was posthumously printed many times from 1544 onwards).³⁸ The Greek text of Appian was first partially printed by Charles Estienne in Paris in 1551; the complete *editio princeps* was printed by Henri II Estienne (Henricus Stephanus) in 1557. It was superseded only by Johannes Schweighäuser's outstanding edition published in 1785. Even if Appian does not rank among the best-known classical authors and if his quality as an historian was severely called into question in the Modern period, his importance in Western culture should, however, not be underestimated. Regarding in particular the reception of Augustus, it is sufficient to think that Appian's *Civil Wars* were used as a source by Shakespeare (in an English translation published in 1578) for his plays *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, and that books 3 and 4 of this work were annotated by nobody less than Karl Marx in the margins of his copy of the German translation by Ferdinand Dillenius.³⁹

The oldest literary source focusing on Octavian-Augustus preserved to a substantial extent is the *Life of Augustus* written by Nicolaus of Damascus, the adviser of King Herod, around 25-20 BC. This text is a very interesting document as it provides an outsider's view on the Empire while being very probably based on the princeps' own autobiography. Two large fragments remain, preserved in two of the four extant sections of the so-called *Excerpta Constantini*, a vast compilation of excerpts of historical writings drawn up at the instigation of the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (945-959). The first one, dealing with Augustus' childhood and youth until 45 BC, has been discovered and published in 1634 by the French philologist Henri Valois;

³⁶ BELLISSIME (2016).

³⁷ BELLISSIME (2018).

³⁸ FAMERIE (1990), p. 91-95.

³⁹ CANFORA (2015), p. 32-44.

the second one, relating the conspiracy against Cesar (including the prophetic dream of his wife Calpurnia) and the events of the following months, has only been discovered in the 19th century.⁴⁰

What about the impact of Augustus' 'own words' on his posthumous image? We know from Suetonius (*Aug.* 85.1) that the emperor wrote an autobiography in 13 books, entitled *De uita sua*, which went as far as the Cantabrian War in 25 BC. We barely know 19 fragments of this work, transmitted by several authors, the latest being the so-called *Servius auctus*.⁴¹ Appian quotes several times Augustus' *hypomnemata* (he says explicitly that he translates the Latin text in *B.C.* 5.45.191) and it is quite possible, as argued by Luciano Canfora, that these were the main source of books 3-5 of the *Civil Wars*.⁴² Whatever the truth of the matter, the precise content of Augustus' *De uita sua* is impossible to reconstruct in detail. Besides the autobiography, we also have a corpus of 53 fragments of letters written by Augustus, the main part being transmitted by Suetonius.⁴³ A part of Augustus' correspondence had been published (so the letters to his grandson Gaius), but many letters were certainly consulted in the imperial archives by the biograph, who had access to them in his capacity as secretary *ab epistulis*. Had we conserved the autobiography (at least substantial passages of it) or complete letters, the modern image of Augustus would certainly have turned out to be more incarnate and maybe quite different – possibly, the reception would have been all the more 'trapped' by the first princeps' artful and subtle self-stylisation as a bringer of universal peace and restorer of the social and moral values.

Contrary to these personal writings, the *Res Gestae diui Augusti* have been preserved.⁴⁴ This epigraphical text, whose original Latin version was exposed on two steles installed before the princeps' mausoleum in Rome, was discovered in Ankara in 1555 by Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, ambassador of the Emperor Ferdinand I to Suleiman the Magnificent at Constantinople. The so-called *Monumentum Ancyranum*, preserving both the Latin text and its Greek translation (with some lacunas), has been several times read and copied since the 16th century, but was first edited in 1865 by Theodor Mommsen, who called it the 'queen of the inscriptions'. Other fragmentary copies of the *Res Gestae* were found in Pisidia, in Apollonia (Greek text) and Antioch (Latin text), at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. The current research on the *Res Gestae* does no more regard Augustus as the true 'author' – in the modern sense of the word – of this text, which was rather written by his secretariat and controlled by the princeps, who possibly gave a personal touch to some

⁴⁰ PARMENTIER / BARONE (2011), p. 435.

⁴¹ Edition and translation by SMITH (2009).

⁴² CANFORA (2015), p. 215-290.

⁴³ MALCOVATI (1962), p. 6-28.

⁴⁴ SCHEID (2007); COOLEY (2009).

passages. Nonetheless, this first-person record of Augustus' achievements exerted for long a deep fascination, especially in the first half of the 20th century, in the context of the rising of the totalitarian regimes and their cult of personality of the leaders (see the contributions by Timo Klär and Heinrich Schlange-Schöningen). The monumental display of the Latin text of the *Res Gestae* in bronze letters on the travertine outer wall of the *Museo dell'Ara Pacis* designed in 1938 in the context of the construction of the Piazza Augusto Imperatore (see the article by Klaus Tragbar) is a telling example of it. Since this inscription was conserved in the present building designed by the US architect Richard Meier and inaugurated in 2006 – on April 21st, the day of the *Parilia* –, the *Res Gestae* are still nowadays part of the urbanistic landscape of Rome.

5. *Augustus Through the Ages: From Historical Figure to Ideal Model*

To sum up the different strings of reception presented in the preceding chapters, the purpose of this collective volume is to discuss how the image of Augustus had been received from the very day of his death up to the present, by looking at the *princeps* not only as a historical figure, but also as a symbol and a model. The radical political change operated in Rome by Augustus left a long-lasting mark, while leaving the institutions of the *res publica* apparently untouched. His own political propaganda presented him as the one who had saved Rome. By doing this, and turning the city into a place on a par to the most important Hellenistic urban centres, he gave Rome – and Italy with it – a prominent role, and at the same time guaranteed himself undying fame. The victor over Marcus Antonius, he gained a place as one of the most prominent figures in the history of western civilisation. Nevertheless, the emperor's multifaceted and ambivalent features were as relevant as his qualities. All of these contributed to the long-lasting fame of this complex character, with art, literature and architecture often referring to these aspects. His cultural and religious profile adds depth to the strictly political one. What happened after the battle of Actium is particularly revealing in this respect. Augustus proved to be a forward-looking politician: by imposing internal peace and stability, he secured long-lasting positive effects to his triumph, which extended well after the victory. The emperor's intention to pursue *clementia* must also be seen as a means to ensure that his fame lasted in time. For all these reasons, and especially during the Middle Ages, Augustus rose as the champion of good government: he had been able to guarantee the conditions that made possible the survival of ancient Rome. In other words, he had played a 'providential' role in saving the *res publica*. It was at this point that Rome started to be perceived as an increasingly ideal place, rather than a historical one. Why 'ideal'? During the Middle Ages, for instance, the multifaceted political situation of the 1st century BC was not fully acknowledged; the distinction between the Republic and the early Empire became increasingly blurred. Augustus was perceived as a complex character guided by

the Divine Providence, a sort of profane King David. Medieval artists liked the complex semantic meanings underlying the figure of Augustus, and rulers looked at him as a reference model. The ‘Augustan Myth’ was born: a less democratic cultural reference if compared to figures of the like of Scipio and Caesar, but equally attractive to the visual arts, literature, history and philology, which selectively borrowed contents and images from this multi-faceted model in a continuous dialogue between ancient and current times. In the process of assimilation that followed, architecture played a central role in shaping the influence of the emperor on Rome.

Even from the very earliest celebratory works, Augustus’ reign was described as an *aurea aetas*: a ‘golden’ time of aesthetic, political and cultural plenty, an endless century. As such, albeit *a posteriori*, this can be seen as a ‘classical’ time, that is, a time when the values and expressive models used were almost a-temporal, hence becoming applicable and comparable to values and models of later periods. In other words, this period was regarded as a ‘moment zero’ in History, when many – if not all – things began. Political propaganda, the Christian providential perspective, up to the cyclical view of time, all had their origin here, between the late 1st century BC and the early 1st century AD. The Roman Empire moved its first steps, Christ was born and a new era of peace and prosperity had started.

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