

Augustus *Senex*: Old Age and the Remaking of the Principate

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In August AD 1, on the occasion of his birthday, Augustus wrote to Gaius, his adopted son and grandson by Julia and Agrippa, complaining about [the onset of old age/his age](#) stating that he had: ‘passed the climacteric common to all old men, the sixty-~~fourth~~^{third} year. And I pray the gods that whatever time is left to me I may pass with you safe and well, with our country in a flourishing condition, while you are playing the man and preparing to succeed to my position.’¹ [Augustus in this statement includes the year of his birth to his first birthday as year one of the sixty-four years. Thus, in modern terms, this was his sixty-third birthday.](#)² The letter is recorded by Aulus Gellius (*NA* 15.7) who says that: ‘It has been observed during a long period of human recollection, and found to be true, that for almost all old men the sixty-third year of their age is attended with danger, and with some disaster involving either serious bodily illness, or loss of life, or mental suffering. Therefore those who are engaged in the study of matters and terms of that kind call that period of life the “climacteric”.’

Interestingly, in this letter, Augustus looks to the possibility of the younger man, Gaius, taking over from him. It is perhaps significant that in AD 1 Lucius holds proconsular *imperium* and we may be looking at a power structure that involves both the emperor and immediate

¹ The immediate family of Augustus wife: Livia, four years younger than himself, step-son Tiberius – who was living on Rhodes (Suet. *Tib.*10); daughter exiled to island of Pandateria (2BC; Dio 55.10.14; Suet. *Aug.* 65).

Grandsons, Gaius and Lucius (Suet. *Aug.*56.2; Dio 54.27; 55.9).

² T. Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World* (Baltimore, 2003), 30.

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Reviewer's feedback

I have read the article with great interest, and it certainly deals with an interesting and neglected topic, the latter 10 to 15 years of Augustus' life. I think a publication on the topic is well worth appearing in G&R; given the limited info available on Aug's old age, this article probably goes as far as it can – but I think something more could be made of the image of Augustus in art, following on from P. Zanker (cited at n. 3). And I wonder if there might be something relevant in Macrobius' *Saturnalia* in his anecdotes re Augustus (with Suet. *Aug.* 71 on his vices even in later life). The ending of the paper seems rather hurried. Some further minor points of detail: In the first paragraph Augustus' famous letter preserved in Aulus Gellius is quoted; note, however, that Augustus' birthday was in September, not August, nor does Augustus say that he is complaining about the onset of old age (first sentence of the paper); Augustus says he has celebrated his 64th birthday: Parkin, *Old Age* (2003) 30, notes that it would in fact have been his 63rd birthday, at least in modern terms. A lot of little errors, including n. 10 'Die dies', and n. 11, J.G.F.[P.]. Refs are needed on p. 10 and on p. 13. At n. 28 for Domitian read Diocletian. P. 14 for Arminum read Ariminum. On emperors' ages (p. 15), by my calculations Tiberius was 54, not 56, on accession, and died at the age of 77, not 78; Claudius was 63, not 64, when he died; Nerva may have been 65 on accession, or he may have been 60; Trajan was either 41 or 44 on accession.

members of his family, which is facilitated through a mixing of the older and the younger generations, the experienced with the physically more able.³

The letter anticipates the emperor's withdrawal from public life, a matter noted later in the century by Seneca in *De Brevitate Vitae* (3.5). Augustus was always thought to have cherished the idea of *otium* (leisure) and even made the matter known in a letter to the senate. Yet, Seneca can marvel that:

'So desirable a thing did leisure seem that he anticipated it in thought because he could not attain it in reality. He, who saw everything depending upon himself alone, who determined the fortune of individuals and of nations, thought most happily of that future day on which he should lay aside his greatness...And so he longed for leisure, in the hope and thought of which he found relief for his labours. This was the prayer of one who was able to answer the prayers of mankind.'

This elucidates the situation of the old emperor denied the *otium* associated with old age, because he is seen by others as still all powerful and in command of the empire. There is no other evidence to suggest that Augustus really considered laying down power, although his behaviour in what turned out to be the last thirteen years of his life at times demonstrates physical weakening, even to the last, his actions seem calculated to preserve himself and his family as well as what he had achieved, both for the state and for his clan. The intersection of his age with his role as princeps in this final decade has been neglected, and we find the

³ Stevenson, T. 2013. 'The Succession Planning of Augustus', *Antichthon* 47: 118-39 – p.135 on Augustus'

climacteric. [A. Winterling, *Politics and Society in Imperial Rome*, \(Chichester, 2009\) 2-3, on negative consequences of emperor being unable to resign.](#)

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absence of Augustus as an old man in modern works an omission that marginalises the centrality of the ageing of an emperor to the development of the principate as an institution.

⁴ Instead, the last decade of Augustus principate is often written with a focus on Tiberius' succession, which has been found wanting in recent years. ⁵ This final period of August needs further attention, because it challenges the perception of a securely founded Augustan principate.

Most works on Augustus or the Augustan age have focussed attention on the formation of the principate, its development, and the ultimate honour of being named Pater Patriae in 2 BC. After 2 BC, Augustus as a person becomes marginal in most accounts which focus on the deaths of Gaius and Lucius and the increasing centrality of Tiberius – or the succession.⁶ Yet

⁴ On discussion of Augustus and new imagery: P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor, 1988); D. E. Favro, 'Making of a World City', in K. Galinsky (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus* (Cambridge, 2005), 234-63. But, note the imagery is sustained by Tiberius in AD 10 with the rebuilding of the Temple of Concordia as shown by K. A. Kellum, 'The City Adorned: Programmatic Display at the *Aedes Concordiae Augustae*', in K.A. Raaflaub and M. Toher (eds) *Between Republic and Empire: Interpretations of Augustus and his Principate* (Berkeley 1990), 276-308. The period is included as a time of consolidation, but few details in D. Favro, *The Urban Image of Augustan Rome* (Cambridge, 1996), 139-40 and 252-80 dwells on the more distant past as seen in AD 14 by an old man. There was little sense of the ageing emperor in the 2014 exhibition *Augusto*, see AAVV, 2013. *Augusto*, Milan.

⁵ See for example K. Galinsky, *Augustus: Introduction to the Life of an Emperor* (Cambridge, 2012) or K. Galinsky, *Augustan Culture: An Interpretative Introduction* (Princeton, 1996). The idea of a succession is seen to be anachronistic by C. Vout, 'Tiberius and the Invention of Succession', in A.C.G. Gibson, *The Julio-Claudian Succession* (Leiden, 2013), 59-77.

⁶ Many books feature a focus on Tiberius and a denial of Augustus' agency to exercise power. See papers in A.C.G. Gibson, (n. 4) for critique of the very notion of succession. The invisibility of Augustus is seen clearly in

Augustus would live as Princeps for longer than the reigns of most of the Julio Claudian emperors and their successors, including those of Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Vespasian, Titus and Domitian. When treated this final decade of Augustus' life is understood to be more autocratic than the previous decades of the principate.⁷ [Our paper sets out to evaluate how the ageing of Augustus affected the running of the principate or the restored *res publica* and to consider more seriously the role of Augustus in the final decade of his long life.](#)

The ancient conception of the elderly

Augustus was one of a small percentage of the Roman population who lived into their seventies.⁸ We might imagine a scenario in which as Augustus became older, fewer and fewer companions of his own age were present in his life. His contemporaries from his youth were passing away, Agrippa, born like Augustus in 63BC, died in 12 BC and Maecenas in 8 BC. Demographers have suggested just six to eight percent of the population were over the age of sixty.⁹ In antiquity, this small minority of the elderly, were seen as quite different from

B. Severy, *Augustus and the Family at the Birth of the Roman Empire* (London, 2003), 187-205 with the chapter entitled 'Inheriting the *Res Publica* – Tiberius'. J.B. Lott, *Death and Dynasty in Early Imperial Rome* (Cambridge, 2012) for discussion of sources honouring Gaius and Lucius after their deaths. On coins, C.H.V. Sutherland, *Coinage in Imperial Policy 31 B.C. – A.D. 68* (London, 1971), 53-78 interprets the coinage as a device for creating a successor.

⁷ B. Levick, *Augustus: image and Substance* (London, 2010), 96-7 and p.154.

⁸ Dio 56.30; T. Parkin, *Demography and Roman Society* (Baltimore, 1992); *Old Age in the Roman World* (Baltimore, 2003), 36-56, esp. 50-2 on model life tables. See also R. Saller, *Power, Patriarchy and Death* (Cambridge, 1994); R. Laurence and F. Trifilò, forthcoming.

⁹ Parkin 2003 (n. 7), 50 estimates a population of 60 million, therefore 4 million over 60s.

their younger peers. To understand Augustus as an old man, we need to review the *topoi* associated with the elderly – many of which are also present in our own society which has a far greater percentage of survivors over the age of sixty.

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There are a number of age systems which survive from antiquity, all of which divide the male life course into certain stages according to particular theoretical thought worlds. Each stage has associated duties, responsibilities (or lack of them) and behavioural characteristics.¹⁰ For Horace:

Many ills encompass the old man, whether because he seeks gain, and then miserably holds aloof from his store and fears to use it, or because in all that he does he lacks fire and courage, is dilatory and slow to form hopes, is sluggish and greedy of a longer life, peevish and surly, given to praising the days he spent as a boy, and to reproving and condemning the young. Many blessings do the advancing years bring with them; many as they retire, they take away (Ars Poetica 153-786 ff).

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Varro, who died in 27 BC, developed a system of five ages, each of fifteen years, in which old age (*senectus*) started at sixty.¹¹ This might suggest some connection in the modern mind with retirement, but this needs to be resisted. Antiquity produced debates over the involvement of the old in public life, such Plutarch in the *Moralia* (783b-797f) - *On whether*

¹⁰ For a succinct summary see Parkin 2003: 17-21; Ibid 'Life Cycle' in M. Harlow & R. Laurence (eds.) *A Cultural History of Childhood and the Family in Antiquity* (London, 2010), 97-114.

¹¹ The schema is reproduced in Censorinus *Die dies natalis*.

*an old man should engage in public affairs; or in Cicero's Cato Maior: de Senectute.*¹²

Whether there was a consensus on this seems far from certain, yet there would seem to have been an expectation that Augustus, in spite of his age, should remain a public figure. The problem was, as Ptolemy portrays it, old age was regarded as a degenerative process, and defined by more than one stage of life. For instance, the period translated as elderly (*presbuteros*) for Ptolemy lasted from fifty-six to sixty-eight years of age during which the active life of manual labour, toil, turmoil and danger was meant to be replaced with retirement, deliberation and consolation.¹³ After sixty-eight, the next stage was characterised by the body was cooling and becoming worn down and weak, and the individual mentally dispirited, easy to offend and often hard to please. Augustus would have been seen within this mental prism that defined the elderly in ancient societies as the antithesis of the young.¹⁴ At the age of sixty-two, Cicero could write to Atticus, 'Old age makes me more cantankerous, everything irritates me. But I have had my time, let the young men worry' (*Ad Att.* 14.21.3).

All of these statements do not report how ageing was in ancient Rome, but they do provide an insight into the discussion of how getting old was seen in antiquity and provide us with a set of expectations with which to view Augustus as he became older.

The penultimate decade – the youths (Gaius and Lucius) create the ageing *senex*

¹² J.G.F.P. Powell, *Cato Maior de Senectute*, (Cambridge, 1988). [For discussion of attitudes to the elderly, see Parkin 2003; K. Cokayne, *Experiencing Old Age in Ancient Rome*, \(London, 2003\); T. Payne, *The Ancient Art of Growing Old* \(London, 2015\)](#)

¹³ [The notion that Augustus introduced a 'retirement age' for senators at sixty, depends on an interpretation of Dio \(55.3.1\) in connection to *Lex Julia de Senatu Habendo* \(9 BC\), R.J.A. Talbert, *The Senate of Imperial Rome*, \(Princeton, 1984\), also Cokayne 2003, 95 with 199 n.24-27; Parkin 2003, 124-29. For age of sixty in Augustan marriage laws, see T. Parkin, 'On becoming a parent in later life', in S. Dixon, *Childhood, Class and Kin in the Roman World* \(London, 2001\) 221-36.](#)

¹⁴ M. Harlow and R. Laurence, *Growing Up and Growing Old in Ancient Rome*, (London, 2002), 1-15.

In many ways, Augustus' age defines the very chronology of his long period in power. His age, at just nineteen, opens his own account of his life in the *Res Gestae* – written in the very last year of his life according to Alison Cooley.¹⁵ Cassius Dio creates a forty year chronology for Augustan Rome beginning with 27 BC and divided into four ten year periods. The logic of this structure works well with thinking through the periods from 27 BC to the *Ludi Saeculares*, then to 7 BC and the re-organisation of the city of Rome, and then onto AD 4 and finally to AD 14. It is worth mentioning at the outset that both Gaius and Lucius were adopted in 17 BC, at the transition point between the first ten year period of Augustan rule and its second decade. Lucius was born in 17 BC, when Gaius was already four years old. Augustus, their grandfather, was in his mid-forties when he adopted the boys – a grandfather, but certainly not 'ageing'.¹⁶ This age structure creates a narrative that features the boys growing-up; while Augustus moves towards old age and his climacteric year 1 BC to AD 1. Lucius dies in AD 2. The death of Gaius in AD 4 coincides with the ending of the third decade of the reign of Augustus and the beginning of the final ten year period.

The penultimate decade, 7 BC to AD 4, has as a central feature: the relationship between an ageing Princeps and the younger members of his family. The life style of his daughter, Julia, is, of course, very much part of the events of this decade that also sees the death of his

¹⁵ A. E. Cooley, *Res gestae divi Augusti: text, translation, and commentary* (Cambridge, 2009), 42-3 dates composition between the start of 37th grant of tribunician power on 26 June AD 14 and his death on 19 August AD 14 both of which are referred to in the *Res Gestae* itself.

¹⁶ Ageing crops up in scholarly discussion of the Augustus in relationship to his grandsons from as early as 17 BC. See E.R. Parker, 'The Education of Heirs in the Julio-Claudian Family', *American Journal of Philology* 67 (1946), 29-50, note at p.35 'The ageing Augustus took on a new lease on life with the arrival of his grandsons....'

grandsons Gaius and Lucius in their early twenties (Dio 55.11).¹⁷ It is possible to track the prominence of Gaius and Lucius as teenagers through coinage beginning in c. 5 BC, and from portraiture. It would appear that their statues were produced from as early as the age of seven.¹⁸ Augustus had actively been involved in their education, as their adopted father, from infancy (Suet. *Aug.* 64). The list of skills taught to them: reading, swimming, writing – specifically copying his hand writing, suggest that they were being trained for public roles over a long period of time. It is interesting that some commentators note that: ‘it is difficult to imagine the aging *princeps* in the role of swimming instructor,’ but it was a traditional role for a *paterfamilias* and a sign of Augustus’ virtue.¹⁹ The point might be that this is very different to the actions of Tiberius in old age, or of Domitian, whose relationship with swimming involved sex.²⁰ In contrast, Augustus’s behaviour reflected the notion that, as Plato suggests (*Laws* 689D), not knowing writing or swimming were signs of ignorance. Whatever

¹⁷ For commentary on Dio, P.M. Swan, *The Augustan Succession: A Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio’s Roman History Books 55-56 (9 B.C. – A.D. 14)*, (Oxford, 2004) and J.W. Rich, *Cassius Dio: The Augustan Settlement (Roman History 53-55.9)*, (Bristol, 1990)..

¹⁸ For discussion of coins: B. Buxton and R. Hannah, ‘*OGIS* 458, the Augustan Calendar and the Succession’, in C. Deroux (ed), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* 12 (Brussels 2005), 290-309; on age of portraits: J. Pollini, *The Portraiture of Gaius and Lucius*, (New York, 1987), 89-94 for relationship of statues to their age; see also J.B. Lott, (n. 5) on their commemoration. [For coinage minted at Lugdunum with obverse legend: CAESAR AUGUSTUS DIVI F PATER PATRIAE and reverse legend: C L CAESARES AUGUSTI F COS DESIG PRINC IVVENT](#), C.H.V. Sutherland and R.A.G. Carson *The Roman Imperial Coinage Volume I: From 31 BC to AD 69* (London, 1984), 55.

¹⁹ M.L. Clarke, ‘Three Notes on Roman Education’, *Classical Philology* 63 (1968), 42-44; see M.G. Morgan, Suetonius and Swimming: A Note on *Div. Aug.* 64.3’, *Classical Philology* 69 (1974), 276-78; E.R. Parker, ‘The Education of Heirs in the Julio-Claudian Family’, *American Journal of Philology* 67 (1946), 35-38.

²⁰ Suet. *Tib.* 44; Suet. *Dom.* 22; A. Cameron, ‘Sex in the Swimming Pool’, *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 20 (1973), 149-50.

Augustus' age, he was well-able to ensure that his adopted sons gained a suitable knowledge of both (in contrast to Caligula, who could not swim (Suet. *Gaius* 54).²¹ It is worth mentioning that Augustus' own adopted father, Julius Caesar, had been a swimmer of some prowess.²² The ability to cross-rivers would seem to have been the key skill, perhaps even learnt by swimming the Tiber from the exercise fields of the Campus Martius.²³ This martial training, alongside Augustus' austere lifestyle, contrasted with their own love of luxury – a characteristic of youths (see, for example, Cicero *Pro Caelio*) was the subject of rebuke by Augustus (Suet. *Aug.*56.2; Dio 54.27; 55.9).²⁴ The rebuke, thus also shaping him as a stereotypical old man – happy to criticise the young. The penultimate decade, of course, ends with the loss of both his grandsons and with Augustus at the age of sixty-seven (Dio 55.11).²⁵ He recalled Tiberius and adopted him as a son and did the same for his surviving grandson, Agrippa Postumus. Tiberius, at the age of forty-two, was in the very prime of life; whereas Agrippa Postumus was just sixteen years of age. Thus, we have the old man, Augustus; the youth, Agrippa Postumus; and a man in mid-life, Tiberius, as the key members of the imperial

²¹ On swimming: H.A. Sanders, 'Swimming amongst the Greeks and Romans', *Classical Journal* 20 (1925), 566-68; Ibid, 'Swimming among the Greeks and Barbarians', *Classical Journal* 29 (1934), 609-12.

²² Suet.*Jul.*57; Caes. *Bell. Alex.*21.

²³ Hor.*Sat.*2.1.8; compare crossing the Danube under Hadrian M.P. Speidel, 'Swimming the Danube under Hadrian's Eyes', *Ancient Society* 22 (1991), 277-82 and also the Tiber: M.P. Speidel, 'Maxentius and his *Equites Singulares* in the Battle at the Milvian Bridge', *Classical Antiquity* 5 (1986), 253-62.

²⁴ Harlow and Laurence (n. 12) 65-78; E. Eyben, 'Antiquity's view of Puberty', *Latomus* 31 (1972), 677-97; Ibid. *Restless Youth in Ancient Rome*, (London, 1991). [Compare the critique of Julia for associating with young men and her response that they would grow old with her – Macr.*Sat.*2.5.6.](#)

²⁵ J.B. Lott (n. 5), 54-77.

family for the final ten years down to AD 14. In all, three generations were involved from which there was an expectation that the best, as opposed to the worst, characteristics of each stage of life would be present for the benefit of the *res publica*.

The Power of images in late Augustan Rome

The shift in terms of agency from the ageing Augustus to other members of his family can be most easily seen with reference to the building of monuments from 7 BC. Seen most easily in 2 BC, when Augustus provided Gaius²⁶ and Lucius with consular power permitting them to consecrate temples – it is uncertain whether these powers were used. The pattern of the evidence is made more complicated by both the deaths of Gaius and Lucius, and Tiberius' withdrawal from Rome that can lead erroneously to the conclusion that Augustus unwilling chose him as an heir.²⁷ Yet, the process of renewal of temples in the Forum Romanum begun in 7 BC, but only completed in AD 10, provides evidence of Augustus' withdrawal from this activity and allows us to view the relationship of Augustus and Tiberius in sharper focus.²⁸ In 7 BC, Tiberius held the consulship and assigned to himself the task of restoring the Temple of Concordia with money derived from his campaigns in Germany, Pannonia and Dalmatia. His reasoning, as set out by Dio, is given as an opportunity to have his name and that of his brother Drusus upon the temple (Dio 55.8.2 ; Suet. *Tib.* 20). The choice of the Temple of Concordia linked Tiberius to the past and a need to ensure for harmony in the state (Ovid *Fasti* 1.637-50) and was dedicated on the day that the *Princeps* had received his famous

²⁶ D. Favro, *The Urban Image of Augustan Rome*, (Cambridge, 1996), 132.

²⁷ The situation of Tiberius' return in Suetonius (*Tib.* 13-15), Dio (55.9) and Velleius Paterculus (2.99, 2.102-104) expressly includes the discussion with Gaius and cites the precedent of Agrippa's withdrawal from public life as Marcellus became Augustus' primary heir. For discussion of these years with a focus on Tiberius, see B. Levick *Tiberius the Politician* (London, 1976) 35-50 and specifically on Suet. *Tib.* 23 B. Levick, 'Atrix Fortuna', *Classical Review* NS 22 (1972) 309-311, also *Res Gestae* 14..

²⁸ G.J. Gorski and J.E. Packer, *The Roman Forum: a Reconstruction and Architectural Guide*, (Cambridge, 2015) for factual discussion and sources 168-169.

cognomen (Augustus) in 27 BC.²⁹ Due to Tiberius' absences from Rome for reason of his withdrawal to Greece, and on campaigns after his recall the temple was only dedicated by Tiberius on 16 January AD 10 (*Fasti Praenestina*).

Interestingly, the final form and content of the temple drew on Tiberius's period in Greece: the temple was repurposed from a temple in which the senate had met, for example to hear Cicero's 4th speech against Catiline,³⁰ to a museum of prestigious pieces of sculpture acquired by Tiberius from communities in Greece, whilst he was resident in Rhodes (Dio 55.9.6 on use of tribunician power to compel the Parians to sell him the statue of Vesta placed in the temple of Concordia, pieces were noted by Plin *NH* 34.19.77, 89, 90; 35.36.66; 35.40.131).³¹ Thus, this temple directly made reference to Tiberius and his engagement with the Greek culture during his period of absence from Rome, whilst also identifying him with its restoration and the acquisition of some of the most prestigious pieces of ancient sculpture from Greece.³² The temple and its contents re-cast Tiberius as more than just the successful general, he had provided the people of Rome with a cultural resource of Greek sculpture between 300 to 400 years old in a well-lit re-designed temple.³³ It was in short a symbol of his *liberalitas* -recognising and adding value to the period of time, he had spent away from Rome in Rhodes.³⁴ A final point is worth considering, Concordia was the goddess Livia

²⁹ A.M. Ferroni, 'Concordia, Aedes', in M. Steinby, *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae I*, (Rome, 1993), 317-18 based on the *Fasti Praenestini* and *Verulani*.

³⁰ B. Levick *Tiberius the Politician* (London, 1976) 36-37.

³¹ B. Kellum, 'The city adorned: Programmatic display in the *Aedes Concordiae*', in K.A. Raaflaub and M. Toher (eds) *Between Republic and Empire: Interpretations of Augustus and his Principate*, (Berkeley, 1990), 276-307.

³² Levick *op cit* 40 on the significance of the statue of Vesta; on the collection as a whole: J. Isager, *Pliny on Art and Society*, (London, 1991), 159-60; A. Bounia, *The Nature of Classical Collecting*, (Aldershot, 2004), 184-5.

³³ It is possible to compare this project to Agrippa's construction of the Pantheon. On use of windows and coloured marble internally in temple of Concordia, see Kellum *op cit*, M. Bradley 'Colour and Marble in Early Imperial Rome', *Cambridge Classical Journal* 52, (2005-2006), 1-22.

³⁴ Bounia *op cit* 202; Isager *op cit* 83-4; R. Laurence, *Roman Passions. A History of Pleasure in Imperial Rome*, (London, 2009) 141-145. For the period in Rhodes and circumstances, B. Levick, 'Tiberius' Retirement to Rhodes in 6 B.C.', *Latomus* 31 (1972), 779-813

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associated with her long marriage to Augustus, which may suggest that Tiberius' selection of the Temple of Concordia aligned himself with this marriage between his mother and his father by adoption.³⁵

Tiberius' relationship with Augustus was also alluded to following his restoration of the Temple of Castor and Pollux in the Forum Romanum on the 27 January in AD 6.³⁶ This was a temple associated with some of the most costly sacrifices on the 15th of July (Dion. Hall. 6.13), and it allowed for the comparison of Tiberius and his deceased brother Drusus to be compared to the Dioscuri.³⁷ Dio (55.27.4) points out that his name was adjusted to the form 'Claudianus' because of his adoption by Augustus.³⁸ This Dio sees as emblematic of their relationship. Suetonius (*Tib.*20), in discussing the rebuilding of both the Temple of Castor and that of Concordia stresses the homage paid to Augustus by his adopted son. Dio does not identify unity embodied in this action, because he points to a tension for Tiberius: the possibility of Augustus finding another heir to replace him; which caused Tiberius, even if campaigning, to return to Rome frequently (Dio 55.27.5), a phenomenon to be discussed in the next section of the paper. Thus, the relationship between Tiberius and Augustus influences the nature of restoration in the Forum Romanum – Tiberius funded the projects from *spolia* from his campaigns in Germany to create a presence for his name or presence as the adopted heir of Augustus at the very heart of Rome.³⁹ Augustus' presence was visible

³⁵ Dio 56.42; Ovid *Fasti* 6.637-48; Cokayne 2003, 132. Note in 7BC, Tiberius dedicated his mother's *Porticus Liviae*, whilst she dedicated a shrine to Concordia, the connection between these two actions is debated, see M. Boudreau Flory, 'Sic exempla parantur: Livia's shrine to Concordia and the portraits of Livia', *Historia* 33 (1984) 309-330; C. Panella, 'Porticus Liviae' in M. Steinby, *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae IV*, (Rome, 1999) 127-29.

³⁶ G.J. Gorski and J.E. Packer, *The Roman Forum: a Reconstruction and Architectural Guide*, (Cambridge, 2015) for factual discussion and sources 288-289.

³⁷ I. Nielsen and B. Poulsen, *The Temple of Castor and Pollux I*: (Rome, 1992) 51, 57; B. Poulsen, 'The Dioscuri and Ruler Ideology', *Symbolae Osloenses* 66 (1991) 119-46.

³⁸ *CIL* 6.40339 for reconstruction of the inscription; *AE* 1992 no.159.

³⁹ The location became associated with honouring Tiberius, Germanicus and Drusus Plin. *NH* 10.60.121, compare text with Macr. *Sat.* 2.4.29-30. In terms of precedents for Tiberius as the absent general building

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[not in the inscriptions on the buildings, but via the knowledge of his adoption of Tiberius as his son – made explicit with the use of the name Claudianus on a temple that would have dwarfed its neighbours.⁴⁰ It is worth also considering that Tiberius' name appears on late Augustan coinage in a format that stresses his father \(TI CAESAR AUGUST F IMPERAT V\) and parallels the format of Augustus name on coins \(IMP CAESAR DIVI F AUGUSTUS IMP XX\).⁴¹](#)

Augustus *senex*

There was a degree of debate about the role of old men in politics in antiquity. Augustus, by his very age, becomes defined by the discourse, whilst at the same time his actions contribute to the discourse. Plutarch (*Moralia* 207E) recalls an instance, when Augustus could not make himself heard above the uproar of young elite males, who paid him no attention, and quotes the wise *dictum* (saying) of Augustus: “Do you young men not listen to an old man, to whom old men listened when he was a young man?” This creates a dichotomy between Augustus as elderly, in contrast to the young. The norm was for old men to educate and instruct the young, for example Sulla and Pompey, or Fabius Maximus and Cato (Plut.*Mor.* 790E-F). Augustus was doing exactly this with his adopted grandsons Gaius and Lucius, but both had died. Similarly, when looking to the relationship between Augustus, his daughter and her younger lovers – Augustus, the old man, set upon a young man rumoured

[monuments in Rome, we can look to Caesar in the 50s BC: although in Gaul, he was developing his new forum. Augustus was frequently absent from Rome earlier in his life, but it was at those times that building projects were also underway that have become iconic images of the power of Augustus.](#)

⁴⁰ S. Sande and J. Zahle, *The Temple of Castor and Pollux III: The Augustan Temple*, (Rome, 2009), 253.

⁴¹ A.S. Robertson, *Roman Imperial Coins in the Hunter Coin Cabinet* (Oxford, 1962) 46-47, note also at 43 for coins of AD 13-14 with legends CAESAR AUGUSTUS DIVI F PATER PATRIAE on the obverse and TI CAESSAR AUG F TR POT XV, both Augustus and Tiberius depend on their adopted father for their identities. Also, H. Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*, (London, 1923) cxvi-cxvii. Compare inscriptions dedicated to Lucius and Tiberius in the Basilica Aemilia, S. Panciera, ‘Iscrizioni onorarie dalla Basilica Emilia’, *Epiigraphica* 31 (1969/70) 104-112.

to have had sex with Julia (Plut.*Mor.*207D; [Macr.Sat.2.5](#)). As *Pater Patriae*, Augustus is set up to advise the young, but his temper disrupts the process, as does his occupation of power into his late seventies – he was not simply advising, but also taking decisions and leading the state.

In Dio, the final 10 years of Augustus' principate increasingly feature the age of princeps to explain actions taken in this last period of power.⁴² He is seen as a milder version of the Augustus who established government as a young princeps in 27 BC, a man in old age who did not wish to incur the hatred of others. Now, at sixty-six years old, Dio explains Augustus' adoption of Tiberius in terms of age and the actions of an old man, he suggests the princeps does this because he was worn out in body by reason of old age and illness – suggesting he would not have made this choice had others been available (Dio 55.13.1a). The choice to adopt Tiberius, a forty-two year old in the prime of life, is driven by age and failing health, together with a degree of persuasion, attributed by Dio to Livia and to Julia (Dio places Julia on the Italian mainland, rather than isolated on an island). This arrangement might appear beneficial to Augustus in mitigating the process of ageing by inserting an active younger man into the power structure. However, we can identify age-related behaviour developing in the form of pessimism and fear. Tiberius was to be feared – he might march on Rome (Dio 55.31) and, as he developed successes in command, he was feared by Augustus. Fear was also an explanation for other Augustan behaviours: Augustus could reform the senate himself and take a census, but fear of rebellion of the people only took a census of those with more than

⁴² For narrative of events, see J.A Crook, 'Political History, 30 B.C. to A.D. 14', *Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd edition, volume 10 (Cambridge, 1996), 105-12.

200,000 sesterces. How such a census could have been undertaken is unclear – how would he know who had over or under this sum?

Such fears may have been real given the plots of AD 4 which led Dio to present a long discussion between Augustus and Livia over the need for clemency and consensus, rather than the destruction of enemies (Dio 55. 13, 14- 21 on Livia giving the arguments on how to control enemies, and not kill the conspirators). With Tiberius holding Tribunician power, Augustus and Tiberius ruled the empire as *paterfamilias* and *filius familias*; whilst Augustus held his final five-year period of *maius imperium*.⁴³ It looks like an arrangement similar to that of Augustus and Agrippa in 12 BC, but that is to see things in purely constitutional terms.⁴⁴ Instead, looking at it in terms of age, we can see Agrippa and Augustus in 12 BC as two equals at the prime of life (early forties) – whereas from AD 4 onwards, Augustus and Tiberius can be seen as an old man, admittedly with *maius imperium*, and a man in the prime of life taking direct action in military matters.⁴⁵ In terms of age, Tiberius is in the stronger position – even if Augustus is the *princeps*. Dio writes this fear of the power of a man in his prime into this final phase of the principate of Augustus. It is also very different from the relationship that might have existed between Augustus in old age and his grandsons in their twenties – that situation might be seen to mirror the ideal that Cicero had sought in influencing the young Octavian in 44 BC, or the relationships between people of different ages embedded in Cicero’s treatises

⁴³ Suet. *Tib.* 15: ‘...he ceased to act as head of a family (*pro patre familias*), neither made gifts, nor freed slaves and did not even accept inheritances or receive legacies’.

⁴⁴ B. Levick, (n. 6) chapter 2

⁴⁵ [Note the role of adoptions in AD 4. B. Levick, ‘Drusus Caesar and the Adoptions of AD 4’, *Latomus* 25: 227-244.](#)

on the *Republ²⁵ic, de Amicitia* and so on, in which an older man explains the world to much younger men, who accept his advice.⁴⁶

The physical effects of old age had an effect on the mechanics of decision making, the role of the senate and the constitution and can be seen at the end of the final decade of Augustus' life. Some see this period as one of autocracy created by the fact that Augustus could not attend the senate.⁴⁷ Instead, we see adjustments made to ensure Augustus continued to be involved in decision-making. Suetonius considers him to have been constantly at work, revising lists of jurors even when elderly (unclear at what age; *Aug.* 29); administering justice from a litter or even lying down at home if indisposed (*Aug.* 33). To facilitate his role in government, the format of the *consilium* established in AD 13 became the equivalent to a decision by the senate. His physical decline is also marked by a gradual withdrawal from certain responsibilities. It would seem that meetings of the senate and the courts were held in his house on the Palatine (*Aug.* 29). But despite 'old age and the feebleness of his body, he continued personally, with his assistants, to investigate judicial cases and to pass judgment, seated on the tribunal in the palace'. This appears to have been a major change to the nature of government – the palace was where power rested in the hands of an elderly princeps, whose immobility caused power to be exercised in his house rather than in one of the fora.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ M. Harlow, and R. Laurence, 'De Amicitia: The Role of Age', in *Passages from Antiquity to the Middle Ages III: De Amicitia, Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae* 36 (2010), 21-32; Harlow and Laurence (n.12), 111-115 on Cicero and Octavian

⁴⁷ Levick (n. 6) 96-100.

⁴⁸ J.A. Crook, *Consilium Principis: Imperial Councils and Counsellors from Augustus to Diocletian* (Cambridge, 1955), 31-36.

However, looking back to embassies reported in Josephus and dated to 4 BC, it is possible to see the *consilium* meeting in private, and then meeting delegates at the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine, (i.e. in public) next to Augustus' residence, but then holding their discussion in private to develop the edict.⁴⁹ As Crook points out, there was a political and legal role for the *consilium* and the roles could not have been neatly divided but, as with many things dealt with by Augustus, involved a complicated mixture of both.⁵⁰ Yet, it is Augustus' frailty and inability to go to the senate that is maintained as a reason to create the *consilium* as a legislative body. There is some reasoning logic behind this. In the previous year, Augustus was unable to make himself heard in the senate house and employed Germanicus (in his first consulship) to read his words for him, even when those words commended the reader to the senators. Germanicus was a suitable substitute at the age of twenty-seven, he had been married to Augustus's grand-daughter Agrippina for over twelve years and had at least three children (Gaius, to be Caligula, born in this year). The relationship of the elderly princeps to this young man was quite different to his relations with Tiberius, a man now approaching old age in his fifty-fourth year. However, Tiberius was seen as a substitute for Augustus and was created as a joint ruler of the provinces with Augustus, thus perhaps recognising that they were equals (Suet. *Tib.* 20; Vell. Pat. 2.121), but also suggesting that Tiberius might be a substitute for Augustus in attending the senate.

⁴⁹ Josephus *BJ* 2.25, 2.81 and *AJ* 17.229, 17.301. Crook (n. 28), 32-33. [Winterling \(n.2\), 58-102 on distinction of public/private and princeps/privatus.](#)

⁵⁰ Crook (n. 28), 33

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Earlier, in AD 8, Augustus had used the German war as an excuse to ask the senators not be offended if he asked them not to greet him at his home, or if he no longer attended public banquets with them, but he continued to visit his peers for birthdays and events such as betrothal parties, until he was 'well on in years' (*grandior*). Even while he was withdrawing from some of the duties of office, his age did not prevent him from travelling to Ariminum to be better on hand to hear the news from Pannonia (Dio 55.34). In AD 9, at the age of seventy-one or –two, he addressed the equites in the forum with regard to their complaints about the marriage laws, talking about ensuring future generations. While there is an irony in this speech, given Augustus's own position with regard to surviving descendants at this stage, it was perhaps given with some self-awareness, that his audience must also have understood. The point about the necessity of a younger wife is also telling in relation to the health-care of elderly men and to temper the 'unreasonable harshness of old age' (Dio 56.3). The speech, in many ways, is a prelude to the enactment of the *Lex Papia Poppaea* (Dio 56.10), which Tacitus associated with Augustus in later life (*Ann.*3.25-28).⁵¹ The law, strongly critiqued by Tacitus, might be argued as a poor ruling because it was passed towards the end of his life. Tacitus (*Ann.*1.3) presents Augustus, as a *senex*, ruled over by Livia in connection to the decision to exile Agrippa Postumus. Tacitus also suggests (*Ann.* 1.4) that there was a fundamental difference in the perception of Augustus in his prime and in his old age and poor health. This may reflect a distinction between Tacitus' experience of Nerva as an old emperor, and the rule of Trajan in his prime. The perception of the old emperor – whether Nerva or Augustus – was that they were not fully capable of being a princeps. The degree of infirmity, seen by others, may have influenced Suetonius' discussion of Augustus' health. He

⁵¹ S. Treggiari, *Roman Marriage* (Oxford, 1991), 60-80 for summation of the nature of the law.

was a man who felt the cold, wore a chest protector, several layers of tunics and leg wraps to keep himself warm (Suet.*Aug.* 82). Augustus did not have a very strong constitution throughout his life, often suffering from what appear to be digestive complaints, bladder stones, rheumatism, limping from weakness in his left leg, numbness of extremities (*Aug.* 80, 82).

Ageing changed Augustus and the Principate?

When compared to the old age of his successors, Augustus appears to have acted as an archetypal *princeps senex*. Tiberius lived to the age of seventy-~~seven~~^{eight}, but spent most of his later years indulging himself in Capri and generally earning his poor reputation which completely overrode any successes of his earlier life. He did not become emperor until the age of fifty-~~four~~^{six}, already in the eyes of many Romans, well into late middle age or approaching old age. Claudius, another long lived emperor, died age sixty-~~three~~^{four} – an interesting case as his physical disabilities had meant that Augustus and Tiberius had planned his life out of the public eye, and in terms of imagery, he is often portrayed as looking old.⁵² Finally in the first century AD, Nerva who became emperor at the age of sixty-five of whom Dio says was so old and feeble in health that he used to vomit up his food and was rather weak, and further ‘finding himself in such contempt for reasons of his age said in a loud voice

⁵² M. Harlow and R. Laurence, ‘Age, Agency and Disability: Suetonius and the Emperors of the First Century C.E.’, in C. Krötzl, K. Mustakallio, & J. Kuuliala (eds.), *Infirmity in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Farnham, 2015), 15-28.

'I adopt Trajan' – a general aged forty-onetwo – that is, in Roman eyes, in the prime of his life.

How should we see Augustus as the old *princeps*?

The Augustus of earlier decades, involved in building monuments across Rome, was to some degree replaced by Tiberius restoring key temples in the Forum Romanum. The disjuncture between the ageing emperor found in Suetonius (*Aug.* 79-80) and his statues or images on coins may be a puzzle for some,⁵³ but seen in the context of Roman old age – it was Augustus' achievements as a young man that created his identity as an old man.⁵⁴ Thus, references to a young Augustus simply enhanced the status of the elderly emperor through recall of all that he had achieved.⁵⁵ This also fits the ancient convention that old men lived, or at least focussed their conversation on their past. There is another logic at work here, Augustus' life was full of *exempla* to be emulated by others, and in most cases these were *exempla* provided to younger men – after all relatively few men lived into the old age that Augustus experienced.⁵⁶ As a result, it was the actions of Augustus' younger self that were to be re-called and were symbolised by both *exempla* and the representation of his younger self on coins, statues and on monuments. Interestingly, Vespasian – a man who attained greatness in later life – was to provide *exempla* from old age to epitomise the rule of the Flavians as quite distinct from that of Nero and the Julio-Claudians.⁵⁷ The disjuncture

⁵³ D. Wardle, *Suetonius Life of Augustus*, (Oxford, 2014) 470-77; on latest interpretation of the phenomenon: B. Gladhill, 'The Emperor's No Clothes: Suetonius and the Dynamics of Corporeal Ecphrasis', *Classical Antiquity* 31 (2012) 315-48; D. Wardle, *Suetonius Life of Augustus*, (Oxford, 2014) 470-77.

⁵⁴ K. Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, (Princeton, 1996) 28-41, 164-79 identifies changes in imagery, but these peter out long before Augustus' final decade.

⁵⁵ As can be so clearly seen, if we read the *Res Gestae* as a text written by an old man in his seventies.

⁵⁶ R. Langlands, 'Exemplary Influences and Augustus' Pernicious Moral Legacy', in T. Power and R.K. Gibson *Suetonius the Biographer*, (Oxford, 2014), 111-29; E. Gunderson, 'E.g. Augustus: *exemplum* in the *Augustus* and *Tiberius*', in T. Power and R.K. Gibson *Suetonius the Biographer*, (Oxford, 2014), 130-46.

⁵⁷ *Suet. Vesp.* provides numerous examples as does the return to *verism* from the Republic in representing Vespasian's face on coins and in statues.

[between representation of a younger self and any actual knowledge of Augustus' appearance was a function of the process of ageing, in which the imagery \(as did the emperor's memory\) recalled the past and the emperor's earlier achievements. It was not the body of the aged emperor, who had pursued war – but that of his younger self. The disjunction makes sense, if we view it in the context of Roman thought about old age.](#)⁵⁸

[The old Augustus was](#) fearful of others, milder than his younger self, too weak to attend the senate, but capable of working and legislating. [He was not the same person, in many ways, as his younger self.](#) [What is missing from our picture of the aged Augustus is the pomp and ceremony of the emperor proceeded by *lictors* taking his seat between the consuls in the senate house.](#) Over the last decade of his life, the emperor had become less visible and decision-making had shifted to the palace – not surprisingly, Tiberius' attempt to put the clock back, abolishing the Augustan *consilium* as a decision making body, was fraught with difficulties. The compensation for an emperor being unable, due to age, to attend the senate shifted the political process away from the Curia to the palace. [The fact of the emperor's old age restructured the nature of what used to be called the Roman 'constitution'.](#) [After Augustus' death,](#) however much Tiberius may have or have not wanted the senate to speak freely with an emperor present, the shift back was not simple or easy.⁵⁹ The experience of an old Augustus had made a change and the ramifications of that change were to be felt in the following reign of an already ageing emperor, Tiberius, who would retire from Rome while power resided in the palace – just as it had done in the final years of Augustus' reign. To a degree, the very fact of Augustus' longevity re-shaped the Roman Empire [in the final decade](#)

⁵⁸ Cicero *De senectute* demonstrates the disjuncture that was seen to exist between middle age and old age.

⁵⁹ Crook (n. 28), 36-39; B. Levick, *Tiberius the Politician* (revised edition), (London, 1999), 93-94.

of his life with a final decade but the imagery, that has inspired so much recent scholarship, was not re-shaped to incorporate an aged emperor and, instead, Tiberius was simply added into an existing set of Augustan places within the city of Rome, in which Augustus, the old man, was to be remembered as a younger man achieving so much. Perhaps, this is why, in old age, in books on Augustan Rome – the emperor disappears once he becomes *Augustus senex*. in which the emperor due to his age and health withdrew from day to day public interaction with senators and, thus, shifted power to the palace with a *consilium* taking on the powers of the senate. Old age had re-shaped the constitution of the restored *res publica* causing Augustus' younger successors to exercise power within the context of the palace rather than the forum, and in private rather than in public.