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Letter from Maria Luisa Cisneros to Hubert Creekmore

Maria Luisa Cisneros

Time Magazine

Hubert Creekmore

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TIME

THE WEEKLY NEWSMAGAZINE

TIME & LIFE BUILDING
ROCKEFELLER CENTER
NEW YORK 20

EDITORIAL OFFICES

March 31, 1955

Dear Mr. Creekmore:

Madame Yourcenar has been very kind in doing research relative to the point you brought up in connection with our review of Hadrian's Memoirs. She found your question interesting, as you will see by the excerpts from her letters which we are going to quote for you. But first, we want to make sure you saw the compliment from Madame Yourcenar which was published in our March 28 Letters column, and which we received apropos of our correspondence with the author over your letter.

The first letter from Mme. Yourcenar said in part: "...about the application of the epithet of Aeterna to Rome, the first use of which I attribute to Hadrian in my book... The context suggests that Hadrian is thinking of the first official application of the epithet. A long literary tradition, first conspicuous under Augustus, precedes, of course, official acceptance of the religious and cosmic concept of Rome in Hadrian's time."

"The interesting quotation from Tibullus could possibly be matched by parallel suggestions in Vergil, Propertius, and Horace, but I was trying to make Hadrian speak in very specific terms of his promulgation of the cult...I have written to three persons well qualified to speak on the point, and shall be happy to make a correction if one is needed."

Then Mme. Yourcenar wrote: "With regard to my ascription to Hadrian of the first use of the epithet eternal for Rome, Mr. Marcel Durry, professor in classics at the Sorbonne, confirms my own previous notations. He writes as follows: 'You may continue to affirm that Hadrian was the first to celebrate officially Roma Aeterna. Though there is a denarius of Vespasian with the legend Roma Perpetua (Matt. Syd. 11, 51, 30), Strack in Reichspragung 11, p. 176 states: "Roma Aeterna and

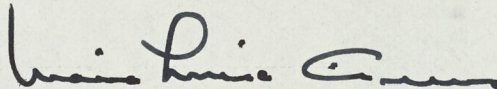
Venus Felix were named in the Roman mint for the first time on Hadrianic coins."

"As I said in my preceding letter, the context of the passage to which your reader refers makes clear that Hadrian is preoccupied with the official introduction of the Roma Aeterna cult. He speaks here as Emperor and as High Pontiff. Your reader's report of the line of Tibullus is none the less interesting in that it shows the long trend of thought which brought about this official recognition. I thank you for sending it to me."

And Mme. Yourcenar is still on the trail, for the beginning of this week we heard from her to the effect that: "In addition to my recent letter to you, containing Professor Durry's report on the use of the term Roma Aeterna by Hadrian in its first official use I can now send you the reply of another specialist, Professor Cornelius C. Vermeule, Department of Fine Arts, University of Michigan: 'I hasten to answer your question as to whether Hadrian was the official originator of the term and concept Roma Aeterna: i.e. did he use it first in such official documents as coins, inscriptions, etc...The answer I would say is yes. I believe the first official use of the phrase coincides with silver Denarii issued at or about the time of the dedication of the new double-apsed temple on the Velia, the largest in Rome, as you know -- the facade bearing the inscription: Veneri. Felici. Et. Romae. Aeternae. Imp. Caes. Aelius. Hadrianus. Ex. S.C. (...Gatteschi's reconstruction...)'"

This has afforded us a very pleasant correspondence with Madame Yourcenar and with you. We were glad to be able to straighten out the point once and for all.

Cordially yours,



Maria Luisa Cisneros
For the Editors

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