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INTRODUCTION

Karl Galinsky

The age of Augustus continues to fascinate. For good reason: it was unquestionably one of the pivotal periods of western history, if not world history. Its monuments and art still vividly speak to us today as do its writers: Vergil, Horace, and Ovid in particular. At center stage, of course, is the young heir of Caesar, only eighteen years old at the time his adoptive father was cut down. A charismatic personality, maybe; a flamboyant one, no; but surely one as multifaceted as the arts, politics, and social developments of the time and, certainly, the Roman empire that he accumulated, tirelessly expanded (we should not be fooled by his parting admonition to Tiberius), helped shape, and unified – which does not mean homogenized – to an unprecedented degree. In structural and material terms, a basis was laid for the system called the principate that lasted for more than 200 years; the birth of Christ during his era may convince even agnostics of divine foresight.

Great periods in world history and their leading figures are destined to keep attracting attention and undergo changing evaluations. There is more to that than the perpetually grinding mills of the scholarly (re)interpretation industry, spurred on by the usual academic rewards. Even outside this sphere, the process of reception is ever changing and shaped by multifarious factors, consumers, and producers. Every age brings its own perspectives to those before it. Such perspectives tend to be far from monolithic because they often reflect contemporary tensions. In "Augustan" England, for instance, Augustus' reputation fluctuated like a cork on the tide of violent crosscurrents – political, literary, and cultural (Weinbrot 1978).

In the end, however, the basic reasons for the multiple reactions to, and assessments of, the Augustan age are, to borrow Gibbon's famous phrase (no matter that it did not motivate him on to write a

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shorter work) about the fall of the Roman empire, "simple and obvious." They are its endemic richness of events, characters, ideas, inspirations, dynamics, and contradictions, all amounting to significant and palpable change. A central issue, therefore, is how to define and assess this change. A related and, citing Gibbon again, obvious question is: "What did Augustus have to do with it?" Sure, this all happened on his watch, but what precisely was his role? Was he instigator or catalyst, or was he channeling an already strong flow of history and giving it some direction and definition? We confront the time-honored question of what shapes the course of history and culture broadly defined, events or individuals? Clearly, there is a dynamic between the two.

Speaking of definitions and directions: the aim of this *Companion*, therefore, is not only to inform the reader of where things are at in terms of previous scholarship but to provide some new departures and directions that can, and should, be developed further. I would like to outline some central ones.

Augustus did not simply step into history as if on a blank slate that needed to be inscribed. Events were already in the making, as they always are. The dominant approach to that issue in the last century was that of Syme whose *Roman Revolution* (1939) was written explicitly to hold up a mirror to its own time when autocrats like Hitler, Mussolini, Franco and Stalin loomed large. On this view, Octavian engineered a bloody, military coup against the old order to seize power, and that power was defined mostly in political terms. Accordingly, the Augustan literati were viewed as mere mouthpieces of the political regime. Happily, Syme did not treat Augustan art and architecture, but he did not need to in order to make his point: Mussolini did it for him.

Today, this view of power is too limited. One aspect of power, as Foucault (1971) has argued, is that power is an outcome of knowledge. As for Rome, we are looking at key areas such as control over the calendar. More is involved than a mere reckoning of time: the calendar determined the flow of public life and, through the annual *Fasti*, marked identity by singling out individuals for the offices they held and their activities. There was a great deal of latitude for those who knew how to handle such matters or, at any rate, handled them. They were, of course, members of the nobility and they often proceeded at will. The calendar reform of Caesar marks the arrival of expert professionals. They bring their knowledge to regularizing a haphazard system, and they are employed and appropriated by the new leader of the state. The process continues under Augustus with the additional dimension that, like control over the calendar, *Fasti* are not a

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privilege anymore that is limited to the aristocracy, but spring up all over for local festivals, magistrates, and functionaries, including freedmen and slaves. As Andrew Wallace-Hadrill summarizes: "In slipping from the nobility, Roman time becomes the property of all Romans" (p. 61). Far from being isolated, this occurrence is part of a broader phenomenon: one of the defining aspects of the Augustan reign is precisely the opening up of formerly restricted opportunities to a much larger segment of the populace. A shift to autocratic government is accompanied by an authentic involvement of much wider strata of the population.

Is this a paradox? Only if one thinks in terms of traditional academic dichotomies, which have had their heyday especially in the interpretation of Augustan poetry. It is clearly relevant, however, to consider Vergil's *Aeneid* against this background: with all its sophistication this was a work that was accessible not only to the élite, but its popular reception was strong and immediate, as we know from inscriptions in Pompeii, theatrical performances, and everyday utensils such as lamps (Horsfall 1995; Galinsky 1969). Similarly, the age witnessed an efflorescence of the art of freedmen. I will return to this aspect again.

Knowledge was power and, as Wallace-Hadrill demonstrates in detail, professional experts had increasingly begun to replace Roman aristocrats as purveyors of knowledge. The development was well under way in vital areas of the Roman state. Religion (with an obvious connection to the calendar) is a prime example: the polymath Varro's compendium on *Human* [i.e. Roman] *and Divine Antiquities* was a landmark and not by coincidence dedicated to the *pontifex maximus* Julius Caesar. Similarly, law and public speaking passed from the realm of the nobles to that of professionals at Cicero's time, and the shift of authority over that all-controlling entity, language, began even sooner. The list does not end here, but one more of its facets deserves mention because it also is a good example of the many interconnections between the chapters of this book. That is the construction and reorganization of the cityscape of Rome. It is one of the dominant images of the period, familiar from the well-known dictum of Augustus that "he left the city, which he found made of bricks, sheathed in marble" (Suetonius, *Aug.* 28; characteristic of Augustan multiple meanings, the phrase follows upon Augustus' claim to have built "the new state" on a secure foundation [*fundamenta*] – architecture is both reality and metaphor). As Diane Favro illustrates, the new urban plan had clear and orderly rationales. The Augustan organization of the city into fourteen *regiones* (see Fig. 40 on p. 244) was part of this concept, but it also had the effect

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of making the city more knowable. Again, professionals, such as surveyors and census officials, did the work and, as Wallace-Hadrill points out, the result was a city that was under control because, in contrast to its late Republican predecessor, it was clearly known.

There is a further connection. One of the defining building types was the theater. Pompey had broken the barrier and, once again, there were social implications. The nobility in Rome had resisted such buildings, which came to exist in Italy by the second century B.C., because the theater, as Cicero makes clear, was a venue for the true will of the Roman people at all levels of society. The rapid diffusion of the Theater of Marcellus (Fig. 9 on p. 165) as a model in Italy and the provinces, therefore, has more than architectural and aesthetic reasons. And the phenomenon provides an additional perspective on the embedding of the spectacular and theatrical in many aspects of Augustan public and private life, as discussed by Richard Beacham, including wall paintings in Augustus' house (see Plate III) that are one of the subjects of John Clarke's chapter. I invite, nay, urge the reader to make such connections throughout this *Companion* (cf. Alessandro Barchiesi's remarks on p. 281); the headings in the Table of Contents do not imply compartmentalization.

In this context of the transformation of power a useful distinction comes to mind that is currently employed by modern analysts of global power and security, including the so-called *Pax Americana*. They differentiate between the "hard power" of military dominance and the nonmilitary "soft power" of culture in its various aspects (cf. Nye 1990). Augustus based his power on both. The professionalization of major areas of cultural activity intensified during his reign and he appropriated its practitioners; it might be helpful to consider the Augustan writers in this larger context, too, rather than from the usual perspective of "patronage" and the like (cf. Peter White's chapter for a critique of such approaches). The paradigm shift had been in the making; the loser was the former ruling class; and these developments, and not just the loss of political power, are behind the laments about the "decline" of the Republic.

Other developments had been under way that were resulting in profound change and received further articulation under Augustus. One is that the stage was far larger than Rome and Italy. Syme (1939) observed astutely that the victory of Augustus in essence was the victory of the nonpolitical classes of Italy who had been burned by decades of civil war, which was fomented by ambitious members of the governing class, and who just wanted to get on with their lives. No doubt

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that was a factor, but Augustus played to a larger gallery. That was the Mediterranean world, the site of Roman provinces and client states, and of immense social, economic, and political change that had been developing for over a century. The chapters by Nicholas Purcell and Greg Woolf address this issue from perspectives that are different as well as complementary. In his article on Augustus in the third edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (1996, 218), Purcell summarized the achievement of Augustus by saying that it "lay in the flexibility with which he and his advisers responded to a period of striking social change in the Mediterranean world, the legacy of the Roman/Italian diaspora of the previous century." His chapter in this volume is an extended demonstration and, like Woolf's, extends the horizon from which it is vital for us to consider the Augustan age. For it is too limiting to view the Roman empire under Augustus, let alone the Roman empire after him, predominantly in terms of Roman civil and military functionaries sent out from the center while neglecting the many interactions – cultural, religious, economic, and social – that were reciprocal and had their own dynamics.

Who were the diaspora Romans? One trait they shared is that they were entrepreneurial, taking advantage of the opportunities Rome's expansion offered. They were a heterogeneous bunch, including Roman citizens who had emigrated and their descendants, freedmen (and their descendants), and locals who had been granted Roman citizenship. They were an important constituency – not necessarily the glue that held the empire together, but clearly a binding link and vital connection between these lands and Rome. Their Roman-ness can be defined in various ways. Purcell, for one, sees their identity as depending "far more on their relationship to Roman power than on any cultural ties." Their ethnicities and cultures reflected those of the entire Mediterranean; what made them "Roman" was their relation with the powers that were at Rome, which gave them privileged status. The presence of a monarch provided a much clearer focus for that relationship, and Augustus evolved into the patron of patrons. We are looking not at an administrative structure but at a dynamic system that is akin to what we would call networking today. And the case can be made that the true locus of action had shifted to the diaspora because "it was in that world that the political outcomes of the age were determined"; it was no accident that Caesar, Augustus, and Tiberius "spent formative years in the currents of the diaspora" (Hadrian later would outdo them all). This view by Purcell finds its complement in Woolf's observation that "Roman civilization, having been taken on by the provinces, no longer

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belonged to the City of Rome." We are back to the topic of the vast expansion of opportunities in a multitude of areas (except for governance at the top) with the concomitant diminution of the exclusiveness of traditional *loci*.

Besides the diaspora Romans, the main beneficiaries were the provincial élites; there is, of course, an overlap between the two. They took the initiative in becoming "Roman," a notion that was not static but kept evolving, thus assuring the longevity of the Roman empire. As Woolf points out, it was relatively easy to achieve this identity as "habits of dress, speech, manners and conduct were more important than descent" – a good example of "soft" power. Aspects of "real" power were the other part of the equation, such as Augustus' strong emphasis on the protection of private property in general and of the propertied classes in the provinces in particular. He systematically buttressed a system that had already evolved in the towns of Italy and in the successor states to Alexander in the Greek east. It is on such local and regional but widespread foundations that the *Pax Augusta* came to rest; it did not automatically kick in after Antony's and Cleopatra's defeat at Actium in 31 B.C. Augustus' behavior clearly indicates that he both recognized the importance of the diaspora and could rely on a stability that was not located at, and emanated from, the center alone: he was away from Rome for long stretches of time in the 20s and 10s B.C., and not only for military campaigns.

The complex of issues we have surveyed also provides some answers to the question about Augustus' role amid a world of developments and changes that were well underway. In other words, events or the man? The parameters are evident: not everything that happened under Augustus happened because of Augustus (John Clarke takes up this issue in an entirely different context, that of marked shifts in Roman painting). But just as clearly, he left his imprint, and already his contemporaries could speak of their times as "your age" (*tua, Caesar, aetas*: Horace, *Odes* 4.15.4). In this case, and his *modus operandi* was not always the same, Augustus found a parade that was already marching and placed himself at its head – one of the classic definitions of leadership as it recognizes the fluid interaction between leaders and followers: "Leadership, unlike naked power-wielding, is thus inseparable from followers' needs and goals" (Burns, 1978, 19). And we can add an even more traditional metaphor: Augustus navigated on the stream of history and was successful because he did not oversteer. He saw himself that way (*Res Gestae* 34): not as one wielding *potestas* ("power") but as exerting *auctoritas* ("influence").

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Reacting to conditions that were not of his own making was nothing new to Augustus. In his early incarnation as Octavian he faced such situations, starting with the murder of Caesar, as a way of life, and he reacted forcefully; Walter Eder well surveys this stage and the next. Similarly, when it came to his plans to establish the principate securely, and with it his succession, Augustus had to revise his expectations again and again (see Erich Gruen's discussion). In all these situations – transformation of knowledge, social change in the diaspora and the provinces, ascent to and maintenance of power, succession – Augustus maneuvered adroitly. But while the last two of these have received plentiful emphasis (which does not mean they cannot be analyzed afresh, as they are here) and shaped much of our view of Augustus and his time they do not rise to the same level of interaction as the others. They were, to be sure, more than mere technical or tactical problems and their solution was important. It is, however, Augustus' attention to the other areas, those of ongoing cultural and social change, that best explains the fundamental impact of the Augustan age on later ages. In Susan Treggiari's (1996b, 902) succinct formulation: "The Roman world was opened up both physically and mentally."

We can make a connection here with one of the salient characteristics of Augustan poetry and art. They were sophisticated and carefully crafted – definitely not pop art, but nonetheless with tremendous popular appeal that is well documented. When one divides the number of days Vergil worked on the *Aeneid* by the number of lines in the poem one arrives at about three lines a day, not exactly the speed of composition of modern best-selling authors, and the figures for Horace's lyric poetry are similar. But the genius of the *Aeneid*, as we saw earlier, was precisely to reach out to readers (at the time more were listeners than readers) of all kinds, and anyone could find meaning in the story, regardless of background and education. Similarly, as Diana Kleiner explains, an Augustan monument like the Ara Pacis "displayed an uncanny ability to invest the major themes of his principate with multiple meanings so that everyone could find significance in them." Sophisticated scholars and interpreters that we are, we take it all for granted, but it is useful, as always, to think of potential alternatives. Why not simply erect a monument with a statue of the Goddess of Peace (we know her image from coins)? Or design a straightforward historical frieze featuring Roman soldiers, as on the Column of Trajan – after all, in Augustus' famous formulation, "peace was achieved through victories" (*Res Gestae* 13: *parta victoriis pax*)? More important, the deliberate polysemy of works like the *Aeneid* and the Ara Pacis can be apprehended not only in general terms

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of viewer or reader response, but in the context of an Augustan milieu that was inclusive rather than exclusive.

Another corollary of the themes I have sketched is the brittleness of periodization. The precise temporal distinction between Republic and Empire is modern; it did not exist for Augustus' contemporaries. Instead, they saw a sea of flux without a big marker that shouted "Actium!" (cf. Gurval 1995). Many of the defining trends, as we have observed, were already well underway, and similar considerations are relevant when we look, for instance, at the "Augustan" poets. As Jasper Griffin points out, the activity of Horace, Vergil, and others antedates the Augustan age – when exactly did they become "Augustan"? And what exactly does that mean – some kind of realignment, as discussed here by Peter White, and what was its nature? As for Augustus, we all know that he became "Augustus" on January 16, 27 B.C. But while he shed the excesses of bloodlust, revenge, ruthless carnage and civil war mayhem of the "Octavianic" period, the break was less total in more benign areas such as his shaping of Roman religion. As John Scheid demonstrates, there was considerable continuity, and the essential elements of his policy had already been forged in his pre-Augustan years. These findings converge with a similar argument recently advanced by Fergus Millar (2000, 30), namely "that many of the most decisive steps – and even more important, the most decisive aspects of fundamental alteration of mentality and political awareness – had already taken place" before 27 B.C. As illustrated in Eder's essay and others, there was transformation, there was experimentation, and there were certain phases we can distinguish, but, as in all things Augustan, we need to stay away from facile dichotomies.

Certainly, there was no rigid "ideology." There was a sense of purpose and direction, and there were ideas, ideals, and values that, again, were shared, articulated, and debated by many participants rather than Augustus alone. However imperfect their implementation may have been at times, they resulted in lasting inspirations that are another legacy of this remarkable age. I have dealt with such matters and others in some detail in *Augustan Culture* (1996) and, therefore, see no need for a repeat, even if updated ("with consideration of the bibliography that has appeared since 1995," of course). In fact, several (well-meaning) friends, colleagues, and publishers asked why I would undertake the present volume – had I not covered the subject already? The answer is easy: as I said at the time, the book was meant to be an introduction (even if it ran to 474 pages) and not an exhaustive, let alone definitive (as if there were such a thing), treatment. There are so many different

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ways to look at the Augustan age, and there were (and still are) plenty of aspects left for discussion. Even Syme, whose *Roman Revolution* was a hundred pages longer, never intended his book to be the last word, although admiring epigones assiduously tried to award it that status. Instead, Syme would always stress that "there is work to be done." The maxim would have pleased Augustus.

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PART I

POLITICAL HISTORY

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