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Memory And Moderation: The Imperial Image Of Augustus And Its Perception Among Later Authors

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MEMORY AND MODERATION: THE IMPERIAL IMAGE OF AUGUSTUS AND ITS PERCEPTION AMONG LATER AUTHORS

by

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A master’s thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Classics in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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Abstract

MEMORY AND MODERATION: THE IMPERIAL IMAGE OF AUGUSTUS AND ITS
PERCEPTION AMONG LATER AUTHORS

By

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Advisor: Professor Joel Allen

Aware of the Roman people’s weariness following decades of civil war, Augustus
founded the Principate on the notion that the traditions of the Republic had been restored and that
Augustus was not a monarch but an ordinary citizen serving his nation. This modest image of the
emperor was characterized by his ceremonial refusal of honors and offices and his preservation
of the Senate’s dignity. However, the purpose of this thesis is not simply to examine the modest
image of the emperor but rather to provide a detailed study of the memory of Augustus’
moderation in the works of later authors.

The first chapter will discuss Augustus’ documentation of his moderate deeds in the Res
Gestae and his attempt to preserve his legacy and provide an example for his successors to
imitate. Similar depictions of his modesty are represented on coins and Augustan monuments
such as the Ara Pacis Augustae and the so-called Laudatio Turiae. Lastly, this chapter will
examine the poetic recusationes of Horace, Propertius, and Ovid as evidence of their skepticism
regarding the sincerity of Augustus’ political refusals.

The second chapter will examine Pliny the Younger’s political career under the tyrannical
reign of Domitian and his praise of Trajan’s moderation in the Panegyricus. Pliny exhibits signs
of insincerity in his panegyric that resemble the methods of doublespeak used earlier by Horace, Ovid, and Statius. Pliny’s false praise of Trajan’s moderation reflects his suspicion of the Principate as a whole. The third chapter will discuss Tacitus’ relationship with Agricola and his career under Domitian. Like Pliny, Tacitus is skeptical of imperial moderation but is more explicit in his condemnation. He criticizes the Principate for its feigned moderation and its capacity for cruelty. Tacitus attributes these problems of the Principate to its founder Augustus while criticizing his false modesty with a literary recusatio.

The fourth chapter will discuss Suetonius’ career as an imperial secretary under Trajan and its impact on his work. Suetonius enjoyed a post-Domitianic career and did not witness the same atrocities as Pliny and Tacitus. Thus, Suetonius lacked the impetus to convey the moderation of Augustus and the Principate in a negative light. Suetonius’ negative depiction of Octavian might imply a perceived insincerity in the moderation of Augustus. However, it is evident from Suetonius’ account that he is more concerned with his continuous display of moderation as emperor, which serves as a model for his successors.

The fifth and last chapter will discuss Cassius Dio’s career during the reigns of Commodus and the Severan dynasty. Like Pliny and Tacitus, Dio witnessed many atrocities committed by emperors. However, Dio seeks to remedy present ills by invoking Augustus’ moderation as precedent for present and future emperors. While Dio explicitly recognizes that this modest image is false, he prefers the pretense of moderation over the open cruelty of a tyrant.

This thesis will show that the moderate image that Augustus created was not a static representation of the emperor. Later authors manipulated the image of the emperor according to
their own ideological goals. Augustus was no longer a man but an idea that could be invoked for praise or criticism of one’s present circumstances.
Acknowledgements

This work is dedicated to my father Louis. I would like to thank my mother Deborah and my sisters Candace and Jacqueline for their love and support. I would also like to thank Daniela Bartalini for patiently reading my drafts. Thank you all for encouraging me to follow my dreams. I am grateful to my advisor, Professor Joel Allen, for his instruction and guidance during this process. Moreover, I would like to show my appreciation to Professor Dee Clayman and Professor Liv Yarrow for their direction. I am grateful to every professor and student in the Classics department whom I have had the privilege of knowing for providing such an enriching learning experience.
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Introduction

Violent civil wars and ruthless proscriptions beleaguered Rome for much of the first century BCE. The Roman people became weary as power-hungry generals clashed for supremacy. Following the demise of Antony, Octavian remained in possession of absolute power. In an effort to restore faith in Rome’s government and revitalize the state, Augustus concealed his true power by behaving modestly and respecting the dignity of the Senate. A key facet of Augustus’ reign was the idea that he had restored the Republic in accordance with the *mos maiorum*. The emperor’s invocation of Republican precedent implies that the *princeps* was not a tyrant but a private citizen who reluctantly accepted the burden of stabilizing the empire. This modest image of the *princeps* was characterized by the emperor’s ceremonial refusal of honors and offices that were not consistent with the *mos maiorum* as well as his respect for the senatorial class and promotion of *libertas*.¹ However, it is not fundamentally the purpose of this thesis to examine the *civilis* image of the *princeps* but rather to provide a detailed study of the memory of Augustus’ moderation in the works of Pliny the Younger, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio.

Modern perceptions of Augustus and the Principate are based on the representations found in the authors listed above. Each author’s memory of the same subject matter varied according to their own perspectives. Andrew Gallia cites a passage from Plato’s *Theatetus* in which Socrates compares the human mind to wax by stating that one can press an idea or thought into it just as one can make a mark with a seal ring.² Gallia argues that memory, like wax, is

² Pl. *Thet*, 191d-e δέδομεν τούνομα αὐτό φῶμεν εἶναι τῆς τῶν Μουσῶν μητρός Μνημοσύνης, καὶ εἰς τούτο ὅτι ἂν βουληθόμεν μνημονεύσαι ἡν ἂν ἱδομεν ἢ ἀκουσμεν ἢ αὐτοὶ ἐννοήσωμεν,
malleable and is subject to change. The metaphor of wax illustrates the ability to erase or add a concept via the “selective nature of memory.”

This work attempts to illustrate the fluidity of historical memory. Augustus’ formation of ideological prerogatives for both contemporary audiences and posterity suggests a recognition of the malleable nature of a figure’s image. Moreover, the continuous molding and revision of this image by later authors is a reminder that the preservation of one’s deeds is not something that is static but is informed by the perspective of the person engaging in a reconstruction of the past. In the cases of Pliny the Younger, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio, each author’s individual life experiences led to distinct understandings about the Principate. While Augustus put forth an image of himself for later generations, this representation was edited by later writers with their own agendas.

Before any discussion of how Augustus’ modesty was remembered by subsequent authors, the first chapter describes Augustus’ desire to documentation of his own moderate deeds in the Res Gestae as an attempt to preserve his legacy and provide an example for his successors to follow. Next, this chapter will discuss the Ara Pacis Augustae and the so-called Laudatio Turiae as monuments that, although not originating from the emperor, adhered to a discourse that emphasized the princeps’ humility and civility. Lastly, this chapter will examine the works of Horace, Propertius, and Ovid. Each author engages in a literary recusatio that imitates the moderate refusals of Augustus. Since their respective recusationes are not fulfilled, one could question their sincerity and, likewise, their skepticism of the genuineness of Augustus’ modesty.

The second chapter discusses Pliny’s view of imperial moderation. One might question the inclusion of a chapter on Pliny in a work focusing mainly on Augustus’ moderation. Yet, the panegyrist’s description of Trajan’s moderation can be applied to the Principate as a whole. Although Pliny does not write about Augustus, his discussion of Trajan's modesty reflects a deeper understanding of imperial ideology which owed a great deal to Augustus' innovations.

After taking into account Pliny’s career under Domitian and his relationship with Trajan, this chapter discusses Pliny’s panegyric to Trajan and its emphasis on the emperor’s moderation. As will be seen, one can make similar thematic connections between Pliny’s description of Trajan’s moderation and the image previously put forth by Augustus. This chapter will explore Pliny’s possible use of doublespeak in his praise of the emperor’s moderation as well as his potential application of a tradition previously utilized by Horace, Ovid, and Statius. It will be argued that the insincerity of Pliny’s praise suggests that Pliny viewed Trajan’s modesty as a disingenuous façade itself.

The third chapter examines Tacitus’ account of Augustus and imperial moderation. Although Tacitus spends little time on Augustus’ reign, his account provides a unique perspective of the first emperor. This chapter analyzes Tacitus’ background with attention to his relationship with Agricola and his displeasure with the reign of Domitian. Tacitus attributes the immoderate behavior of Domitian to the environment created by the Principate as a whole. This chapter will analyze his criticism of the Principate before discussing his brief account of Augustus and will also consider why Augustus is rated unfavorably by the historian. It will discuss Tacitus’ understanding of tyrannical behavior and the image of false moderation. In addition to openly criticizing the sincerity of Augustus’ moderation, Tacitus performs a literary

recusatio at the beginning of the Annales which mirrors the disingenuous refusals of the princeps himself.

The fourth chapter discusses Suetonius’ career as an imperial secretary and its role in allowing the biographer to have access to documents written by earlier emperors. Moreover, it will describe Pliny’s role as Suetonius’ patron and its attestation in Pliny’s letters. It is the aim of this chapter to deemphasize the impact of Pliny’s Panegyricus and the reign of Trajan on Suetonius’ rendering of Augustus’ moderation. Suetonius cites multiple sources from Augustus’ reign which lends credibility to this chapter’s argument that the biographer did not insert Trajan’s moderate example into his account of Augustus. Instead, Suetonius viewed Augustus as a forerunner of Trajan. Although Pliny and Tacitus possibly had access to such documents as well, Suetonius did not experience the same atrocities under an unruly princeps during his career and thus did not carry strong feelings about the present into his representation of the past. Lastly, this chapter discusses Suetonius’ dichotomous portrayal of Octavian and Augustus as well as his understanding of Augustus’ sincerity.

The last chapter examines Cassius Dio’s portrayal of Augustus. While Pliny, Tacitus, and Suetonius were active in the late first century and early second century CE, Cassius Dio was writing in the third century CE and represents a considerable shift from the authors listed above. However, similar themes that appear in the works mentioned above are present in Dio’s rendering of Augustus’ moderation. Dio, like Pliny and Tacitus, witnessed the violence of immoderate emperors during his senatorial career. However, Dio rates the Principate favorably and employs the memory of Augustus’ moderation to insert his own ideas for how the ideal princeps should behave. This chapter will discuss Dio’s account of a debate between Maecenas and Agrippa to illustrate that point. Unlike Suetonius, Dio does not present the emperor’s life in
terms of a duality that is marked by the cruelty of the triumvirate on the one hand and the civility of the Principate on the other. This chapter will highlight the continuity in Dio’s depiction of Augustus and its impact on his rendering of the princeps’ character. Lastly, this chapter will discuss Dio’s perception of false modesty as an alternative to the blatant cruelty of a tyrannical princeps.
Chapter 1
Augustus and the Formation of the Imperial Ideal

Introduction

The triumviral period of the late Republic, marked by chaos and civil war, culminated in Augustus becoming sole ruler of Rome. Augustus recognized the discontent—especially among the senatorial class—with the tumult of recent decades and sought to heal the empire by restoring Republican traditions in what Paul Zanker calls a “program of cultural renewal.” This chapter argues that Augustus attempted to secure acceptance of his reign and to distance himself from the atrocities of the civil wars by presenting himself as a modest adherent to the mos maiorum. This chapter will examine Augustan influences in monuments that were erected to convey a moderate image of the princeps for both contemporary audiences and posterity. This chapter concludes by appraising the recusatio poems of Horace, Propertius, and Ovid. These Augustan poets were influenced by the work of Callimachus in their refusal to write epic poetry. However, their recusatio is not simply a refusal to write epic but is also a commentary on the political recusatio that defines the modesty of Augustus’ Principate.

Monuments, Modesty, and Memory

The Res Gestae Divi Augusti was inscribed in bronze and set up at the entrance of Augustus’ mausoleum in Rome. Michael Peachin has argued that the inscribing of the text on bronze tablets indicates that the document was intended to be an official proclamation, which provided guidelines for attaining the role of princeps. Moreover, the location of the original

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2 Suet. Aug 101.4
bronze inscription at Augustus’ mausoleum indicates that it served as a funerary monument and was meant to have dynastic connotation. The list of Augustus’ accomplishments could then be understood as guidelines, or exempla imitanda, for his successors.³

While the original bronze inscription is lost, fragmentary marble copies have been found in Galatia and Sardis.⁴ This suggests that Augustus had copies of his list of accomplishments set up in the provinces in order that he might unite the empire under an imperial ideology. In the context of Asia Minor, where our only copies have survived, the erection of the inscription in temples dedicated to the princeps, such as the Temple of Augustus in Ankara, was perhaps intended to Romanize the provincials through an imperial cult.⁵ The placement of the Res Gestae with the mausoleum in Rome and provincial temples served to bolster the communicative effectiveness of the inscription. The imagery of these edifices coupled with the inscription would have left a lasting impression on contemporary viewers and would have established an impressive memory of Augustus for viewers of later generations.⁶

Augustus expresses his concern for the mos maiorum when he states that he restored the exempla maiorum exolescentia with laws passed by his authority (legibus novis me auctore latis).⁷ The princeps aligns his reign with Republican precedent again when he states that he received no magistracy against longstanding precedent (nullum magistratum contra morem maiorum delatum recepi).⁸ By presenting himself as an adherent to Republican tradition, he is

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³ Peachin (2013) pp. 262-269; Gallia (2012) p. 41; Res Gestae 8
⁵ Guven (1998) pp. 32-33
⁷ Res Gestae 8
⁸ Res Gestae 6
establishing himself as an *exemplum maius* that Rome’s youth and future generations could emulate.\textsuperscript{9}

In keeping with this image of a preserver of the *mos maiorum*, the *Res Gestae* contains multiple references to Augustus’ *res non gestae*,\textsuperscript{10} or refusals of honors and offices. For instance, Augustus describes celebrating two ovations and three *curule* triumphs. However, he states that the Senate offered him more triumphs, from which he refrained (*cum autem pluris triumphos mihi senatus decrevisset, iis supersedi*).\textsuperscript{11} Augustus also states that he did not accept the dictatorship when it was offered to him (*dictaturam et apsenti et presenti a populo et senatu Romano mihi oblatam... non accepi*).\textsuperscript{12} Likewise, Augustus refused to be made *Pontifex Maximus*, a title which Julius Caesar had held, in place of a living colleague (*Pontifex maximus ne fierem in vivi conlegae locum... quod pater meus habuerat, recusavi*).\textsuperscript{13} When the *municipia* and the colonies offered Augustus golden crowns, the *princeps* did not accept (*aurum coronarium non accepi decernentibus municipiis et colonis*).\textsuperscript{14} Lastly, Augustus describes removing statues of himself from the city and using the proceeds to make golden offerings to Apollo.\textsuperscript{15} The act of refusing was Augustus’ way of downplaying his monarchical ambitions to the Senate. The documentation of these acts preserves this moderate image of the *princeps* for future generations.

Kirk Freudenburg cites two *denarii* from Augustus’ reign to illustrate the significance of the *recusatio* in the first Principate. The first *denarius*, issued by the *triumvir monetalis C.*

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\textsuperscript{10} The term is found in Eder (2005) p.14
\textsuperscript{11} *Res Gestae* 4
\textsuperscript{12} *Res Gestae* 5
\textsuperscript{13} *Res Gestae* 10
\textsuperscript{14} *Res Gestae* 21
\textsuperscript{15} *Res Gestae* 24
Sulpicius Platorinus in 13 BCE, depicts Augustus and Agrippa seated together on the *subsellium tribunicium*, which signifies their joint possession of the tribunician power. After Agrippa’s death in 12 BCE, the *triumvir monetalis* L. Caninius Gallus minted a *denarius* depicting an empty *subsellium* with the letters TR POT above it. Freudenburg suggests that this coin depicts a subtle *recesatio*. The *subsellium* is empty despite the fact that Augustus continued to hold the tribunician power. This image shows Augustus’ apparent unwillingness to hold power alone as well as a reverence for Agrippa.  

Refusals such as these were not easy to maintain. In an attempt to appear traditional, Augustus claims that, when holding the tribunician power, he demanded and received (*depoposci et accepi*) a colleague in that power from the Senate. Although this action was taken to appear less autocratic, Augustus has presented himself in an authoritarian manner by making a demand of the Senate. Paradoxically, Augustus appears autocratic in an attempt to take a colleague and present himself as a Republican.

Augustus’ image as a preserver of the *mos maiorum* is also expressed when he states that he rebuilt 82 temples that had fallen into disrepair. Ronald Syme points out that the civil wars had coincided with the declining conditions of these temples and that the calamities of recent decades emanated from Rome’s lack of concern for the gods. Therefore, Augustus’ rebuilding of the temples exemplified the emperor’s *pietas* and reminded the Romans of his role in restoring peace, which helped him obtain support for his government.

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16 Freudenburg (2014) pp. 105-107  
17 *Res Gestae* 6  
18 Freudenburg (2014) p.108  
19 *Res Gestae* 20  
Augustus also built new temples, such as the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine and the Temple of Mars Ultor in the Forum Augustum.\textsuperscript{21} According to Paul Zanker, these deities and other divinities associated with the \textit{princeps} and his family received more attention than others. For instance, Augustus transferred the Sybilline books from the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus to the Temple of Palatine Apollo and moved the ceremonies that were held before and after military campaigns to the Temple of Mars Ultor.\textsuperscript{22} By promoting deities with which the \textit{princeps} had strong connections, Augustus reinforced the legitimacy of his reign.

Augustus states in his \textit{Res Gestae} that the Senate and people gave him a Golden shield with an inscription that recognized his \textit{virtus}, \textit{clementia}, \textit{iustitia}, and \textit{pietas}.\textsuperscript{23} A marble copy of the \textit{clipeus virtutis} from Arles indicates that Augustus’ \textit{pietas} was specifically in relation to \textit{deos} and \textit{patriam}. The rebuilding of temples and the victory over Cleopatra were evidence of this \textit{pietas}.\textsuperscript{24} The \textit{Res Gestae} also states that the Senate, the equestrians, and the Roman people bestowed upon Augustus the title of \textit{pater patriae} in 2 BCE.\textsuperscript{25} Tom Stevenson corroborates this claim by citing an \textit{aureus} that depicts Augustus’ bust with the caption \textsc{caesar avgvstvs divi f pater patriae} on the obverse and two figures representing Gaius and Lucius with the caption \textsc{c l caesares avgvsti f cos desig princ ivvent} on the reverse.\textsuperscript{26} Therefore, the \textit{patria} became Augustus’ household.\textsuperscript{27} With his title of \textit{pater patriae}, Augustus behaved as a \textit{pater familias}. Beth Severy expounds this idea by comparing the \textit{imagines} of Rome’s \textit{summi viri} displayed in the Forum Augustum to the ancestral \textit{imagines} that one would

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} \textit{Res Gestae} 21
\item \textsuperscript{22} Zanker (1990) p. 108
\item \textsuperscript{23} \textit{Res Gestae} 34
\item \textsuperscript{24} Galinsky (1996) pp. 86-88
\item \textsuperscript{25} \textit{Res Gestae} 35
\item \textsuperscript{26} Stevenson (2007) pp. 120-121 and 140-141.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Severy (2003) pp. 153-157
\end{itemize}
find in the atrium of an aristocratic *pater familias*.

This guise of Augustus as *pater familias* gives the *princeps* supreme *auctoritas* without the negative connotations of monarchy.

The Ara Pacis Augustae is another example of Augustan monuments conveying a moderate image of the *princeps* for contemporary audiences and posterity. It is important to remember that the Senate commissioned the altar, not Augustus. In *Res Gestae* 12, Augustus states that after he returned from his campaigns in Gaul and Spain, the Senate decreed that an altar of Augustan peace (aram Pacis Augustae) must be dedicated in the Campus Martius on behalf of his return. The altar was sanctioned in 13 BCE and was completed in 9 BCE. The monument contains two processional friezes: one depicts senators on the northern wall and the other is portraying Augustus with priests, Agrippa, and the imperial family on the southern wall. The figures, which are veiled and togated, appear to be taking part in a sacrifice. The inclusion of senators in the sacrificial procession conveys a sense of unity with the new regime. This monument was not simply an altar dedicated to the Pax Augusta but also functioned as a means of preserving the Senate’s own dignity.

The portrayal of Augustus surrounded by priests while conducting a sacrifice exemplifies the *pietas* of the *princeps*. Perhaps this modest depiction of Augustus was not a prerogative that emanated from the Senate; it could have been influenced to some extent by the many portraits of the *princeps* that represent him in priestly garb, such as the togated statue from the Via Labicana. By adopting this form of depiction, the Senate adhered to Augustus’ image of modesty and piety, which reflects his tendency to avoid appearing as a monarch. J.C. Scott has argued that when a subordinate group refers to the dominant party in public discourse, “the subordinate will, out of

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30 Zanker (1990) p. 127
prudence, fear, and the desire to curry favor… appeal to the expectations of the powerful.” The subordinate group will accommodate the dominant party and represent the ruling class according to its ideology. It is likely that the Senate yielded to the princeps in a similar manner.

While the togated Via Labicana statue might have influenced the attire of Augustus’ figure in the Ara Pacis Augustae, the facial features of the princeps on the frieze resemble those of the Forbes style rather than those of the more idealizing Via Labicana statue or the prevalent classicizing style of the Prima Porta statue. The Prima Porta portrait was influenced by Polykleitos’ Doryphoros as indicated by the hairstyle of each statue. Quintilian refers to the Doryphoros as a vir gravis et sanctus. Therefore, one could make the same observation about the Prima Porta portrait and understand its idealizing features as an illustration of Augustus’ sanctity. The Via Labicana portrait is more individualizing than the youthful Prima Porta type since it contains a greater realism in its features. The face is thinner, the cheekbones are more visible, and the ears are larger than they appear in the Prima Porta type. Lastly, the Forbes type is even more individualizing than the Via Labicana type. The Forbes portrait depicts Augustus with wrinkles by the mouth and nose, which makes Augustus seem somewhat older and more humble, as appropriate for a pater patriae. Each of these portrait styles contains features of Augustus’ modesty: the sanctity of the Prima Porta type, the priestly garb of the Via Labicana, and the unassuming Forbes style.

In addition to the processional friezes on the north and south exterior walls, the Ara Pacis Augustae features mythological scenes on its eastern and western walls. Although this is an altar

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32 Galinksy (1996) p 147
to peace, the restored northwestern relief depicts Mars and the restored northeastern wall portrays the goddess Roma seated on a pile of weapons. War and peace are not exclusive concepts since peace could only be secured through victory (*parta victoriis pax*). Mars is also associated with Augustus’ victory over Julius Caesar’s assassins. The Temple of Mars Ultor was a monument to this victory and carries connotations of Augustus’ *pietas* for dutifully bringing the conspirators to justice. Yet, there is another interpretation of Mars’ depiction on the altar. The restorations of the relief indicate that Romulus and Remus were represented and Mars was present in the scene to watch over his children. It is likely that Mars is a substitute for Augustus while Romulus and Remus correspond to Gaius and Lucius, who are also depicted in the procession on the south frieze.

The southeastern relief portrays a goddess—it is uncertain whether she is Venus, Ceres, Tellus, Italia, or Pax—holding two children. Perhaps, these children represent Gaius and Lucius as well. In another reference to *pietas*, the southwest panel depicts a veiled Aeneas making a sacrifice similar to how Augustus is portrayed in the southern processional frieze. Although the altar was commissioned by the Senate, Augustan influences are pervasive throughout the monument. Augustus claimed that Aeneas and Mars were both his ancestors and Gaius and Lucius were promoted as future *principes*. Therefore, as seen above with the *Res

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36 Galinsky (1996) p.88
Gestae, one could understand Augustus connecting himself to the past to legitimize his reign in the present as well as secure his legacy for his successors and future generations.  

Augustus legitimized his reign by promoting himself as the restorer of peace and neglected Republican traditions. The princeps needed to behave moderately in order to avoid seeming like a monarch. Furthermore, Augustus sought to alter the image that he had established as triumvir and distance himself from his immoderate acts, such as the proscriptions. As will be explained below, Augustus manipulated the perception of his reign by invoking Republican values while deemphasizing negative aspects of his time as triumvir.

One could see the influence of this ideology on Roman society in the text of a laudatio funebris written from the perspective of a widowed husband in memory of his wife. The inscription, the so-called Laudatio Turiae, recounts the wife’s role in saving her husband from being proscribed. The husband states that Octavian, who was away from Rome, allowed him to return home as a citizen ([reddito me iam] cive patriae beneficio et iudicio apsentis Caesaris Augusti). The account continues by stating that Lepidus, who was present in Rome, ignored Octavian’s edict. When the wife resorted to prostrating herself before Lepidus’ feet, the triumvir had her dragged off and beaten (sed tra[cta et servilem in] modum rapstata livori[bus c]orporis). However, the wife responded by reminding Lepidus of Octavian’s edict despite having to endure insults and wounds so that Lepidus would be known as the author of her husband’s dangers (ut

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40 See Severy (2003) pp. 171-179. Here, Augustus is equated with Aeneas and Romulus on the basis of their roles as founders/saviors and their divine lineage (Julius Caesar, Venus, and Mars respectively). Yet, Augustus is also likened to Mars.
41 Syme (1939) pp. 2-3 and 319-324
42 The word [V]XORIS is preserved on the stone but the text does not contain the name of the wife or the husband. The name of the inscription is based on Mommsen’s argument (Gesammelte Schriften 1.416-17) that the husband and wife of the inscription bear similarities to Q. Lucretius Vespillo and his wife Turia, who were depicted in the works of Valerius Maximus (6.7.2) and Appian (B. Civ. 4.44). However, this theory is by no means conclusive. See Osgood (2006) pp. 75-77 for the debate regarding the identity of the married couple.
*auctor meorum peric[ul]orum notesceret). The husband then states that his wife’s efforts served to display Octavian’s *clementia* as well as Lepidus’ *crudelitas* (*praebere Caesari clementia[e locum... not[a]re inportunam crudelitam [Lepidi]).*

The ideology of the Augustan age and its emphasis on the *clementia* of the *princeps* has clearly influenced the author of this inscription. The juxtaposition of Lepidus’ *crudelitas* and Octavian’s *clementia* indicate that the blame for the proscriptions is diverted toward Lepidus while Octavian’s role is deemphasized. Moreover, the author of the inscription provides an earlier instance of being saved by *clementia*. The word *clementia* is modified by the genitive plural *eorum* (*me m)unibat clementia eorum contra quos ea parabas*), which Alain M. Gowing suggests could be referring to Julius Caesar and his camp. If the *eorum* is indeed referring to Julius Caesar in some respect, the author of the inscription is further aligning his narrative with Augustan ideology by drawing a connection between the *clementia* of Augustus and of Julius Caesar.

The juxtaposition of *clementia* and *crudelitas* can also be found in various works of Cicero. Cicero describes the importance of *clementia* to the concept of *mos maiorum* when he states that Rome’s ancestors exhibited this virtue toward the residents of Capua (*maiores nostri... neque aliud quicquam in urbe nisi inane nomen Capuae reliquerunt non crudelitate—quid enim illis fuit clementius*). Cicero contrasts *clementia* and *crudelitas* again by associating *crudelitas* with the *superbia* of Tarquin (*quae te, hominem clementem popularemque, delectant... non sunt sed ne Romuli quidem aut Numae Pompili; Tarquini, superbissimi atque*

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43 Text from Gowing (1992) p. 283
45 See Gowing (1992) p. 296 for the argument that *eorum* refers to
46 Gowing (1992) p. 288
47 Cic. *De Lege Agr.* 1.19
Lastly, Cicero makes this comparison yet again when he appeals to Julius Caesar’s clemency to forgive King Deiotarius for aligning with Pompey (quorum alterum optare illorum crudelitatis est, alterum conservare clementiae tuae). By analyzing Cicero’s discussions of clemency with the inscription’s reference to the virtue, one could perceive the laudatio’s expression of Augustus ideology not only in its reference to the memory of Julius Caesar but also for its attention toward Republican ideals of moderate behavior.

**Princeps and Poets**

According to Suetonius, Horace enjoyed good relations with his patrons, Maecenas and Augustus. Suetonius cites letters from Augustus in which the princeps expresses his desire to employ Horace as his secretary. Even when Horace refused (recusanti), Augustus still sought his friendship. Suetonius continues by stating that the princeps believed that Horace’s writings would endure forever and, therefore, commissioned the poet to compose the *Carmen Saeculare*, another book of Odes, and a work in honor of Drusus and Tiberius’ victories (scripta quidem eius usque adeo probavit mansuraquo perpetuo opinatus est ut non modo saeculare carmen componendum iniunxerit sed et indelicam victoriam Tiberii Drusique, privignorum suorum, eumque coegerit propter hoc tribus carminum libris ex longo intervallo quartum addere). Augustus trusted Horace enough to allow him to compose poems that would help shape the princeps’ perception among contemporary audiences and posterity. The *Carmen Saeculare* refers to many of the key themes mentioned in the *Res Gestae* or depicted in Augustan art and

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48 Cic. *Pro Rab*. 13  
49 Cic. *Pro Rege Deiot*. 43  
50 Suet. *Vita Horati* 33-37
architecture—Rome’s Trojan origins, Pax gained from victory, modesty (pudor), and the return of ancient and neglected virtue.

Although willing to write in praise of the princeps, Horace at times refused such requests. For instance, Horace declined Maecenas’ appeal for a poem about Augustus’ achievements in war by stating that such a topic was better suited for a history written by Maecenas himself. Here, Horace is poking fun at Maecenas’ ability as writer, which, according to Suetonius’ quotation of the princeps, Augustus himself mocked. The poet also refuses Agrippa’s request to write about war. Horace claims that his modesty (pudor) and the Muses prevent him from writing the epic theme on the basis of his insufficient skill (tenues) to take on the task (grandia). Perhaps, Augustus took this claim of insufficient skill seriously and did not want to risk damaging his legacy.

In his account of Horace’s Life, Suetonius cites a letter written by Augustus to Horace, in which the princeps complains that Horace writes to others and not to him. Augustus also questions whether Horace was afraid that he would tarnish his legacy by appearing as Augustus’ friend (an vereris ne apud posteros infame tibi sit, quod videaris familiaris nobis esse). Suetonius continues by stating that Horace’s response to Augustus was the poem that begins:

Cum tot sustineas et tanta negotia solus
Res Italas armis tuteris, moribus ornes

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51 Hor. Carm. Saec. 37-52
52 Hor. Carm. Saec. 53-57
53 Hor. Carm. Saec. 57
54 Hor. Carm. Saec. 58
55 Hor. Odes 2.12.9-12
57 Hor. Odes 1.6.5-8
58 Hor. Odes 1.6.9-12
59 Griffin (1984) p. 201
60 Suet. Vita Horati 41-42
Legibus emendes: in publica commoda peccem,
Si longo sermone morer tua tempora, Caesar.

This quotation corresponds to Epistles 2.1. Horace points out that Augustus bears many responsibilities by himself (tot sustineas et tanta negotia solus). He also compares Augustus’ negotia with Hercules’ labors (diram qui contudit hydram notaque fatali portenta labore subegit). The poet continues this laudation by stating that he will bestow honors onto Augustus (praesenti tibi maturos largimur honores) and dedicate temples to the princeps (iurandasque tuum per numen ponimus aras). Moreover, Horace claims that Augustus is preferred over any Greek or Roman leader (te nostris ducibus, te Grais anteferendo). Such high praise is perhaps not what Augustus would have expected when he asked Horace to write to him as a familiaris. It is possible that Augustus had wished for Horace to write to him in a more informal manner and to avoid flattering the princeps as if he were an autocrat. Perhaps, Augustus had hoped that he would seem like a modest citizen who, in keeping with his Republican image, could handle the advice and criticism of a trusted friend.

Horace’s excessive praise of the princeps undermines Augustus’ intention to appear approachable. However, Horace’s lavish commendation of the princeps could be a satirical criticism of the emperor that only a familiaris could get away with. The negotia and premature (maturos) honors mentioned above correspond to functions and privileges that the princeps would not refuse and, thus, refer to his lack of moderation. In addition to criticizing the princeps for his lack of self-restraint, Horace puts his own temperance on display. Horace claims

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61 Freudenburg (2014) p. 113
62 Hor. Epist. 2.1.10-11
63 Hor. Epist. 2.1.15-16
64 Hor. Epist. 2.1.19
65 Freudenburg (2014) p. 115
66 Freudenburg (2014) pp. 116-119 and 128
that, although he would like to write epic,\textsuperscript{67} his small poem would not be worthy of the princeps’ majesty and, therefore, his modesty prevents him from attempting a task that his abilities refuse to bear (\textit{si quantum cuperem possem quoque; sed neque parvum carmen maiestas recipit tua, nec meus audet rem temptare pudor quam vires ferre recusent}).\textsuperscript{68}

While the poet’s unwillingness to bear the burden of writing epic finds a poetic precedent in Callimachus’ \textit{Aetia}, Horace’s \textit{recusatio} has its own Roman context. The poet displays his own moderation by refusing to bear the burden of writing epic. However, the moderation he displays in this poem appears insincere given its juxtaposition with the list of Augustus’ \textit{negotia}. Horace is perhaps poking fun at his \textit{familialis} by giving the impression that he has superior moderation and is more skilled in refusing.\textsuperscript{69} Horace’s faux moderation indicates his awareness of Augustus’ carefully constructed self-image as a moderate Republican and the ease with which someone could look past the veneer of the princeps’ modesty.

Propertius also utilized the \textit{recusatio} in his poems addressed to Maecenas. In the ninth poem of book 3, Propertius states that he will not refer (\textit{nec referam}) to the events of Trojan War and will thus avoid epic themes.\textsuperscript{70} The poet also makes a direct reference to Callimachus, which places more attention on this poetic \textit{recusatio} (\textit{inter Callimachi sat erit placuisse libellos}).\textsuperscript{71} Propertius expresses this poem’s political dimension when he parallels his refusal with that of Maecenas (\textit{at tua, Maecenas, vitae praecепta recepi/ cogor et exemplis te superare tuis}).\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{67} Hor. \textit{Epist.} 2.1.250-256 \textit{nec sermones ego mallem repentis per humum quam res componere gestas, terrarumque situs et flumina dicere, et arces montibus impositas et barbara regna, tuisque auspiciis totum confecta duclla per orbem, claustraque custodem pacis cohibentia Ianum, et formidatam Parthis te principe Romam
\textsuperscript{68} Hor. \textit{Epist.} 2.1.257-259
\textsuperscript{69} Freudenburg (2014) p. 121
\textsuperscript{70} Prop. \textit{Elegies} 3.9.39-42
\textsuperscript{71} Prop. \textit{Elegies} 3.9.43
\textsuperscript{72} Prop. \textit{Elegies} 3.9.21-22.
Propertius is claiming that his own modest refusal is superior to Maecenas’ refusal of a public office. Thus, this poem is evidence of an Augustan poet utilizing an existing poetic device to make a political statement. Propertius’ statement that Maecenas’ modesty was a precedent for his own gives the impression that the poet is insincere. Perhaps, Propertius’ comparison of the poetic and political recusatio implies that the political recusatio is just as theatrical.

In another poem addressed to Maecenas, Propertius states that even if the fates had given him the ability to lead heroes into war, he would not sing about epic themes such as the Titans, Ossa, Pelion, Thebes, and Troy. However, Propertius also claims that he would remember the wars and deeds of Augustus (bellaque resque tui memorarem Caesaris). This assertion takes on a negative implication when he states that he would sing about Mutina, the civilian graveyard (civilia busta) of Philippi, the naval battle at Sicily, and the ruined hearths (eversosque focos) of the Etruscans, which is likely a reference to the siege of Perusia. The description of civilian graveyards and ruined Etruscan hearths conveys the atrocities of civil war. Here, Propertius recalls unflattering incidents from Augustus’ time as triumvir, which reflects poorly on the princeps and is likely the poet’s way of refusing to write a panegyric of the emperor. Unlike Horace’s epistle mentioned above, the recusatio in this poem was probably intended to damage the emperor’s character, especially considering Propertius’ ties to Perusia.

Poem 1.21 addresses a soldier from the siege of Perusia from the point of view of a soldier named Gallus. Propertius describes a soldier who was wounded by Etruscan ramparts

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73 Griffin (1984) pp. 195 and 207
75 Prop. Elegies 2.1.25
76 Prop. Elegies 2.1.27-29
The poet continues by stating that Gallus was taken away through the middle of Augustus’ swordsmen (Gallum per medios ereptum Caesaris enses). Here, Augustus is mentioned by name along with the siege of Perusia, which would have been antithetical to Augustus’ carefully crafted image as clemens princeps. Propertius continues undermining Augustus’ clementia in poem 1.22, which is addressed to Propertius’ friend Tullus. The poet laments the civil strife that led to tombs at Perusia and the unburied limbs and bones of his relatives. Based on Propertius’ use of recusatio and his personal relationship with Perusia, one could infer that the poet aimed to subvert Augustus’ constructed image.

Likewise, Ovid wrote utilized the recusatio in his poems. In Amores 1.1, Ovid cleverly states that he was ready to write about epic themes until Cupid stole a foot from his meter:

\[
\text{arma gravi numero violentaque bella parabam} \\
\text{edere, materia conveniente modis} \\
\text{par erat inferior versus; risisse Cupido} \\
\text{dicitur atque unum surripuisse pedem}\]

In Amores 2.1, Ovid claims that he had dared to speak about war (ausus eram, memini, caelestia dicere bella) and he was holding Jupiter’s lighting (cum Iove fulmen habebam). However, Ovid’s lover closed her doors and Ovid dropped the lighting (clausit amica fores: ego cum Iove fulmen omisi). In these poems, Cupid and the amica are agents of elegy that overcome Ovid and his stated desire to accept the task of writing epic. The missing foot in Amores 1.1 and the closed door in 2.1 impede Ovid’s ability to write epic. Therefore, Ovid is refusing to accept a burden

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78 Prop. Elegies 1.21.2
79 Prop. Elegies 1.21.7
80 Prop. Elegies 1.22.3-8
81 Ovid Amores 1.1.1-4
82 Ovid Amores 2.1.11 and 15
that he is not able to bear. These poetic recusationes reflect Ovid’s awareness of the political recusationes of Augustus and, later, Tiberius.

In Book 1 of the Fasti, Ovid claims that it is right for Augustus’ house to hold the reins of power and for his son and grandson to refuse it (hanc fas imperii frena tenere domum, inde nepos natusque dei, licet ipse recuset).\(^{83}\) Ovid makes the same reference to a refusal of the reins of power in the Ex Ponto as well. After Augustus’ death, Ovid states that Tiberius was Augustus’ equal in virtue and that he took the reins of a refused imperium (esse parem virtute patri qui frena rogatus saepe recusati ceperit imperii).\(^{84}\) Clearly, Ovid was well aware of the role refusals played in crafting a virtuous image of the princeps. It is possible that this awareness existed at the time he published the Amores and is reflected in Ovid’s work.

Another work that reflects Ovid’s understanding of Augustan ideology is Tristia 2, which, like Horace Epistle 2.1, is a letter to Augustus.\(^{85}\) The exiled Ovid appeals to Augustus’ clemency and states that his fate gives the princeps an opportunity to be merciful (materiam veniae sors tibi nostra dedit).\(^{86}\) He continues invoking Augustus’ modesty by stating that nobody could ever hold the reins of power as moderately as Augustus (imperii potuit frena tenere sui. tu veniam parti superatae saepe dedisti).\(^{87}\) Here is another occasion in which the poet uses a horseriding metaphor while invoking the princeps’ moderate use of power. Despite Augustus’ attempts to appear Republican and to disguise the fact that he holds the reins of power, Ovid is ready to remind him that he sees through the facade.

\(^{83}\) Ovid Fasti 1.532-533  
^{84}\) Ovid Ex ponto 4.13.27-28  
^{85}\) Nugent (1990) p. 243  
^{86}\) Ovid Tristia 2.32  
^{87}\) Ovid Tristia 2.41-42
The sincerity of Ovid’s plea is questionable. The poet describes the princeps as mitissime Caesar\textsuperscript{88} and even makes an explicit reference to the princeps’ clementia.\textsuperscript{89} However, the poet describes the edict that led to his exile as immite minaxque.\textsuperscript{90} Furthermore, Ovid states that his punishment was lenient in name since he was called a relegatus and not an exile (attamen in poenae nomine lene fuit; quippe relegatus, non exul, dicor in illo).\textsuperscript{91} However, Ovid later refers to himself as an exile when he states that no other exul is farther from his country than he.\textsuperscript{92} As S.G Nugent points out, Ovid is revealing the distinction between appearance and reality as a way of commenting on the princeps’ behavior.\textsuperscript{93}

This chapter has illustrated the role of art and architecture in crafting a moderate image of the princeps for both contemporary audiences and posterity. Even works that were not commissioned by Augustus are influenced by his ideology. Although the Senate was subordinated by the princeps, the institutional body accommodated the emperor in helping to shape his memory. Augustus enlisted the services of poets, sometimes directly, in order to further build his legacy. However, the poets at certain times and for various reasons deride the emperor’s modest veneer. The following chapters will examine how Augustus’ memory was perceived by later authors.

\textsuperscript{88} Ovid Tristia 2.27 and 147  
\textsuperscript{89} Ovid Tristia 2.125  
\textsuperscript{90} Ovid Tristia 2.135;  
\textsuperscript{91} Ovid Tristia 2.136-137.  
\textsuperscript{92} Ovid Tristia 2.188  
\textsuperscript{93} Nugent (1990) pp. 252-253
Chapter 2
Pliny’s Praise

Introduction
This chapter discusses Pliny’s senatorial background and the impact that it had on his praise of Trajan. Pliny provides a moderate and humble image of the emperor that is compatible with imperial ideology. However, there are potential instances of doublespeak that cast doubt on Pliny’s sincerity. The ambiguities of Pliny’s praise are found in the works of earlier authors such as, Horace, Ovid, and Statius. It is the contention of this chapter that Pliny’s ambiguous praise of Trajan and its similarities to earlier imperial discourses indicate his skepticism of Trajan’s moderation and that of the Principate in general.

Pliny’s Background
Pliny was born in either 61 or 62 CE since he states that he was seventeen years of age at the time of the eruption at Vesuvius in 79.\(^1\) Pliny had an aristocratic background as his paternal lineage belonged to the Caecilii and his maternal family was the Plinii, both of which were based in Comum in northern Italy.\(^2\) Pliny’s relationship with his uncle, who was associated with Vespasian, and two consuls, Julius Frontius and Corellius Rufus, helped Pliny embark on a senatorial career.\(^3\)

\(^2\) Sherwin-White (1966) p. 69; *ILS* 2927
\(^3\) Sherwin-White (1966) p. 71; Plin. *Ep.* 3.5; 4.8.3; 5.1.5
Pliny became a *quaestor*, perhaps in 89 CE, by the commendation of Domitian. Pliny advanced rapidly in his career as he held in succession the tribunate, the praetorship, and the *praefectura aerari militaris* from approximately 92-96. Pliny owed his quick progression to Domitian’s support, which, as the panegyrist claims, was offered before the emperor became hateful of good men (*si cursu quodam provectus ab illo insidiosissimo principe, ante quam profiteretur odium bonorum, postquam professus est substiti*). Although Pliny owed his career in large part to Domitian’s patronage, he needed to distance himself from the hated emperor. In 93, Domitian carried out purges in which Herennius Senecio and Helvidius Priscus were executed on a charge of treason. Pliny emphasizes his own courage when he describes avoiding the emperor’s thunderbolts that killed his friends. The reference to the emperor’s thunderbolts implies a comparison between the *princeps* and Jupiter. The comparison of an emperor with Jupiter bears negative connotations, which will be discussed below.

As Syme notes, Pliny did not only survive this troubled time but he even thrived. In fact, Domitian’s *odium bonorum* did not hinder Pliny’s career since he subsequently received the *praefectura aerari militaris*. Pliny’s claim that his career stalled appears to be disingenuous. By making himself appear as a victim of Domitian, the emperor whom he villainizes in the *Panegyricus*, Pliny is attempting to make his praise of Trajan seem credible. Syme states that when Pliny was *quaestor Caesaris*, the orator had to convey Domitian’s wishes to the Senate, which involved “hollow phrases of deference” and was an “uncomfortable apprenticeship in the arts and hypocrisies of public life.” Syme continues by stating that “it was no bad training for

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5 Plin. *Pan.* 95.3; Sherwin-White (1966) pp. 74-78 and 732; *ILS* 2927
6 Plin *Ep.* 1.5.2-3; 3.2; 7.27.14; Syme (1958) p. 76; Sherwin-White (1966) p. 75
7 Plin. *Pan.* 90.5; Plin. *Ep.* 3.11
one who hoped in due course to compose and deliver his own speech of thanksgiving to Caesar.9 Thus, Pliny did not only have cause for duplicity but he was quite capable of it as well.

**Optimus Princeps**

Pliny took up the suffect consulship and delivered his *actio gratiarum* to Trajan in 100 CE. The *Panegyricus* is a more extensive version of the speech that Pliny published after the original was delivered.10 Speeches that were given in praise of the emperor in the *curia* had existed even during Augustus’ reign.11 Perhaps it is reasonable to assume that the methods of praise had not changed from Augustus’ day.12 Hence, Pliny states at the beginning of the *Panegyricus* that he will not praise the emperor in a manner that has been seen before.13

A key feature of Pliny’s praise of Trajan is his emphasis on the emperor’s good relationship with the Senate and the promotion of *libertas*.14 This positive representation of the emperor is contrasted with the negative portrayal of Domitian and his infringement of senatorial dignity.15 Respecting the Senate demonstrates the emperor’s reverence for Republican values, a notion that held significance in Augustus’ reign.16 Pliny recognized the contradiction between Republican *libertas* and the monarchic Principate when he states that Trajan ordered Romans to be free (*iubes esse liberos, erimus*).17 Yet, as Mark P. O. Morford argues, Pliny rationalizes the

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11 Radice (1968) p. 166; Ovid. *Ex Pont*. 4.4
12 Bartsch (1994) p. 165
14 Plin. *Pan*. 36 and 66
16 See Gallia (2012) for the importance of Republican values in the Principate.
existence of *libertas* in the Principate was dependent upon the emperor’s *modestia* and *moderatio*.\(^{18}\)

Pliny makes multiple references to Trajan’s modesty and moderation throughout the panegyric. As indicated by Wallace-Hadrill, Pliny uses the word *modestia* interchangeably with *moderatio*.\(^{19}\) While trying to convince the *princeps* to take a third consulship, Pliny states that a senator was consul three times and, therefore, it was acceptable for Trajan to hold the same honor. He also suggests that Trajan’s refusal was on account of his excessive modesty (*nimia modestia*) but notes that previous emperors were too ambitious as they sought perpetual consulships during their reigns.\(^{20}\) Thus, it appears that Pliny is praising Trajan for his modesty in yielding the consulship to others. Although the panegyrist claims that his praise of Trajan is not like previous encomia, the attention to Trajan’s refusal is reminiscent of Augustus’ refusals of various offices and honors as shown in the *Res Gestae* and discussed in the first chapter.

Pliny describes Trajan’s moderation again when he discusses Trajan’s refusal of flattery before debates (*Tuae moderationis haec laus*). Pliny adds that while some past emperors have refused honors, nobody would think that these emperors did not want these honors offered to them (*nemo ante tantus fuit ut crederetur noluisse decerni*).\(^{21}\) Pliny continues by stating that Trajan did not outright refuse all honors offered to him. Instead, the emperor rejected the highest honors and accepted the minor ones. The acceptance of lesser honors shows the emperor’s *moderatio*. Pliny also suggests that refusing all honors is an insincere attempt to court favor (*Pulchrius hoc, Caesar,*

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\(^{19}\) Wallace-Hadrill (1982) p. 42
\(^{20}\) Plin. *Pan.* 58
\(^{21}\) Plin. *Pan.* 54
Thus, Pliny recognizes a distinction between genuine and insincere moderation.

Pliny praises the emperor for showing reluctance when the people proclaimed him as Imperator. He states that Trajan refused to rule and, thus, would rule well since he had to be forced to rule (recusabas enim imperare, recusabas, quod erat bene imperaturi. Igitur cogendus fuisti). Pliny states that although Trajan was worthy of new honors and titles, he refused the title of pater patriae for most of his reign until he was later forced (at tu etiam patris patriae recusabas... quam tarde vicimus). He states that other emperors accepted the title on the first day of their reigns while Trajan rejected the honor on account of his modesty (modesta tua) even though he deserved it. One could compare Trajan’s refusal to that of Augustus and his adoption of the title late in his reign, as indicated in the Res Gestae.

As mentioned above, Pliny claims that Trajan refused the pater patriae for a long time whereas other emperors accepted it at the beginning of their reigns. Stevenson suggests that Pliny’s comparison of Trajan with other emperors is an implicit reference to Domitian. However, Stevenson notes that Pliny refers to Trajan as pater patriae, which likely means that Trajan had accepted the title before the Panegyricus was published in 100 CE. Moreover, Pliny, as seen above, is asking Trajan to accept a third consulship. Stevenson cites aes coins with the caption PP along with TR P COS II. Therefore, if Trajan received the pater patriae by the time of his second consulship, his recusatio likely lasted 8-9 months. Although Trajan’s recusatio does not

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22 Plin. Pan. 55
23 Plin. Pan. 5.5-6
24 Plin. Pan. 21
seem to have lasted as long as Pliny’s account would have us believe, perhaps Trajan was simply appreciated for having shown more modesty than Domitian.

Augustan influence can also be found in Pliny’s depiction of Trajan’s *pietas*. As seen in chapter one, the *Res Gestae* describes Augustus’ restoration of temples that had fallen into disrepair.\(^27\) Similarly, Pliny states that temples were no longer threatened with collapse during Trajan’s reign (*stant securae domus nec iam templa nutantia*).\(^28\) One could infer from these examples that temple preservation was an important function of the *princeps* that denoted his *pietas*. This key Augustan virtue, which is attested in the *Res Gestae*’s discussion of the *clipeus virtutis* and on the Arles inscription,\(^29\) appears to have retained importance into Trajan’s reign.\(^30\)

Pliny repeatedly associates Trajan with Jupiter by giving him the appellation “Optimus,” a name that was already attributed to Jupiter Optimus Maximus.\(^31\) Furthermore, Pliny claims that his reign was sanctioned by the Jupiter and that his virtue equaled that of the gods.\(^32\) In addition to the *Panegyricus*, the Arch of Beneventum depicts the emperor’s *pietas*.\(^33\) For instance, the lower right panel on the southeast side of the arch depicts a veiled Trajan conducting a sacrifice.\(^34\) The lower left relief on the southeast side also portrays Jupiter presiding over a treaty between Rome and so-called barbarians.\(^35\) Moreover, the center right relief of the same side depicts a goddess, perhaps Roma, watching Trajan and others prepare a sacrifice. The arch portrays two consuls welcoming Trajan along with Roma, Romulus, and the Penates. Trajan is

\(^{27}\) *Res Gestae* 20  
\(^{28}\) Plin. *Pan.* 51  
\(^{29}\) *Res Gestae* 34; Galinsky (1996) pp. 86-88  
\(^{30}\) See discussion in Norena (2011) pp. 60-62 regarding the frequency of *virtus* and *pietas* appearing in coinage.  
\(^{31}\) Bennett (1997) p. 106; Plin. *Pan.* 2.7 and 88.4  
\(^{32}\) Bennett (1997) p. 64; Plin. *Pan.* 1; 5; 8; 23; 88; 94  
\(^{33}\) See Gallia (2012) p. 247 for Republican values depicted on the arch.  
\(^{34}\) Bennett (1997) p. 206  
\(^{35}\) Beard et al. (1998) pp. 26-27
also represented on another relief with Jupiter who hands a lightning bolt to the *princeps* as a symbol of his divinely sanctioned rule. While one might argue that this represents Trajan as Jupiter's equal, this interpretation would undermine Trajan's image as a humble and modest *princeps*. Kleiner argues that Trajan as *Optimus* is not Jupiter's equal but that his power simply emanated from the highest authority of Rome's pantheon. She also states that Trajan was possibly deceased at the time of the arch's construction based on depictions of Hadrian on the arch. Therefore, Hadrian was likely emperor at the time of the arch's construction.\(^{36}\)

The depictions of *pietas* in the relief of the sacrificial procession, the representation of Trajan in a veiled toga, and the portrayals of gods and goddesses are reminiscent of similar motifs found on the Ara Pacis Augustae. Furthermore, the arch, according to Kleiner, is the first monument to depict children in a procession since the Ara Pacis. The similarities of representation and the emphasis on *pietas* suggest that Augustus' ideological precedent endured on through Trajan's reign. Thus, depictions of the emperor’s *pietas* in literature and on monuments reflect the understanding that the *princeps*’ humility before the gods was a key imperial virtue.

The inscription on the arch states that the Senate and People commissioned the monument.\(^{37}\) Much like the Ara Pacis and Pliny's *Panegyricus*, this monument contains elements of imperial ideology despite emanating from a non-imperial source. As will be elaborated below, these works are examples of a public discourse given by a subordinate group out of self-preservation on behalf of the dominant party. In other words, the subordinate group, in this case the senatorial class, tells the emperor what he wants to hear. Therefore, when approaching the question of whether Jupiter's portrayal on the Arch of Beneventum undermines Trajan's modest

\(^{36}\) See Kleiner (1992) pp. 224-229 who dates the arch from 114-118 CE

image-- provided that he was still alive at the time of its construction-- it is important to remember that this is a senatorial representation of the emperor and was not dictated by the emperor himself.

The Sincerity of Pliny’s Praise

Based on the quotations regarding Trajan’s modesty listed above, the Panegyricus may seem like a straightforward attempt to praise a worthy emperor. However, the Panegyricus contains some language that might cause one to question Pliny’s sincerity. Shadi Bartsch has argued that the Panegyricus contains elements of political doublespeak that require a reading that goes beyond understanding the text as simply a laudatory speech. For instance, Pliny states that nothing should be said about Trajan that has been said about his predecessors because previous emperors elicited praise through fear. Bartsch argues that senators who engaged in public discourse conformed to imperial ideology out of self-preservation. Conversely, the emperor was not aware of private conversations among the senatorial class. Therefore, the secretive nature of private discourse allows the senatorial class to express their true opinions freely.

Pliny recognized the distinction between public and private discourse when he states that if Trajan were to violate the privacy of the senatorial class in order to learn their true feelings, the princeps would find nothing but admiration. Thus, Pliny claims that public and private discourses are identical under the benevolent reign of Trajan since public praise reflects the true opinions of a satisfied senatorial class. On the other hand, a bad emperor would receive the same

38 Bartsch (1994) p 148-187
39 Plin. Pan. 2.2; 2.3 Pliny also alludes to a change in private conversation (neque eadem secreto quae prius loquimur); see also Plin. Pan. 72.5-7
40 Bartsch (1994) p. 153
41 Bartsch (1994) p. 153; Plin. Pan. 68.6-7
public praise as a good emperor but the private conversations within the subordinate party would reflect their true and unflattering opinions about the ruler.  

The issue at hand is that Pliny’s Panegyricus is itself an example of public discourse. Therefore, the speech may simply reflect encomia of previous emperors, despite Pliny’s claims to the contrary. Pliny states that his speech submits to Trajan’s modesty and moderation (modestiam principis moderationemque) by not praising the emperor excessively. He continues by listing Trajan’s virtues and acknowledging that the emperor would not suspect him of alluding to their corresponding vices. Pliny recognizes the potential for his praise to be considered as criticism of the emperor. While this awareness of doublespeak is intended to be evidence of sincerity and to dispel any notion that his praise is false, Pliny could simply be adopting this approach to seem sincere.

While Pliny states that Trajan should not be honored in the same manner as previous emperors, the Panegyricus contains forms of praise that are similar to earlier works dedicated to previous emperors. Bartsch compares Pliny’s claims about Trajan with Statius’ praise of Domitian. For instance, Pliny states that he speaking about a citizen and a father instead of a tyrant and a master (non enim de tyranno sed de cive, non de domino sed de parente loquimur). This praising of an emperor for not being a dominus is also found in Statius’ Silvae which describes Domitian refusing the appellation (Saturnalia principis sonantes/ et dulci dominum

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43 Bartsch (1994) p. 162
44 Plin. Pan 3.2-4
45 Bartsch (1994) pp. 156-157 and 162
47 Plin. Pan 2.3-4

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As seen above, Pliny praises Trajan for refusing a third consulship. Likewise, Statius had previously praised Domitian for his multiple refusals (et quanta recusas, quanta vetas). Bartsch’s juxtaposition of these quotes illustrate Pliny’s adherence to public transcript that already existed under Domitian and, therefore, diminishes the credibility of a sincere encomium to Trajan. Interestingly, the comparison not only includes echoes of public transcript from Domitian’s reign, but also contains elements from Augustus’ Principate.

During his praise of Domitian for his numerous refusals, Statius shows support for Domitian’s taking of a seventeenth consulship as if it were a joyous occasion. He later references Augustus and states that although he was consul only thirteen times, he did not deserve the offices until later in his reign (ter Latio deciesque tulit labentibus annis Augustus fasces, sed coepit sero mereri). The implication is that while Domitian has held more consulships than Augustus, he was more deserving of them. Thus, Statius’ approach in praising Domitian is to compare him favorably to the founder of the Principate. Pliny likely adopts this method when he compares Trajan favorably to his predecessors. Pliny’s use of this mode of public transcript undermines his attempt sincere praise of Trajan. Furthermore, the allusions to Augustus via Statius illustrate that the first princeps’ exemplum had persisted in the Roman memory.

The Panegyricus and Silvae also contain similar elements found in Augustan poetry. Statius states that the Senate rejoices at overcoming Domitian’s modesty (curia Caesareum

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48 Stat. Silv. 1.6.82-84
49 Stat. Silv. 4.1.33-34
50 Bartsch (1994) p. 162
51 Stat. Silv. 4.1.31-32
52 Bartsch (1994) pp. 164-165; Plin. Pan. 66.3
gaudet vicisse pudorem). One could find a parallel to this expression of the emperor’s pudor with Horace’s reference to his own pudor in Odes 1.6. As discussed in the first chapter, Horace’s pudor in refusing to write epic is reflective of Augustus’ modest refusals of excessive honors.

By linking the expressions of modesty in the work of Pliny and Statius to those found in Horace’s poem, one could use those connections to illustrate a general framework of the imperial ideology. Thus, it seems that imperial modesty remained an important and recognizable feature of the Principate well after Augustus’ reign.

Bartsch reveals another link between Pliny and Statius when she compares their depictions of the emperor as Jupiter. The discussion of Pliny’s portrayal of Trajan reveals some inconsistency—and perhaps some insincerity—on the part of the panegyrist. Although Pliny initially states that it is inappropriate to praise the emperor as if he were a god (nusquam ut deo, nusquam ut numini blandiamur), he subsequently equates Trajan’s power with that of the gods (principem, quem aequata dis immortalibus potestas deceret). Moreover, Pliny connects Trajan to Jupiter later in the Panegyric when he refers to the emperor as the parent of the world whom Jupiter gave to perform his duty toward every race of man in his place (talia esse crediderim, quae ille mundi parens temperat nutu... postquam te dedit, qui erga omne hominum genus vice sua fungereris). A similar comparison to Jupiter is found in the Silvae. Statius states that Domitian is a god whom Jupiter orders to rule over the happy lands in his place (en! hic est deus,

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53 Stat. Silv. 4.1.10
54 Freudenburg (2014) 122; see also discussion in chapter 1
55 Bartsch (1994) p. 163
56 Plin. Pan. 2.3; Plin. Pan. 4.4
57 Plin. Pan. 80.4-5
Therefore, as Bartsch illustrates, the reference to an emperor as a god was a familiar feature in public transcripts.

Pliny’s initial sentiment that a princeps should not be equated with a god is also found in the work of Horace. While the poet praises Augustus, he states that the princeps is second only to Jupiter (gentis humanae pater atque custos, orte Saturno, tibi cura magni Caesaris fatis data: tu secundo Caesare regnes... te minor latum reget aequos orbem). As M.C.J. Putnam notes, Horace gives Augustus his due praise by proclaiming him ruler of the terrestrial world but he is careful to recognize the emperor’s mortality by stating that he is second to Jupiter. This statement is an acknowledgement of Augustus’ humble and modest image. Thus, one could consider this example from Horace as a precedent for Pliny’s initial desire to avoid portraying Trajan as a god.

When Pliny deviates from this model and compares Trajan to the immortal gods and especially to Jupiter, he may not be only using Statius as an example but also Ovid. While asking Augustus for leniency, the poet states that Jupiter would eventually run out of weapons if he used his lighting every time someone was guilty of an offense (si, quotiens peccant homines, sua fulmina mittat Iuppiter, exiguo tempore inermis erit). Ovid states that Augustus should follow Jupiter’s example since Jupiter is the ruler and the father of the gods and the princeps is the ruler and father of the country (iure igitur genitorque deum rectorque vocatur, iure capax mundus nil Iove maius habet. tu quoque, cum patriae rector dicare paterque, utere more dei nomen habentis idem). S.G. Nugent notes that Tristia 2 contains elements that are critical of the emperor, such

Stat. Silv. 4.3.128-129
Hor. Carm. 1.12.49-52 and 57
Ovid Trist. 2.33-34
Ovid Trist. 2.37-40
as the comparison to Jupiter. Nugent points out that since Ovid depicts Jupiter as a “capricious rapist” in the *Metamorphoses*, a comparison between Augustus and Jupiter indicates the poet’s insincerity in his appeal to the *princeps*. Based on Nugent’s analysis, Ovid’s association of the emperor and Jupiter contains an added element of subversion aside from the notion that the Principate was a position of immoderate supremacy. Thus, when considering Pliny’s comparison of Trajan and Jupiter as a continuation of an Augustan era motif, one ought to view the *Panegyricus*’ claims of sincerity with an added degree of incredulity.

Lastly, Bartsch points out that Pliny also compares Trajan to Hercules in the *Panegyricus*. Pliny states that Trajan filled Domitian with both admiration and fear just as Hercules had done to Eurystheus after he completed his labors. This comparison of the emperor to Hercules is not unprecedented. As seen in the first chapter, Horace compares Augustus to Hercules in the first poem of the second book of the *Epistles*. Freudenburg argues that Horace equates Augustus’ tasks as emperor to the labors of Hercules. He continues by stating that, on the surface, this appears as a form of flattery indicating that the emperor is capable of taking on great burdens. However, there is an element of criticism highlighting Augustus’ “recusational failure” in accepting the burdens in the first place. If one accepts Freudenburg’s assessment of the poem as a satirical prodding of the emperor’s moderate image, one could draw a similar conclusion regarding Pliny’s assessment of Trajan. One could also argue that Pliny’s representation of Trajan contains subtle expressions of insincerity that have been used by previous panegyrists.

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63 See Ovid *Met.* 2.417-440
64 Nugent in Raaflaub and Toher (1990) pp. 245-246 and 257
65 Bartsch (1994) p. 164
66 Plin. *Pan.* 14.5 iners ipse alienisque virtutibus tunc quoque invidus imperator, cum ope earum indigeret, tantam admirationem tui non sine quodam timore conceperit, quantam ille genitus love post saevos labores duraque imperia regi suo indomitus semper indefessusque referebat,
67 Hor *Epist* 2.1.10-11.
68 Freudenburg (2014) pp. 118-119
writing about their respective emperors. Thus, Pliny’s *Panegyricus* is a successor of an earlier tradition that emphasized the modesty and moderation of the emperor and expressed criticism under the guise of praise.

**Conclusion**

Pliny praises Trajan’s humility and moderation in refusing honors, which is in accordance with the same ideological principle that was paramount in Augustus’ reign. Although Pliny makes claims to the contrary, his praise of Trajan is quite similar to earlier authors praising their respective emperors. Furthermore, the appearance of comparable examples of insincerity in both the *Panegyricus* and the texts of earlier authors is probably not a coincidence. Perhaps, by adopting these familiar methods, Pliny shares a similar point of view of the Principate. While Pliny appreciates the difference between cruel and civil emperors, he is skeptical of the authenticity of imperial moderation. One could infer that Pliny’s insincerity in the *Panegyricus* reflects his perception of the emperor’s disingenuous modesty. Therefore, Pliny’s assessment of Trajan’s moderation conveys a distrust of not only the emperor himself but also the Principate—Augustus’ legacy.
Chapter 3
Tacitus on Augustus and the Principate

Introduction

This chapter examines Tacitus’ senatorial background and his relationship with Agricola as factors that color his perception of the emperor Domitian. Moreover, Tacitus’ presentation of Domitian reflects a larger disapproval of the Principate as a whole. Although Tacitus does not expect or advocate a return to the government of the Republic, he criticizes the oppressive nature of the Principate and its feigned *libertas*. Discussion of Tacitus’ criticism of the Principate will precede an analysis of his brief account of Augustus’ reign in order to convey Tacitus’ grievances with the system as motivating his negative perception of Augustus as the source of these problems. ¹ Lastly, by claiming not to discuss Augustus’ reign, Tacitus performs a literary *recusatio* that imitates the refusals of the *princeps*.² Tacitus sees through the façade of Augustus’ moderate refusals, which, for Tacitus, are an attempt to disguise the monarchic nature of the Principate.

Tacitus and Agricola

Cornelius Tacitus was granted the *latus clavus* by Vespasian and had his senatorial career advanced by Titus and Domitian.³ In 81 or 82 CE, Tacitus became a *quaestor Augusti* and progressed in the *cursus honorum* by becoming either an *aedile* or a tribune of the plebs a few

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¹ Von Fritz (1957) pp. 94-95.
³ Tac. *Hist*. 1.1
years later. Tacitus later held the praetorship in 88 and was a *quindecimvir* in the same year.⁴ Tacitus was also a consul in 97 during Nerva’s reign, which is evidenced by a letter from Pliny describing Tacitus’ funeral oration of Lucius Verginius Rufus.⁵ The Flavian emperors, especially Domitian, were instrumental in advancing Tacitus’ career. Yet, as will be seen below, Tacitus conveys a negative image of the emperor. This critical portrayal of the emperor might seem puzzling at first glance but one should look to Tacitus’ representation of Agricola to understand this position.⁶

Gnaeus Julius Agricola was a military tribune in Britain during the early stages of his career.⁷ Agricola subsequently obtained a quaestorship and served under the proconsul Salvius Titianus in Asia. Tacitus notes that neither the wealthy province nor the greedy proconsul could corrupt Agricola.⁸ Upon his return to Rome, Agricola became tribune of the plebs. At this time, Nero was behaving as a tyrant at Rome and Agricola managed to avoid unwanted attention by wisely remaining inactive (*gnarus sub Nerone temporum quibus inertia pro sapientia fuit*).⁹ Agricola supported Vespasian during the civil war of 69 CE and was subsequently given a command in Britain.¹⁰ When Agricola returned to Rome in 77 CE, Tacitus married Agricola’s daughter with the commander’s blessing.¹¹ By mentioning that he was Agricola’s son-in-law, Tacitus establishes his personal connection to the topic of his narrative.

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⁴ Syme (1958) pp. 63-65; Tac. *Ann*. 11.11.1
⁵ Syme (1958) pp. 19 and 70; Plin. *Ep.* 2.1.6
⁶ Syme (1958) pp. 19 and 210; Percival (1980) p. 121
⁷ Tac. *Ag*. 5
⁸ Syme (1958) p.21; Tac. *Ag*. 6.2
⁹ Syme (1958) p. 21; Tac. *Ag*. 6.3
¹⁰ Syme (1958) p. 21; Tac. *Ag*. 7.5
¹¹ Syme (1958) p. 64; Tac. *Ag*. 9
In his account of Agricola’s death, Tacitus suggests that his father-in-law might have been poisoned by attendants working for Domitian. Tacitus conveys an image of Domitian as envious of Agricola’s success in Britain, especially in light of the emperor’s false German triumph. He continues by stating that Domitian’s suspicions were based in the idea that being a good general was an imperial virtue (*ducis boni imperatoriam virtutem esse*), which suggests that Domitian feared Agricola as a potential rival for the throne. Tacitus places Domitian in the category of bad emperors (*malis principibus*) and characterizes his as prone to anger (*Domitiani vero natura praeceps in iram*). Perhaps, this negative portrayal of the emperor is influenced by speculation that Domitian was responsible for Agricola’s death. Syme states that after Domitian’s death people associated with those whom the emperor killed or exiled expressed their frustrations in literature. Syme’s suggestion that Tacitus’ bitter feelings toward the emperor motivated his representation of the emperor is plausible, especially when one considers his juxtaposition of Agricola’s virtues and Domitian’s autocratic behavior.

Throughout the *Agricola*, Tacitus describes his father-in-law’s moderation. For instance, Agricola is portrayed as a young military tribune who showed considerable restraint and maturity in taking on responsibilities when compared to other young commanders who used their age or position to justify neglecting their duties. The diction used in this section of the *Agricola* places further emphasis on Agricola’s moderation as Tacitus characterizes him as *nec... licenter, more iuvenum*. The phrase is an expression of Agricola’s self-restraint when others in his position

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12 Tac. Ag. 43  
13 Tac. Ag. 39  
14 Tac. Ag. 42  
15 Syme (1958) pp. 24-25 and see p. 92 for discussion of literature after Domitian.  
16 Tac. Ag. 5
were unable to behave in the same manner.¹⁷ Tacitus also demonstrates Agricola’s moderation when he states that after Agricola was placed in charge of an unruly legion in Britain, he brought the soldiers under control. Yet, as the account continues, Agricola exhibited exceptional moderation (*rarissima moderatione*) since he did not take credit for making them obedient (*maluit videri invenisse bonos quam fecisse*).¹⁸ Agricola’s modest refusal of recognition is presented as a key trait of the senatorial class under the Principate.¹⁹

Tacitus provides another example of his father-in-law’s moderation when he states that Agricola remained obedient to Vettius Bolanus, the governor of Britain, who is characterized as too mild for such a hostile province. The historian asserts that Agricola restrained his zeal and curbed his ardor for battle (*temperavit Agricola vim suam ardoremque compescuit*).²⁰ When Petillius Cerialis replaced Bolanus, Agricola was given an opportunity to lead an army in the troubled region. Yet, Tacitus notes that Agricola yielded the credit for the victory to his superior, Cerialis.²¹ In Tacitus’ account of Agricola’s dealings with emperors, such moderation served the general well.

For Tacitus, obedience and self-restraint were essential in avoiding the wrath and jealousy of a bad emperor.²² As mentioned above, Nero was not suspicious of Agricola because he did not engage in any activity as tribune of the plebs that would bring himself renown and draw unwanted attention.²³ Tacitus provides another example of modesty as a means of self-preservation in his account of the proconsulship offered to Agricola. The historian states that

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¹⁷ Classen (1988) p. 96
¹⁸ Tac. Ag. 7
²⁰ Tac. Ag. 9.1; Classen (1988) p. 96.
²¹ Tac. Ag. 9.2-3; Syme (1958) p. 22.
²³ Tac. Ag. 6.
Agricola had achieved great renown and Domitian, an emperor hostile to virtue (*infensus virtutibus princeps*), was aware of the praise that Agricola was receiving (*quibus sermonibus satis constat Domitiani quoque auris verberatas*).²⁴ When lots were cast for the proconsulships of Asia and Africa, Agricola was in the running. Tacitus suggests that Domitian had the proconsul Civica killed while he was in office and Agricola recognized the likelihood of having the same fate if he took the position.²⁵ People close to the emperor tried convincing Agricola to accept the office and also brought him before Domitian. Agricola refused the office and thanked the *princeps*. Such moderation enabled Agricola to avoid appearing as a threat to the emperor.²⁶

The moderation exhibited by Agricola can be compared to that of Verginius Rufus. As Syme suggests, Tacitus conveys an image of Agricola that is similar to that of Verginius Rufus, whom the historian eulogized.²⁷ Pliny states that Verginius Rufus was a virtuous man who was suspected by some emperors. Moreover, Pliny states that Verginius Rufus refused imperial power (*cum principis noluisset*).²⁸ Agricola’s refusal of the proconsulship can be compared to Rufus’ refusal to become emperor. R.G. Tanner states that perhaps Tacitus was cognizant of the possibility that if Agricola became proconsul, he would not only draw the emperor’s ire but might be placed in a position where he would be offered the throne. Tanner continues in asserting that Tacitus’ potential allusion to Rufus suggests that Agricola similarly avoided a civil war.²⁹ Such an interpretation would serve to bolster an already positive depiction of Agricola’s virtuousness.

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²⁴ Tac. Ag. 41
²⁵ Tac. Ag. 42.1; von Fritz (1957) pp. 75.
²⁶ Tac. Ag. 42; Classen (1988) pp. 96 and 100; von Fritz (1957) pp. 76-77 argues that Agricola’s refusal was against the wishes of the *princeps* and was perhaps taken as an insult.
²⁷ Syme (1958) p. 121; See also Tanner (1969) p. 95.
²⁸ Plin. *Ep.* 2.1
²⁹ Tanner (1968) p. 97
One can see the importance of moderation for those subordinate to the emperor based on these examples. It was better for the individual, as well as the state, to avoid acquiring too much recognition. When a tyrannical emperor was on the throne, it was more prudent to be obedient than to express oneself freely (*inani iactatione libertatis*).\(^{30}\) Thus, the *libertas* of the Republic was incompatible with the realities of the Principate, which required compliance (*obsequium*) on the part of the nobility.\(^{31}\)

**Tacitus and the Principate**

Contrary to the sentiment above, Tacitus states that Nerva’s reign ushered in an age in which *libertas* and the Principate were reconciled (*Nerva Caesar res olim dissociabilis miscuerit, principatum ac libertatem*).\(^{32}\) John Percival emphasizes that the Principate and *libertas* were *once* (*olim*) irreconcilable to suggest that Nerva’s unification of the two concepts reflects Tacitus’ animosity only toward bad emperors and not to the Principate as a whole.\(^{33}\) However, in the *Historiae*, Tacitus describes the Principate as a time of adulation and servitude (*adulationi foedum crimen servitutis*) that only gave the appearance of *libertas* (*falsa species libertatis*).\(^{34}\) The quote about Nerva from the *Agricola* was likely written sometime during Nerva’s reign.\(^{35}\) Therefore, one could argue that Tacitus was simply praising the emperor insincerely when he sets him apart from previous emperors. If Tacitus claims *libertas* is false under the Principate in one text and then asserts in another that it has been restored by the current emperor, the historian is likely just flattering the *princeps*.

\(^{30}\) Tac. Ag. 42  
\(^{31}\) Syme (1958) pp. 27-29; Classen (1988); p. 116  
\(^{32}\) Tac. Ag. 3.1; see Hammond (1963) pp. 93-113.  
\(^{34}\) Tac. Hist 1.1  
Although Percival accepts Tacitus’ description of Nerva as the first emperor to unite *libertas* and the Principate, he also interprets Tacitus’ statement that there were good men during the reigns of bad emperors (*posse etiam sub malis principibus magnos viros esse*)\(^{36}\) to suggest that these men managed to express themselves freely during these troubled times. Percival states that Thrasea Paetus’ free expression during Nero’s reign, as seen in two passages from the *Annales*, is evidence of that sentiment.\(^{37}\) In the first passage, Tacitus describes the senators as giving thanks to the Nero after Agrippina’s murder. Yet Thrasea Paetus, who would normally remain silent during the Senate’s flattery of the emperor, defiantly left the Senate chamber (*Thrasea Paetus silentio vel brevi adsensu priores adulationes transmittere solitus exiit tum senatu*). Tacitus also states that this act failed to initiate *libertas* for the rest of the senators (*ceteris libertatis initium non praebuit*).\(^{38}\) In another passage from the *Annales*, Tacitus describes a more successful show of *libertas* from Thrasea Paetus. He states that Nero tried the praetor Antistius, who wrote offensive poems about the emperor, for treason and wished sentence him to death. While the compliant Senate agreed with the emperor, Thrasea Paetus opposed Nero’s wishes and suggested that Antistius suffer a lesser punishment by having his property confiscated and being exiled. Tacitus continues by stating that Thrasea Paetus’ *libertas* made the other senators less servile (*libertas Thraseae servitium aliorum rupit*).\(^{39}\) Although Percival cites these incidents to illustrate the existence of *libertas*, albeit on a small-scale, during the Principate, Thrasea’s example demonstrates how a *princeps* could extinguish any such expression.\(^{40}\)

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\(^{36}\) Tac. Ag. 42 \\
\(^{37}\) Percival (1980) p. 124. \\
\(^{38}\) Tac Ann. 14.12 \\
\(^{39}\) Tac. Ann. 14.48-49 \\
The important issue is not that individuals could get away with free speech but that emperors would suppress it. Tacitus asserts that after Thrasea Paetus exhibited free expression by walking out of the Senate in the first passage, these actions brought potential harm to him (sibi causam periculi fecit). The potential penalties for free speech imposed by the princeps suggest that such freedom could not really exist. In the second passage, Thrasea expresses a view contrary to that of Nero. However, Tacitus states that Thrasea first praised Nero thoroughly and quite bitterly reproached Antistius. Tacitus also asserts that Thrasea Paetus framed his argument by stating that the punishment was too extreme for an honorable princeps like Nero and a Senate that was not bound by compulsion (id egregio sub principe et nulla necessitate obstricto senatui statuendum disseruit). Clearly, Tacitus’ Thrasea is trying to mask his unfavorable opinion with flattery. The need to resort to such discourse is a sign of falsa species libertatis. Thus, in Tacitus’ view, the Principate concealed its domination with the illusion that libertas was still relevant.

Tacitus lists both incidents as reasons for Nero’s desire to kill Thrasea. Among the charges against Thrasea were the avoidance of swearing oaths of allegiance and offering sacrifices for the health of the emperor. Moreover, Thrasea sent a letter to Nero asking what charges were being made against him. Nero was displeased with the libertas shown in the letter (libertatem insontis ultro extimuit) and summoned the Senate. Later in the narrative, Thrasea was sentenced to death. The suppression of libertas in these passages demonstrates Tacitus’ understanding of Nero as a despot.

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42 Tac. Ann. 14.48; For Thrasea’s trial and death see Ann. 16.
43 Tac. Ann. 16.21
44 Tac. Ann. 16.22
45 Tac. Ann. 16.24
46 Tac. Ann. 16.33-34
Tacitus indeed refers to the *princeps* as a king (*regem*) in the passage concerning Thrasea’s letter to the emperor.\(^{47}\) As the historian notes, a bad emperor seeks domination while a good emperor accepts a restricted *libertas* (*quo modo pessimis imperatoribus sine fine dominationem, ita quamvis egregiis modum libertatis placere*).\(^{48}\) Although true freedom is not found under good emperors, *libertas* is antithetical to the servitude imposed by bad emperors.\(^{49}\) For instance, Tacitus portrays senators as servile in their adulation of Nero (*quaeque alia summa facundia nec minore adulatione servilia fingebant*).\(^{50}\) Syme suggests that Tacitus is critical of the Principate not only for its domination of the Senate but also for the façade that the authority of the *princeps* was given freely.\(^{51}\)

Similarly, Tacitus is critical of imperial suggestions that the Senate is still the leading governing body of the state. One can compare the discussions of Nero’s tyranny with the emperor’s claims to recognize the Senate’s ancient functions (*teneret antiqua munia senatus*) in order to see Tacitus’ criticism of this fallacy.\(^{52}\) Tacitus also illustrates this notion in his account of Claudius’ marriage to Agrippina. Before marrying his niece, Claudius first consulted the Senate and claimed that he would yield to their authority (*auctoritati senatus cederet*). Tacitus’ continues his account by stating that the Senate not only approved of the marriage but claimed that they would use force if he hesitated.\(^{53}\) The critical issue in this passage is Tacitus’ awareness that self-interest was promoted under the guise that the Senate was the leading authority.\(^{54}\)

\(^{47}\) Tac. *Ann.* 16.24  
\(^{48}\) Tac. *Hist.* 4.8  
\(^{49}\) Benario (1964) pp. 101-102  
\(^{50}\) Tac. *Ann.* 16.2  
\(^{51}\) Syme (1958) p. 412.  
\(^{52}\) Tac. *Ann.* 13.4; Benario (1964) p.103  
\(^{53}\) Tac. *Ann.*12.5-7  
\(^{54}\) Syme (1958)p. 412
Tacitus describes Tiberius’ false deference when he hesitates to accept the role of princeps in the presence of the Senate even though he had already sent letters to the armies as if he was already in power. In Tacitus’ account of Augustus’ funeral, the senators express their desire to carry Augustus’ body to the funeral pyre and Tiberius yields to their wishes in what Tacitus describes as an arrogant moderation (adroganti moderatione). Ellen O’Gorman interprets this apparent reluctance to carry the body as a symbolic refusal to bear the burden of Augustus’ example. Likewise, she cites a passage in which Tiberius modestly hesitates to take up the burden of empire since only Augustus was capable of such a task (ille varie disserebat de magnitudine imperii sua modestia. solam divi Augusti mentem tantae molis capacem). Thus, the outwardly modest refusal to accept the burden of Augustus’ position as princeps paradoxically establishes Tiberius as a successor to Augustus’ model.

**Tacitus on Augustus**

Tacitus describes Augustus’ moderation when he states that the princeps, with the appearance of refusing (specie recusantis), desired to have Lucius and Gaius be named principes iuventutis and become consuls. The use of species indicates the insincerity of the gesture. Tacitus also states that Augustus carried himself as a consul (consulem se ferens). This implies that Augustus conveyed an image that his position was not tyrannical and was in keeping with Republican norms. However, Tacitus recognizes the pretense and his already negative view of the Principate as a despotism is exacerbated by the show of false moderation.

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55 Tac. Ann. 1.7; See also Syme (1958) p. 412  
56 Tac. Ann. 1.8; Syme (1958) p. 416  
57 Tac. Ann. 1.11.1  
59 Tac. Ann. 1.3  
60 Tac. Ann. 1.2  
61 Syme (1958), p. 409; Percival (1980) p. 120
Tacitus also suggests that the moderate refusal is a fallacy when he states that Augustus accepted all things worn by civil discord under his imperium in the name of a princeps (qui cuncta discordiis civilibus fessa nomine principis sub imperium accepit). The acceptance of all things (cuncta... accepit) is likely Tacitus’ subversion of the Res Gestae’s claim that Augustus rejected honors and offices. It is also noteworthy that Tacitus states that Augustus accepted power in the name of a princeps. Similarly, Tacitus asserts that the state was restored by neither a monarchy nor a dictatorship but in the name of a princeps (non regno tamen neque dictatura sed principis nomine constitutam rem publicam). Perhaps, Tacitus’ use of nomine implies that he understands the term princeps as simply a more acceptable appellation for a monarch who absorbed the functions of state in himself (munia senatus magistratum legum in se trahere).

F. Haverfield’s comparison of the Res Gestae and the Annales provides an important insight into Tacitus’ alteration of Augustus’ memory. The Res Gestae states that Augustus freed the state from the domination of a faction (rem publicam a dominatione factionis oppressam in libertatem vindicavi). However, Tacitus states that Augustus acted with a desire for domination (cupidine dominandi), a contradiction of the sentiment expressed in the Res Gestae. Thus, one can see that Tacitus criticizes the first emperor by using language similar to that found in the text praising him.

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62 Tac. Ann. 1.1
64 Tac. Ann. 1.9
65 Tac. Ann. 1.2; Haverfield (1912) p. 197; Syme (1958) p. 408
66 Res Gestae 1
67 Tac. Ann. 1.10
68 Haverfield (1912) pp. 197-199; Compare Suetonius’ straightforward rendering of the Res Gestae, as will be seen in the fourth chapter, with Tacitus’ critical interpretation of the text. As will be seen in the next chapter, Suetonius did not have a similar experience under the rule of a tyrant. Thus, Suetonius regards Augustus favorably and attributes the vices of an emperor to the
Tacitus does not only criticize Augustus’ *moderatio* with his own diction but also by imitating his refusals. The historian claims that he would only discuss a few things about Augustus from the end of his reign and continue with his account of Tiberius and his successors (*inde consilium mihi pauba de Augusto et extrema tradere, mox Tiberii principatum et cetera*). However, as discussed above, Tacitus gives considerable attention to Augustus’ actions in establishing the Principate and does not limit his account to the end of his reign. The false *recusatio* of Tacitus can be considered a literary parallel to the insincere refusal of Augustus.

Tacitus depicts Tiberius refusing the title of *pater patriae* in keeping with Augustus’ model. However, he continues by stating that Tiberius did not establish trust in his civic sensibility since he reinstated the law of treason (*non tamen ideo faciebat fidem civilis animi nam legem maiestatis reduxerat*). Tacitus also explains that the law had previously been limited to treasonous acts but Augustus was the first to apply the law to writings (*facta arguebantur, dicta inpune erant. primus Augustus cognitionem de famosis libellis specie legis eius tractavit*). Thus, one can see a contradiction between Augustus’ outwardly moderate refusals and his immoderate laws restricting free speech, which, in Tacitus’ view, became precedents for Tiberius and later emperors to emulate. Tacitus’ criticism of Augustus stems from his negative personal failings of that individual. Although both authors had access to the same text, Tacitus’ negative experience under Domitian influenced his interpretation of Augustus’ reign. See von Fritz (1957) pp. 77-78.

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69 Tac. *Ann.* 1.1
71 Tac. *Ann.* 1.72; Syme (1958) p. 432
72 See von Fritz (1957) pp. 94-95; O’Gorman (1995) pp. 102, 105-106, 110, and 113 for Augustus’ precedents; See discussion above regarding Nero’s charge of *maiestas* against Thrasea.
perception of the Principate after living through the reign of Domitian. For Tacitus, Domitian’s tyranny was made possible by innovations that were established by Augustus.\footnote{See von Fritz (1957) p. 78; Contra Benario (1964) pp. 98-99}

Some scholars argue that Tacitus was not as critical as he appears and recognized that the failures of the late Republic were remedied by the Principate. For instance, Tacitus claims that the late Republic was marked by civil strife, during which time there was neither custom nor law (\textit{non mos, non ius}).\footnote{Tac. \textit{Ann.} 3.28} Tacitus also states that the senators who had not been killed in the proscriptions were weary from years of civil war. Moreover, Augustus offered them opportunities to advance in wealth and distinction. Thus, the nobility accepted a monarchy since they preferred the safety of the present to the dangers of the past (\textit{ceteri nobilium, quanto quis servitio promptior, opibus et honoribus extollerentur ac novis ex rebus aucti tuta et praesentia quam vetera et periculosa mallent}).\footnote{Tac. \textit{Ann.} 1.1} Thus, according to this view, Tacitus does not romanticize the memory of the Republic but recognizes the benefit of peace and stability that the Principate established.\footnote{Syme (1958) pp. 547-550; Benario (1964) p. 97; Gallia (2012) p. 175}

However, Tacitus is not completely convinced that peace had been restored. While he acknowledges the existence of peace, he describes it as bloody (\textit{pacem sine dubio post haec, verum cruentam}).\footnote{Tac. \textit{Ann.} 1.10} In another passage, he states that the peace was cruel (\textit{saevae pacis}).\footnote{Tac. \textit{Hist.} 1.50} Likewise, Tacitus depicts Augustus’ reign as a time in which the Roman people profited from peace and the Principate (\textit{pace et principe uteremur}) but were more oppressed (\textit{acriora ex eo vincla}).\footnote{Tac. \textit{Ann.}3.28} Elizabeth Keitel argues that the \textit{maiestas} prosecutions were essentially like civil wars...
being waged against the Roman people for the benefit of the emperor.\textsuperscript{80} As Wallace- Hadrill argues, Tacitus depicts the Principate as a “ruthless pursuit of self-advantage” that undermines “any merit in the establishment of peace and security.”\textsuperscript{81} Thus, the violence that occurred under the Principate weakened the princeps’ claims of restoring peace.

\textit{Conclusion}

This chapter has argued that Tacitus’ relationship with Agricola and his career during Domitian’s reign have influenced his perception of the Principate. Like Pliny, Tacitus saw firsthand the negative aspects of having an emperor. As a result, Tacitus is critical of the princeps’ false moderation and his capacity to inflict harm on Roman citizens. However, while Pliny had to disguise his criticism of a living princeps, Tacitus could express his frustrations more freely when writing about past emperors. The disapproval of the emperor’s false \textit{moderatio} can be seen in explicit references to the imperial practice of feigning deference to the Senate. Moreover, Tacitus’ literary \textit{recusatio} regarding Augustus’ reign is a more subtle criticism of the imperial pretence. The historian manipulates the wording of the \textit{Res Gestae} and the memory of Augustus as a moderate princeps to expose the modesty of the Principate as a sham. This negative perception of the emperor and of the Principate in general stems from his antipathy toward Domitian as a successor of the Augustan model.

\textsuperscript{80} Keitel (1984) pp. 306-325
\textsuperscript{81} Wallace-Hadrill (1983) p. 111.
Introduction

This chapter examines the role of Suetonius’ imperial career and his relationship with Pliny in his Lives of the Caesars. Suetonius’ work as a studiis, a bibliothecis and ab epistulis gave the biographer access to the emperor and to important documents from previous reigns, which he would use as source material for his Lives. Moreover, while Pliny had some influence over the biographer, it is important not to overemphasize the impact of the Panegyricus on the Lives. It is the contention of this chapter that Suetonius considered Augustus’ moderate behavior as a precedent for that of Trajan, as well as the Principate as a whole, instead of viewing Augustus through a Trajanic lens. Lastly, Suetonius understood the sincerity of imperial moderation as secondary to an emperor’s ability to maintain a moderate image.

Suetonius’ Background

There are many references to Suetonius’ intellectual background. The Suda states that Suetonius (Τράγκυλλος) was the author of various works, including the Lives. It also describes the biographer as a γραμματικὸς, a teacher of literature.\(^1\) Additionally, John the Lydian refers to Suetonius as a φιλολόγος,\(^2\) a lover of learning, and Pliny, Suetonius' patron, describes him as a

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\(^1\) Suda Τράγκυλλος
\(^2\) Lyd. Mag. 1.34
scholasticus, a teacher of rhetoric.\(^3\) These characterizations have distinct meanings but, generally, indicate that Suetonius had strong literary interests.\(^4\)

In a letter to Trajan recommending the *ius triorum liberorum* for Suetonius, Pliny refers to the biographer as *probissimum honestissimum eruditissimum virum*, which further illustrates his scholarly prowess.\(^5\) Additional letters of Pliny shed more light his patron-client relationship with Suetonius.\(^6\) In Letter 1.24, Pliny calls Suetonius his *contubernalis* when he is helping his client buy an estate at a good price.\(^7\) In Letter 5.8, Pliny refers to his friendship with Suetonius as an *amore mutuo* when he prods his client to publish his hendecasyllables. Lastly, in Letter 3.8, Pliny alludes to a military *tribunate* that he secured for Suetonius, which the latter had refused. Pliny commends Suetonius for refusing the position so that his relative, Caesennius Silvanus, would receive the equestrian office.\(^8\) These letters are evidence of Suetonius’ intimate relationship with Pliny that extended beyond the parameters of simply being contemporary writers.

The fragmentary inscription from Hippo Regius in honor of C. Suetonius Tranquillus has revealed important information regarding the biographer’s career as *a studiis, a bibliothecis*, and *ab epistulis*.\(^9\) Suetonius’ scholarly interests and his relationship with Pliny may have led to Suetonius’ appointment to positions in the imperial bureaucracy. While the inscription refers to Suetonius’ work under Trajan and Hadrian, it is unclear under which emperor Suetonius held each office. The *Historia Augusta* states that Hadrian dismissed both the praetorian prefect

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\(^3\) Plin. *Ep*. 1.24  
\(^5\) Plin *Ep*. 10.94  
\(^6\) For Pliny’s Letters relating to Suetonius, see Plin. *Ep*. 1.18; 1.24; 3.8; 5.10; 9.34; 10.94-95  
\(^7\) Plin *Ep*. 1.24  
\(^8\) Plin *Ep*. 3.8 Perhaps this refusal is an example of Suetonius’ own display of moderation.  
\(^9\) See Marec and Pflaum (1952) pp. 76-85; A.E. 1953, no. 73
Septicius Clarus and Suetonius, who is described as Hadrian’s *magister epistularum*, for behaving too informally toward the emperor’s wife.  

The reference to Suetonius as a *magister epistularum* indicates that he was *ab epistulis* during the reign of Hadrian. It is also likely that Suetonius held the posts of *a studiiis* and *a bibliothecis* under Trajan. The inscription and the *Historia Augusta* passage shed light on Suetonius’ career and provide modern scholars with insight into how his experiences potentially informed his writing.

Gascou states that after Pliny’s death, Septicius Clarus became Suetonius’ patron and later helped the biographer attain the post of *ab epistulis* during Hadrian’s reign. The exchanging of letters between Pliny and Septicius Clarus before the former’s death indicates that the three figures belonged to the same “cercle d’amis.” Some scholars have suggested that the troubled relationship that Suetonius and Septicius Clarus had with Hadrian can be seen in allusions in the *Lives* criticizing the emperor. However, David Wardle is skeptical of this notion and, instead, argues that “the search for a hidden purpose to the *Caesares* is delusive: they make perfect sense as… a novel presentation of the first twelve emperors.” Wardle continues by stating that Suetonius’ work was informed by a societal notion of the ideal *princeps* and focuses on how well each Caesar lived up to that notion. Wardle is correct to understand the *Lives* as a work primarily focusing on past emperors. Yet, the basis for Suetonius’ perception of the ideal *princeps* deserves further elaboration. It is the aim of this chapter to illustrate the Augustan

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12 Gascou (1978) p. 441; see Plin *Ep*. 1.1; 1.15; 7.28; 8.1 for letters addressed to Septicius Clarus
14 Wardle (1998). 446-447. ; see also Bradley (1991) p. 3723 who, on the basis of the insecure chronology of the *Lives*’ publication, argues against the notion that Suetonius was praising Trajan and criticizing Hadrian when writing his *Lives*. Like Wardle, Bradley believes it is more likely that Suetonius is measuring each emperor according to their adherence to the “component parts” of the ideal emperor.
influence on Suetonius’ notion of the ideal prínceps and to deemphasize contemporary factors shaping his portrayal of the twelve Caesars.

Contemporary Influences

As seen above, Suetonius had a close relationship with Pliny and had some exposure to Trajan. Based on this relationship, some scholars have argued that Pliny’s depiction of Trajan as the optimus princeps influenced Suetonius’ understanding and representation of the emperors discussed in the Lives. Pliny’s letter to Vibius Severus states that the Panegyricus was written not only to commend Trajan in his virtues but also to provide an exemplum for future principes to follow. Wallace-Hadrill suggests that another use for the Panegyricus was to judge past emperors according to those same virtues. According to this rationale, Suetonius’ discussion of the virtues and vices of past emperors is indebted, to some extent, to Pliny’s description of Trajan’s virtues. Likewise, della Corte argues that Pliny supplied Suetonius with a paradigm of characterizing emperors by means of rubrics listing examples of their virtues or vices. Suetonius’ discussion and presentation of virtues was likely influenced by Pliny. However, the biographer’s awareness of key imperial virtues and the moderate image of the emperor stems from his adherence to primary source evidence from Augustus’ reign that depict such qualities.

For instance, Suetonius often cites letters written by Augustus, which suggests that the biographer understood the first prínceps well enough that he did not have to construct an image of the emperor from his knowledge of the Panegyricus. Della Corte suggests that Suetonius was

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16 Plin Ep. 3.18.1-3
18 Della Corte (1958) p. 80.
influenced by the *Panegyricus*’ depiction of Trajan as the emperor who respected the Senate and reconciled the conflicting notions of *principatus* and *libertas*. However, there are many examples of Augustus’ deference toward the Senate as well. Suetonius states that there were many *documenta* that attest to Augustus’ clemency and civility. In this rubric outlining Augustus’ moderate behavior, Suetonius states that when senators were insolent or spoke out against the *princeps*, Augustus refrained from punishing them. Moreover, Suetonius also states that Augustus vetoed a law that would have limited freedom of speech in wills. While Suetonius does not describe each of the *documenta* that he is citing, the biographer explicitly quotes a letter to Tiberius instructing him not to get upset when people speak ill of the emperor. This letter from the *princeps* supports the notion that Suetonius recognized Augustus’ emphasis on free speech and senatorial dignity from Augustan rather than Trajanic sources.

Suetonius’ citation of Augustus’ letter is not an isolated incident. For instance, Suetonius had access to letters written by Augustus and used them as sources for his biographies on Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius. As mentioned above, Suetonius worked as *a studiis* and *a bibliothecis* for Trajan and had access to important documents for the reigns of each emperor. Therefore, Suetonius’ career played an important role in the publication of this work. One can see that Suetonius’ overall perception of Augustus stems from his familiarity with documents from the *princeps* himself and not just from the writings of later authors.

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19 Della Corte (1958) pp. 88-91; Plin. *Pan.* 36.4; also Tac. *Agr.* 3.1
21 Suet. *Aug.* 54
22 Suet. *Aug.* 56
23 Suet. *Aug.* 51
24 Suet. *Tib.* 21; *Tib.* 23; *Cal.* 8; *Cl.* 3-4; *Vita Horati*
Keith R. Bradley suggests that Suetonius’ work was inspired by the image of the ideal princeps found in both the *Res Gestae* and the *Panegyricus*. However, this ideal image, for both Pliny and Suetonius, originates from their memory of Augustus’ Principate. Suetonius states that Augustus wrote a list of his achievements, which he wished to be inscribed on bronze tablets and set up at the entrance of his mausoleum. It is evident that Suetonius was familiar with the bronze inscription and used it as a source for his discussion of Augustus’ moderate image.

One can find commonalities between Suetonius’ account and the *Res Gestae* regarding Augustus’ moderate refusals. Suetonius states that when the people offered Augustus the dictatorship he not only refused it but begged them with his chest bare. Although Suetonius’ version is somewhat exaggerated, he is likely drawing on Augustus’ refusal of the dictatorship as described in the *Res Gestae*. Suetonius also states that Augustus melted down silver statues of himself and used the proceeds to dedicate golden tripods to Palatine Apollo (atque etiam argenteas statuas olim sibi positas conflavit omnis exque iis aureas cortinas Apollini Palatino dedicavit). This statement is likely taken from the *Res Gestae*, which describes a similar episode (Statuae meae pedestres et equestres et in quadrigeis argenteae steterunt in urbe XXC circiter, quas ipse sustuli exque ea pecunia dona aurea in aede Apollinis... posuit).

The biographer alludes to Augustus’ pietas when he describes the emperor’s offering to Apollo. Suetonius makes a similar allusion to the emperor’s pietas when he states that Augustus rebuilt temples that had been in poor condition (aedes sacras vetustate conlapsas aut incendio

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27 Suet. Aug. 101
28 Suet. Aug. 52
29 *Res Gestae* 5
30 Suet. Aug. 52
31 *Res Gestae* 24
absumptas refecit). Although one could connect this example to Pliny’s reference to Trajan’s temple restoration in the Panegyricus, the description in the Res Gestae of Augustus’ rebuilding of eighty-two temples is a more likely influence on the biographer (duo et octoginta templa deum in urbe consul sextum ex auctoritate senatus refeci nullo praetermisso quod eo tempore refici debeat). As discussed in the first chapter, Augustus’ emphasis on temple rebuilding highlighted the emperor’s pietas. Thus, the importance of restoring temples, as seen in the Panegyricus and the Lives, indicates that Augustus’ example was still relevant in the early second century.

Suetonius claims that Augustus refused to be called dominus and even forbade his children and grandchildren from using the title whether in jest or in seriousness. While it is unclear what source Suetonius is using, the depiction of Augustus’ aversion to the title dominus is not Trajanic. One might argue that the Panegyricus’ antipathy toward the title inspired Suetonius depiction of Augustus. However, the Res Gestae illustrates this sentiment as well when Augustus states per quem rem publicam a dominatione factionis oppressam in libertatem vindicavi. Thus, the ideal that Augustus established persisted into the second century instead of a Trajanic ideal being used to revise the memory of Augustus.

One can see Suetonius’ understanding of Augustus as a model for later emperors in passages from the Lives. The refusals of Tiberius, Claudius, and Vespasian reflect this

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32 Suet. Aug. 30
33 Plin. Pan. 51
34 Res Gestae 20; for more on the emperor and religion see Lewis (1991) p. 3634.
36 Suet. Aug. 53
37 See Plin. Pan. 45 scis ut sunt diversa natura dominatio et principatus and Pan 85 dominationis impatiens
38 Res Gestae 1
understanding. In Suetonius’ depiction of the incivilis Domitian, one can see a reversal of the Augustan model. For instance, Domitian wished to be called dominus et deus and also had statues of himself set up on the Capitol that were made of silver and gold. These actions are contradictory to the example set by Augustus but it is still clear that Suetonius is judging Domitian according to Augustan values. Suetonius also alludes to Augustan clementia when he describes the beginning of Nero’s reign. The biographer states that Nero exhibited this virtue during this time since he was following Augustus’ example (ex Augusti praescripto imperaturum se professus, neque liberalitatis neque clementiae, ne comitatis quidem ex hibendae ullam occasionem omisit). This statement is evidence of Suetonius’ recognition of Augustus as the exemplum for future emperors.

In addition to Augustus’ refusals of silver statues and the dictatorship, Suetonius portrays Augustus as affable and approachable toward the Senate, which truly underscores Augustus’ civilitas. Suetonius also points out that Augustus greeted each senator by name and without a prompter, attended the anniversaries of many senators, and visited a sick senator named Gallius Cerrinus with whom Augustus was not even well acquainted. Suetonius also states that Augustus refused the title of pater patriae until the end of his life (ad ultimum finem vitae). Each of these examples shows Suetonius’ adherence to a tradition that emphasized Augustus’

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40 Suet. Tib. 26; Suet. Cl. 12; Suet. Ves. 12
41 Lewis (1991) p. 3634; Suet. Dom 13; compare with Pliny’s mentioning of “bad” emperors having silver and gold statues in Pan. 52. Yet, both Suetonius and Pliny have in mind Augustus’ refusal of silver statues as depicted in the Res Gestae 24. The moderate refusal of statues made of precious metals is not indicative of Pliny’s influence on Suetonius but Augustus’ influence on posterity. See also Gallia (2012) pp. 124-125 for his comments on Domitian as dominus et deus.
42 Suet. Nero 10
43 Suet. Aug. 53
44 Suet. Aug. 58
example of moderation while Pliny and Tacitus, who possibly had access to the same sources as Suetonius, are more critical of it.

While describing Otho’s pre-imperial career, Suetonius states that when Otho was appointed as governor of Lusitania he administered the province with moderation and self-restraint (provinciam administravit quaestorius per decem annos, moderatione atque abstinentia singulari). This moderate image is entirely consistent with Augustus’ self-representation and Suetonius’ depiction of the first princeps. Suetonius pairs moderation (moderatio) and self-restraint (abstinentia) again at the end of the Life of Domitian. Suetonius states that Domitian had a dream that he had a golden hump on his back, which meant that his successors would bring about a golden age. Suetonius claims that this was true as a result of the moderation and self-restraint of Domitian’s successors: Nerva, Trajan, and Hadrian (sicut sane brevi evenit abstinentia et moderatione insequentium principum).

R.G. Lewis correctly points out that although Trajan was the optimus princeps, Augustus was the auctor of the optimus status and established the civilis precedent for his successors to follow. It was the reigns of his successors—both good and bad—which helped shape the idea of how a princeps should behave. It is quite possible that Suetonius recognized this as well. No emperor in the Lives was completely able to live up to Augustus’ model. Even the so-called good emperors are still depicted as with flaws that subordinate them to Augustus. As seen in the

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45 Suet. Otho 3.2
46 Suet. Dom 23.2
48 For criticism of Vespasian’s cupiditas pecuniae see Suet Ves. 16; See the discussion in Wallace-Hadrill (1983) p. 114-115 for Titus’ premature death in Suet. Tit. 10 as a reason not to count the emperor as equal to Augustus; Claudius’ incestuous relationship with Agrippina as described in Suet Cl. 26 likely disqualifies him as well. Suetonius in Aug. 71 discusses charges (criminibus) against Augustus’ character but these are dismissed as slanders (maledictis). The
account of Domitian’s dream, one could conclude that Suetonius is praising the contemporary dynasty of Nerva, Trajan, and Hadrian as the emperors who were finally able to live up to Augustus’ exemplum fully.\(^{49}\)

The Moderate Image and its Sincerity

Augustus’ refusals, especially with regard to the dictatorship, can be clearly seen as Suetonius contrasting the civilitas of the princeps with the arrogantia of Julius Caesar. For instance, Suetonius writes that Julius Caesar accepted an excessive amount of honors (honores modo nimios receipt) such as the perpetuam dictaturam, the cognomen patris patriae, and templæ, aras, and simulacra iuxta deos, all of which Augustus refused.\(^{50}\) Suetonius’ implicit comparison of Julius Caesar and Augustus is meant to characterize Augustus’ reign in a positive manner.\(^{51}\) This comparison serves to intensify the distinction that the biographer makes between civilitas and arrogantia. This distinction is also present within Suetonius’ representation of Octavian the triumvir and Augustus the princeps. Suetonius portrays Augustus as the model princeps and does not attribute any vices to him once he establishes the Principate. Wallace-Hadrill states that Suetonius separates his account of Octavian’s poor behavior as triumvir from the rest of the biography, which highlights Augustus’ civility as princeps.\(^{52}\) Thus, one can see a dichotomy in the representation of Octavian and Augustus.

In Suetonius’ account of Octavian, the triumvir is portrayed as a cruel and ruthless leader, quite unlike how is depicted as princeps. For instance, Suetonius writes that after the battle of

\(^{49}\) Suet. Dom. 23
\(^{50}\) Suet. Jul. 76
Philippi, Octavian was not moderate in his victory (*nec successum victoriae moderatus est*). This quote is especially glaring considering the importance of *moderatio* as a key virtue of a good *princeps*. Suetonius continues by stating that Octavian sent Brutus’ decapitated head to Rome to be placed before the statue of Julius Caesar (*sed capite Bruti Romam misso, ut statuae Caesaris subiceretur*). Moreover, Suetonius describes Octavian as accosting captives, such as when a man begged for a burial and Octavian replied *iam istam volucrum fore potestam*. Kenneth Scott argues that Suetonius’ accounts of Brutus’ head and Octavian’s treatment of prisoners were likely based on sources hostile to the *triumvir* and were not used by other ancient writers. However, Suetonius is skeptical of evidence depicting Octavian in a positive manner as well.

Suetonius states that Octavian was reluctant to carry out the proscriptions at first but once they had begun, he performed them with greater severity than either of the other *triumviri*. This episode is antithetical to the depiction of Octavian’s *clementia* in the so-called *Laudatio Turiae*. Moreover, the passage contradicts the negative image of Lepidus that exists in the *laudatio*. Suetonius states that Lepidus addressed the Senate and agreed to end the proscription in the hope of clemency in the future since there had been enough punishment (*cum peracta proscriptione M. Lepidus in senatu excusasset praeterita et spem clementiae in posterum fecisset, quoniam satis poenarum exactum esset*). It is unclear whether Suetonius would have been familiar with

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53 Suet. *Aug.* 13.1
55 Suet. *Aug.* 13.1
56 Suet. *Aug.* 13.2
57 Scott, (1933) p 22.
58 Suet. *Aug.* 27.1
59 Suet. *Aug.* 27
the laudatio. Yet, based on Suetonius’ reversal of the laudatio’s presentation of Octavian and Lepidus, he was likely aware of Augustan era sources making similar claims.

In keeping with this negative depiction of Octavian, Suetonius utilizes Octavian’s lack of moderatio and his eagerness for taking office to exemplify his incivilitas. He states that Octavian took a consulship by the threat of force. According to this account, Octavian led his army against Rome and sent messengers demanding that the triumvir be given the office. When the Senate hesitated, Cornelius, a centurion and the leader of the delegation, showed the hilt of his sword and threatened that “this will make him consul if you do not” (hic faciet, si vos non feceritis). This abrasive approach in dealing with the Senate is quite the opposite of how Suetonius portrays Augustus later as emperor.

Another example of Octavian’s cruelty as triumvir is his handling of the conflict with Lucius Antonius at Perusia. Suetonius states that Octavian forced Lucius to capitulate by means of starvation. He also provides an account of Octavian performing human sacrifices at the altar dedicated to Julius Caesar and states 300 hundred senators and just as many equestrians were sacrificed. Suetonius writes that when a man begged Octavian to be spared he simply replied moriendum esse. Like Propertius, Suetonius recognizes Octavian’s/Augustus’ capacity for heinous acts. However, Suetonius makes a distinction between Octavian the bad triumvir and Augustus the moderate princeps on the basis of behavior whereas Propertius holds the emperor accountable for his past transgressions.

It is difficult to reconcile Suetonius’ depiction of a “bad” triumvir and “good” princeps, especially when some scholars argue that generally those living in antiquity regarded character

60 Suet. Aug. 26.1
61 Suet. Aug. 14
62 Suet. Aug. 15
63 Suet. Aug. 15
as innate and static. Yet, if character is unchanging, Suetonius could be implying that Augustus’ moderate behavior is not sincere. One can see evidence of this insincerity when Suetonius describes Augustus’ death. The princeps is depicted as asking if he completed the farce of his life suitably (minum vitae commodo transegisse). Perhaps this episode indicates that Suetonius viewed the princeps’ moderate image as a farce. However, in an earlier statement, Suetonius states that Augustus thought about restoring the Republic on two occasions and claims that he did not know whether Augustus’ decision to keep power in his hands had better intentions or consequences. Here, Suetonius indicates both his approval of the Principate and a belief that the establishment of the institution emanated from Augustus’ good nature. This depiction further obscures the intent of the farce statement as well as the role of the dichotomy of Octavian and Augustus.

For more clarity on the issue of sincerity, one must look to its importance in the Lives of Augustus’ successors. Tiberius’ cruelty was perceived even when he was a child by his teacher, Theodorus of Gadara. Suetonius also remarks that Tiberius was only courting favor earlier in his reign by a moderationis simulatione. Suetonius is implying that one does not simply become bad but one has those vices all along. Thus, Tiberius was just expressing his true character. This idea of an emperor displaying an image that is different from his innate character can be seen in Suetonius’ accounts of Caligula and Nero. Suetonius marks a shift in his treatment of the reign by stating that up to this point he had been writing about Caligula as a princeps and that now he was going to write about Caligula the monster (Hactenus quasi de principe, reliqua ut de

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65 See Hammond (1965) pp. 139-162, especially p. 145 for the argument in favor of Augustus’ sincerity.
67 Suet Aug. 28
68 Suet. Tib. 57
monstro narranda sunt). Like Caligula, Nero falsely exhibits good traits at the beginning of his reign but eventually reveals his true character. As seen above, Suetonius states that Nero initially emulated Augustus’ liberalitas, clementia, and comitas. Suetonius writes that Nero gradually stopped trying to conceal his vices and became even worse (Paulatim vero invalescentibus vitiis iocularia et latebras omisit nullaque dissimulandi cura ad maiora palam erupit).

The common theme among each of these three Lives is that the emperors’ display of moderation degenerates over time. All three emperors yielded to their nefarious tendencies. However, Augustus behaved immorally in his youth and conveyed a moderate image later in his life when he became princeps. While Suetonius’ reference to the farce of Augustus’ life might suggest that the emperor was insincere, the biographer’s chief concern is not whether the princeps was genuine in his modesty but that he consistently behaved in such a manner.

This chapter has examined Suetonius’ imperial career as an aid to his literary exploits. Moreover, the de-emphasis of Pliny’s role in framing Suetonius’ perception of past emperors allows for a better understanding of Suetonius’ impression of Augustus’ moderation and sources from that period. Much of Suetonius’ depiction of Augustus adheres to the princeps’ own self-representation in his letters and in the Res Gestae. Perhaps Augustus appears in an overwhelmingly positive light since Suetonius’ approach to the sources reflects the genre of biography in which he is writing. This chapter also has attempted to understand Suetonius’ position regarding the sincerity of Augustus. The emperor’s earlier bad behavior as triumvir could imply that his true character was more sinister than his outward appearance as princeps. While Suetonius explicitly acknowledges the dangerous of feigned modesty in other emperors who eventually revert to their cruel inner natures, the biographer vaguely alludes to insincerity.

69 Suet. Cal. 22
70 Suet. Nero 27
on Augustus’ part and prefers to commend the emperor’s consistent display of moderation.

Whereas Pliny and Tacitus are critical of the Principate given their experiences under Domitian, Suetonius’ post-Domitianic career can perhaps explain the absence of such strong negative feelings.
Chapter 5
Cassius Dio and the Value of Imperial Moderation

Introduction

This final chapter will discuss Cassius Dio’s career and experiences under the reigns of emperors who exhibited immoderate behavior. Next, this chapter will argue that the Maecenas speech in Book 52 contains examples of Augustus’ moderation that already existed in the historical tradition. Dio also ascribes his own ideas of a moderate princeps to the memory of Augustus in reaction to the troubles of his own era. Lastly, this chapter will examine Dio’s avoidance of polarity in his representation of Octavian and Augustus. Furthermore, it will analyze on linguistic and thematic grounds Dio’s awareness of and lack of hostility to the insincerity of Augustus’ moderate refusals.

Cassius Dio’s Background

Cassius Dio was born in Nicaea approximately between 163-165 CE. Dio was the son of a senator and enjoyed a senatorial career himself. Based on Dio’s use of the first person plural in his account of Commodus’ reign to describe himself and other senators, one can determine that Dio was already a member of the Senate during Commodus’ rule. Dio became praetor in either 194 or 195 after Pertinax appointed him to the position in 193. He was later given a consulship during the reign of Septimius Severus and also advised the emperor as an amicus principis.

2 Millar (1964) p. 14; Cassius Dio 73.16.3 ἡμᾶς τε καὶ τὰς γυναίκας ἡμῶν (The text used in this chapter is from the Loeb edition of Dio’s Historiae Romanae)
4 Barnes (1984) p. 243; Cassius Dio 77.16.4 (for consulship) and 77.17.1-2 (amicus principis).
indicates that his role as advisor continued during the reign of Caracalla.\(^5\) Dio also states that the emperor Macrinus named him *curator* of Pergamum and Smyrna.\(^6\) Dio later became consul in 229 with the emperor Severus Alexander, which would be his last office before retiring in Bithynia.\(^7\)

Although owing his political career to these emperors, Dio’s comments indicate that this period was a turbulent time during which emperors exhibited immoderate behavior. He states that Commodus committed terrible acts and killed many people (ὁτι ὁ Κόμμοδος πολλὰ μὲν καὶ ἀπρεπῆ ἐπραξὲ, πλεῖστους δὲ ἐφόνευσε).\(^8\) In Dio’s account of the civil wars leading to Septimius Severus’ accession to the throne, the emperor is described as cutting off Clodius Albinus’ head and fixing it to a pole.\(^9\) Dio continues his account by claiming that Septimius Severus delivered a speech praising the harshness of Marius, Sulla, and Augustus. Dio also states that the speech criticized the Senate for its hostility to Commodus.\(^10\) In his account of the reign of Caracalla, Dio states that the emperor executed many distinguished men (ὅσους τῶν ἐπιφανῶν οὐδεμιᾷ δίκη ἀπέκτεινε).\(^11\) Dio claims that Elagabalus also had many prominent men killed.\(^12\) Thus, one can see that Dio’s career coincided with the reigns of tyrannical emperors.

These chaotic events likely influenced Dio’s work. For instance, the debate between Agrippa and Maecenas in Book 52 contains references to the moderate behavior of an ideal *princeps* which were likely a reaction to the despotic behavior of the emperors from Dio’s

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5 Barnes (1984) p. 244; Cassius Dio 78.17.3-4
6 Barnes (1984) p. 244; Cassius Dio 79.7.4
7 Barnes (1984) pp. 244-245; Cassius Dio 80.1.2-2.1 and 80.5.3
8 Millar (1964) p. 125; Cassius Dio 73.4
9 Cassius Dio 76.7
10 Cassius Dio 76.8; Millar (1964) pp. 141-142.
11 Cassius Dio 78.6.1; Millar (1964) p. 151
12 Cassius Dio 80. 3-7; Millar (1964) p. 169
lifetime. Some scholars have offered various suggestions regarding the date and the reign in which Book 52 was composed. However, as Duncan Fishwick suggests, finding a precise date for Dio’s composition of the text is neither certain nor of primary importance. One does not need to juxtapose the message of Maecenas’ speech in Book 52 to the actions of a particular Severan emperor. Instead, one could understand the speech as a reaction to the general political climate in which Dio lived.

Maecenas/Agrippa Debate

In Book 52, Cassius Dio provides a fabricated debate between Agrippa and Maecenas, each of whom are appealing to Octavian to adopt their preferred form of government. Agrippa unconvincingly tries to convince Octavian to restore the Republic and not take up sole power. On the other hand, Maecenas advocates for the adoption of a monarchic form of government. Maecenas suggests that if Octavian restores the Republic, he could become vulnerable to those who hold a grudge against him. This argument is similar to what Suetonius describes in his Life of Augustus when he states that Augustus thought about restoring the Republic on two occasions but decided not to do so out of concern for his well-being and that of the state (De reddenda re p. bis cogitauit...sed reputans et se priuatum non sine periculo fore et illam plurium arbitrio temere

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14 Millar (1964) p. 104 suggests that Book 52 was written during Caracalla’s reign in 214 CE while Barnes (1984) p. 254 argues that it was composed in 223 during the reign of Severus Alexander.
15 Fishwick (1990) p. 275
17 Cassius Dio 52.14-40
18 Cassius Dio 52.17; see also 52.15.5-6
committi, in retinenda perseueravit, dubium euentu meliore an uoluntate). It is likely that Cassius Dio is using Suetonius as a source or their accounts are based on a common tradition.

In this representation, Maecenas advises Octavian on how to conduct himself as a monarch. Fergus Millar argues that the suggestions given by Maecenas serve as a “political pamphlet” to address the issues of Cassius Dio’s own day. Unlike Tacitus who blames the Principate and its founder for making the tyranny of Domitian possible, Cassius Dio favors the monarchic system but believes that it should be managed differently than Caracalla and the Severan emperors had done. The Maecenas speech was likely written to address the issues of Severan dynasty by invoking the memory of Augustus’ moderation as a solution. An important theme in the speech is the need for the emperor to exhibit this moderation and avoid discord by respecting the dignity of the upper classes.

On multiple occasions in the speech Cassius Dio provides ideas for an emperor to behave moderately toward the senatorial class. Maecenas states that he is not advising Octavian to become a tyrant and enslave the Senate and people but rather to consult the best men when making laws. Although this sentiment reflects imperial practice from the beginning of the Principate, not all of Dio’s suggestions for respecting the Senate are Augustan in origin. For instance, Dio portrays Maecenas as stating that embassies should be introduced before the Senate so that it seems as though the Senate was the leading authority (τὴν βουλὴν πάντων κυρίαν

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19 Suet. Aug. 28.1
23 Cassius Dio 52.15 (μὴ γάρ τοι οἰηθής ὅτι τυραννήσαι σοι, τὸν τε δῆμον καὶ τὴν βουλὴν δουλωσαμένως, παρανένθετο. τὸ ποτὲ μὲν γὰρ ὦτ’ ἂν ἑγὼ ποτὲ εἰπεῖ πάντως ὦτ’ ὂν σὺ πράξαι τολμήσεις: ἐκεῖνα δὲ δὴ καὶ καλὰ καὶ χρήσιμα καὶ σοι καὶ τῇ πόλει γένοιτο ἂν, τὸ τε πάντα τὰ προςήκοντα αὐτὸν σε μετὰ τῶν ἀρίστων ἀνδρῶν νομοθετεῖν)
24 Millar (1964) p. 117; Hammond (1932) pp. 90-91
δοκεῖν εἶναι).  

25 Millar claims that this point was an innovation by Cassius Dio.  

26 It would appear that Millar is correct since Augustus did not make this concession to the Senate. As seen in the  

Res Gestae, Augustus repeatedly claims that embassies had gone to him to seek amicitia with Rome.  

27 Since he does not mention the Senate, it is clear that Maecenas’ statement was Dio’s creation and not based on Augustan practice. Dio, via Maecenas, also asserts that the emperor should enact all laws through the Senate (ἔπειτα δὲ ἂν πάντα τὰ νομοθετούμενα δι᾽ αὐτῶν ποιήσῃ).  

28 Millar argues that this is a reaction to the power of imperial edicts in determining law, as attested by Ulpian.  

29 Thus, from these examples, one can see evidence of Dio inserting issues from his era into his account of the founding of the Principate.  

Another suggestion for showing moderation that appears in Maecenas’ speech is the necessity for refusing of divine honors. Maecenas states that Octavian should not allow gold or silver images of himself to be made (καὶ εἰκόνας σου χρυσάς μὲν ἢ καὶ ἀργυράς μηδέποτε ἐπιτρέψῃς γενέσθαι).  

30 The reference to gold and silver images is reminiscent of Suetonius’ description of Augustus melting down silver statues of himself that had previously been erected. As seen in a previous chapter, Suetonius’ discussion of silver statues is based on Augustus’ own statement in the Res Gestae that he removed silver statues that had been set up in his honor.  

31 Duncan Fishwick argues that the implication of accepting gold and silver statues was that the honoree was accepting adulatio. If Octavian/Augustus were to accept such statues from the
Senate, the senatorial order would appear subordinate and its dignity would be damaged. Here, Cassius Dio is citing an actual Augustan practice to serve as a lesson for contemporary and future emperors and not is simply inserting his own ideals into his account of the refusal of statues.³²

Based on the assessment of these examples, one can see that Dio incorporates his own ideas for how a moderate emperor should behave along with the existing tradition of Augustus’ reign. Dio likely exploits Augustus’ status as a precedent for later emperors so that perhaps his ideas of imperial moderation would be accepted by contemporary and even later emperors. The main concern for Dio is concord between the emperor and the Senate.³³

*Cassius Dio on Octavian and Augustus*

As seen in the chapter on Suetonius, the biographer juxtaposes the moderate behavior of Augustus with the *incivilis* image of Octavian. However, Dio represents Octavian/Augustus in less polarizing terms by depicting the *princeps* and *triumvir* as neither totally good nor bad. As Meyer Reinhold writes,

> It is true that after 31 B.C. Dio reduces adverse details sharply, but he does not suppress unfavorable aspects of the action of the first *princeps*. He does present him after he achieved sole power in a generally more favourable light as imperial role model, but he does not resort to the conventional dualism of Octavian *adulescens carnifex* vs. Augustus *princeps optimus*.³⁴

While Dio still rates Octavian’s actions as *triumvir* negatively, Dio argues that Octavian behaved violently in extraordinary situations and that one could more justly blame the circumstances than Octavian himself (δικαιότερον ἄν τινα αὐτά τὰ πράγματα ἣ ἐκείνου αἰτιάσασθαι).\(^{35}\)

For instance, Cassius Dio states that Octavian spared Lucius Antonius at Perusia as well as some other people (καὶ αὐτὸς μὲν ἄλλοι τέ τινες ἀδειαν εὕροντο) before killing the city’s senators and equestrians (οἱ δὲ δὴ πλείους τῶν τε βουλευτῶν καὶ τῶν ἵππων ἐφθάρμενον).\(^{36}\) This brutal image of Octavian is consistent with the representations that are found in Propertius’ poems and Suetonius’ account of Perusia.\(^{37}\) However, this passage differs from the other accounts since it also shows Octavian’s capacity for clemency.

Dio vindicates Octavian’s bad reputation by stating that Octavian did not kill many people in the proscriptions because he was not cruel by nature (τῇ τε γὰρ φύσει οὐκ ὁμοὶ ἦν).\(^{38}\) For example, Dio mentions that Octavian saved many people and even rewarded those who helped the proscribed while punishing those who betrayed their friends and masters to the *triumviri*. Dio reports an instance where a woman named Tanusia hid her proscribed husband at the house of a freedman named Philopoemen. Tanusia later admits her deed to Octavian who pardons her and her husband, and also made Philopoemen an *eques*.\(^{39}\) Dio’s account bears some similarities to the image of Octavian’s *clementia* that is presented in the text of the so-called *Laudatio Turiae*. It is also reminiscent of Suetonius’ narrative which paints a slightly different picture by stating that Augustus gave Philopoemen equestrian status later (*postea*) as a way of

\(^{35}\) Cassius Dio 56.44.2; Reinhold and Swan (1990) p. 160.
\(^{36}\) Cassius Dio 48.14.3
\(^{37}\) See discussions in chapters 1 and 4; See also Scott (1933) pp. 26-28.
\(^{38}\) Cassius Dio 47.7.1-2; See Scott (1933) p. 19.
\(^{39}\) Cassius Dio 47.7.5
showing remorse for his past transgressions.\textsuperscript{40} Thus, Suetonius sharply distinguishes between Octavian and Augustus whereas Dio avoids such a division in his portrayal.

Dio rates Augustus’ Principate favorably and describes it as allowing the people to live in the liberty of moderation and a secure monarchy (ἐν τε ἔλευθερίᾳ σώφρονι καὶ ἐν μοναρχίᾳ ἀδεείζην).\textsuperscript{41} As Millar suggests, the security of the Principate was more important to Dio than the freedom of the Republic. He also recognized the importance of the \textit{princeps’} respect for the dignity of the Senate in order to not appear as a tyrant. Dio acknowledges the importance of moderate refusals to achieve this aim but does not avoid commenting on their insincerity.\textsuperscript{42} While Suetonius does not emphasize Augustus’ insincerity because it would undermine his positive portrayal of the emperor, Cassius Dio makes a more explicit recognition of Augustus’ disingenuousness. Yet, Dio does not criticize the emperor for this behavior but accepts the moderate refusal as a “noble lie.”\textsuperscript{43}

One can clearly see this duplicity in Cassius Dio’s depiction of Augustus’ refusal where he describes the \textit{princeps} as appearing unwilling on the surface but secretly desiring power. For instance, Dio portrays Octavian/Augustus as showing reluctance for power after his speech to the Senate when he writes that the senators forced Octavian, as it was pretended, to be absolute ruler (κατηγάκασαν δὴθεν αὐτὸν αὐταχρήσαι). Moreover, Cassius Dio writes that Augustus desired to set aside the monarchy for himself (οὕτως ὡς ἀληθῶς καταβέθαι τὴν μοναρχίαν ἐπεκθύμησε).\textsuperscript{44} The word καταβέθαι is ambiguous as it can mean “to put down” or “to set aside.

\textsuperscript{40} Suet. Aug. 27.2
\textsuperscript{41} Cassius Dio 56.43.4
\textsuperscript{42} Millar (1964) pp. 74-76.
\textsuperscript{43} Reinhold and Swan (1990) pp. 167-168.
\textsuperscript{44} Cassius Dio 53.11.5
for oneself.” However, translating καταθέσθαι in the sense that Octavian/Augustus desired to end his supremacy does not make sense in the context of the narrative.

In light of the insincerity discussed by Cassius Dio in his narrative of Octavian’s speech, one can see a continuing theme in Dio’s subsequent accounts of Augustus’ feigned unwillingness to receive power. When Dio describes Augustus taking a third ten-year term of imperium, he states that Augustus appeared unwilling (ἀκων δὴθεν). One can also see Augustus’ apparent unwillingness (ἀκων) in his acceptance of another ten-year term of imperium. This continuity is evident not only in its thematic content but by the similarity in diction.

To add further weight to the relevance of Cassius Dio’s diction, the author’s description of Pompey’s refusals will now be discussed. Dio writes that Pompey showed reluctance in taking the powers offered to him by the lex Gabinia. The diction he uses resembles that of his depiction of Augustus’ refusals. For instance, Dio writes:

As seen in the examples from his description of Augustus’ refusals, Dio presents Pompey as pretending to be unwilling (ἀκων) to take the power he actually desired (ἐπιθυμεῖν). Thus, Cassius Dio makes an implicit connection between Augustus and Pompey in his discussions of their duplicitous use of moderate refusals to fulfill their ambitions. This connection is made clearer when Augustus, while under compulsion (ἄναγκαίως), accepts the position as curator of

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45 http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=kataqesqai&la=greek#lexicon
47 Cassius Dio 55.6.1
48 Cassius Dio 56.28.1
50 Cassius Dio 36.24.6
the grain supply just as Pompey had done (καθάπερ ποτὲ τὸν Πομπήιον). Dio continues his account by stating that Augustus refused the dictatorship outright but only because he already possessed powers greater than a dictator (τὴν τε γὰρ ἐξουσίαν καὶ τὴν τιμὴν καὶ ὑπὲρ τοὺς δικτάτορας ἔχων). Thus, while this particular refusal was genuine, Cassius Dio’s Augustus only avoided the dictatorship because there was nothing to be gained.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the role that the political climate under Commodus and the Severan emperors had played in the composition of Cassius Dio’s Maecenas speech in Book 52. The speech that Dio provides contains examples of moderation that were consistent with Augustan tradition as well as innovations that addressed issues of his own day. Dio’s perception of Augustus is generally favorable. While Dio portrays Octavian the triumvir as capable of great cruelty, he softens this image with examples of his clemency. Dio also recognizes the disingenuousness of Augustus’ refusals but does not judge them with hostility. Having lived under regimes that were openly despotic, Dio could overlook the insincerity of an emperor’s moderate behavior.

51 Cassius Dio 54.1.3-4
Conclusion

Augustus presented a moderate image of himself in the *Res Gestae* by highlighting his refusals of offices and honors that conflicted with the *mos maiorum*. Similar depictions are also found in coins and Augustan monuments such as the Ara Pacis Augustae and the Laudatio Turiae. However, the contemporary poets Horace, Propertius, and Ovid are critical of this image and engage in literary *recusationes* that are a response to Augustus’ political refusals. Augustus’ moderate image served as a precedent for later emperors and, likewise, the response of the Augustan poets listed above was a model for authors to criticize the insincerity of political refusals.

Pliny’s praise of Trajan’s moderation in the *Panegyricus* reflects the impact Augustus’ example had on later emperors. However, Pliny’s apparent doublespeak indicates a perspective that is critical of the *princeps*. Perhaps Pliny’s view of the Principate stems from his career under Domitian and his perception of the emperor’s *maiestas* prosecutions. Pliny describes his experience during these executions as avoiding thunderbolts, which is a characterization of the emperor as Jupiter. This allusion to the king of the gods has a literary precedent in Statius’ false praise of Domitian, which likely followed the tradition of Horace and Ovid in comparing the emperor to Jupiter. Thus, one could argue that Pliny’s false praise of Trajan reflects his deeper mistrust of the Principate as a whole.

Much like Pliny, Tacitus had a political career during Domitian’s reign and attests to his crimes against the senatorial class, including his father-in-law Agricola. However, while a panegyric to a living emperor requires Pliny to use more veiled criticism, the history of past emperors allows Tacitus to be more explicit. Not only does Tacitus criticize emperors for their
cruelty but he also attacks them for their feigned moderation. Tacitus attributes these problems of
the Principate to its founder Augustus. Moreover, the historian’s literary recusatio regarding his
account of Augustus is both a criticism of the emperor and an imitation of his political refusals,
as seen in the work of the Augustan poets. Tacitus disparages Augustus again by using language
in the Res Gestae that praises Augustus’ moderation and by manipulating that diction in order to
criticize the modest image of the princeps.

On the other hand, Suetonius’ account of Augustus’ moderation adheres to the claims of
the Res Gestae and documents written by Augustus. Suetonius, unlike Pliny and Tacitus, enjoyed
a post-Domitianic career and did not experience the same issues that Pliny and Tacitus faced.
Moreover, one could also speculate that the genre of biography, in which Suetonius was writing,
played a role in his superficial rendering of the princeps. While Suetonius characterizes
Augustus’ moderation in overwhelmingly positive terms, his portrayal of Octavian’s cruelty as
triumvir presents a dichotomous image of the first emperor’s life. One could see this sudden
change in behavior from triumvir to princeps as indicative of the insincerity of his modesty. Yet,
such a notion of disingenuousness is downplayed in Augustus’ life in favor of an appreciation for
his continuous display of moderation during his reign as princeps. Such insincere moderation is
criticized in the Lives of later emperors who begin their reigns by following Augustus’ modest
example but later yield to their true nature and exhibit cruelty. Suetonius holds Augustus’
memory as an unassailable precedent for successors to follow and alludes to the post-Domitianic
emperors—Nerva, Trajan, and Hadrian— as the ones who best imitated Augustus’ moderate
image.

Like Pliny and Tacitus, Cassius Dio also had a senatorial career during the reigns of
tyannical emperors. However, Dio’s perception of the Principate is not as negative as that of
Pliny and Tacitus. Instead, Dio sought to remedy the problems of the Principate of his day by invoking Augustus’ moderate precedent as a model for future emperors. He altered the memory of Augustus somewhat and tailored it to the needs of his age. Dio, like Suetonius, does not consider Augustus’ insincerity to be detrimental enough to undermine the importance of his moderate image. However, Dio diverges from Suetonius in his portrayal of Augustus’ disingenuousness. While Suetonius tries to avoid discussing the falsity of Augustus’ modesty so that the emperor’s image remains intact, Dio simply presents the false moderation as a much lesser evil than the violence of a tyrant. Although both Suetonius and Dio discuss the cruelty of Octavian, the latter author softens this image by presenting examples of his clemency and by attributing this behavior to the circumstances of the late Republic. Thus, Dio’s characterization of the princeps does not necessitate a questioning of the emperor’s innate character since it avoids the dichotomous image of Octavian and Augustus that is present in Suetonius’ account.

In summation, Augustus crafted his modest image to endure into posterity. However, as seen in the works of the authors above, a writer could adhere to or deviate from this memory of Augustus’ moderation in order to suit his ideological goals. Thus, Augustus was not simply a man but a malleable idea that could be invoked for a variety of reasons in support of one’s own agenda.
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