

**THE CONSTRAINTS OF TRADITION
DEPICTIONS OF HERCULES IN AUGUSTUS' REIGN***

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In the years immediately surrounding 27 BC, in Rome's Campus Martius, the porticus Metelli and immediate surroundings were transformed into the porticus Octaviae.¹ Though the new complex was named after Octavia, her brother paid for it.² The decoration of the new porticus included a series of paintings on which the figure of Hercules was prominently present. The paintings included two of the best works of Artemon, one depicting the betrayal of Laomedon, the other 'Heracles ascending to the sky with the consent of the gods'.³ A famous picture of Hesione by Antiphilos completed the series of Hercules-related paintings. Of that same artist, a painting was shown which depicted Alexander the Great, his father Phillip and Athena.⁴ At first sight, this all seems rather unsurprising. Naming a building after his sister fitted perfectly well within the Augustan building programme, in which members of the imperial family were regularly invoked. Artistically important decorations formed integral part of such new monuments. The incorporation of Herculean imagery in a building to Octavia might, however, have been noticeable. Octavia had, after all, been married to Mark Antony until their divorce in 32 BC.⁵ Hercules, furthermore, was Antony's mythical ancestor – a fact that the former triumvir had put conspicuously forward in his self-representation, though only up to his infatuation with Cleopatra.⁶ With this in mind, it seems possible that

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¹ A. Viscogliosi, 'Porticus Octaviae', *LTUR* 4, 141-5, with references and a discussion of the date; A. Viscogliosi, 'Porticus Metelli', *LTUR* 4, 130-132.

² Suet. *Aug.* 29; Liv. *epit.* 138; Dio, 49.43.8.

³ Plin. *HN*, 35.139: 'Hercules ... consensus deorum in caelem euntem'. On the story of king Laomedon of Troy, who refused to reward Heracles for saving his daughter Hesione; Apollod. 2.5.9; J. Boardman, 'Laomedon', *LIMC* 6.1, 201-3. On Pliny's discussion of publicly displayed paintings see now: S. Carey, *Pliny's Catalogue of Culture. Art and Empire in the Natural History* (Oxford 2003), 104.

⁴ Plin. *HN*, 35.114.

⁵ *PIR*² O 66.

⁶ Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 4.1-3, 60.3; App. *B. Civ.* 3.16; British Museum inv. RR 4255. Crawford, *RRC*, no. 494.2a (= Sydenham, *CRR*, nos. 1103-a); *LIMC*, 4, 'Herakles', no. 994; D. R. Sear, *The History and Coinage of*

images of Hercules in the portico named after Antony's ex-wife, could have reminded spectators of the close ties that had existed between Augustus and the man he had defeated in the civil war. Ties, one would expect, that the new *princeps* did not want particularly advertised. Indeed, it has been argued that the whole point of the pictorial display was to cleanse Hercules from the negative connotations of the civil war, by emphasising *consensus deorum*, and thus, in a way dissociating Antony from Hercules.⁷ This 'appropriation' of Hercules from an enemy has also been noted in other aspects of Augustan imagery.⁸

Is such an ideological explanation the best way to approach the presence of these paintings? Similar problems of association could be construed for Augustus' restoration of temples of Hercules within the anonymous group of 'eighty-two temples of the gods' that Augustus had restored.⁹ In that case, however, it seems obvious that to *not* restore temples to a specific deity when restoring all other temples would have been odd behaviour. Similar considerations will have led to the restoration of the temple of Hercules Musarum.¹⁰ None other than L. Marcius Philippus, Octavian's stepfather, restored it in 33 BC, to celebrate his Spanish triumphs.¹¹ The event did not go unnoticed. It was, in fact, important enough for Ovid to use in the lines passage of his *Fasti*:

... 'clari monumenta Philippi
aspicis, unde trahit Marcia casta genus

...

the Roman Emperors 49-27 BC (London 1998), 95 no. 143; S. Ritter, *Hercules in der römischen Kunst. Von den Anfängen bis Augustus* (Heidelberg 1995), 74-5 nn. 147-52, Taf. 5.7a-b; U. Huttner, 'Marcus Antonius und Herakles', in: Ch. Schubert/ K. Brodersen (eds.), *Rom und der Griechische Osten. Festschrift für Hanno H. Schmitt zum 65. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart 1995), 103-12 ; 104, n.7, 105-6; T.P. Wiseman, 'Legendary genealogies in Late-Republican Rome', *G&R* 21 (1974), 153-64; 157; W. Derichs, *Herakles. Vorbild des Herrschers in der Antike* (PhD-Köln 1950), 37-8. On the chronological demarcations of Antony's use of Hercules in his self-presentation: O. Hekster, 'Hercules, Omphale, and Octavian's 'counter propaganda'', *BABesch* 79 (2004), 171-78; 171-74.

⁷ Ritter, *Hercules in der römischen Kunst*, 136: 'ein neues ... gereinigtes Bild von Hercules'.

⁸ E.g. G. K. Galinsky, *Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction* (Princeton 1996), 223-4.

⁹ Indeed, temples to Hercules are not mentioned in *RGDA*, 20.4. Deities (amongst whom Apollo, Jupiter and Mars) are explicitly named in *RGDA*, 19.1-2, 21.1-2, but, like Hercules, Venus, clearly an important deity for Augustus, is not mentioned. One should not conclude too much from Hercules' absence in the text; U. Huttner, 'Hercules und Augustus', *Chiron* 27 (1997), 369-91; 387.

¹⁰ A. Viscogliosi, 'Hercules Musarum, aedes', *LTUR* 3, 17-9.

¹¹ Suet. *Aug.* 25.9; Tac. *Ann.* 3.72.1; R. Syme, *The Augustan Aristocracy* (Oxford 1989²), 403-4; Ritter, *Hercules in der römischen Kunst*, 132-3. Cf. J.G. Frazer, *The Fasti of Ovid VI* (London 1929), 350-3.

nupta fuit quondam matertera Caesaris illi'

...

sic cecinit Clio, doctae adsensere sorores;

adnuat Alcides increpuitque lyram

(‘You do behold the monument of that famous Philip from whom the chaste Marcia has descended ... The mother’s sister of Caesar was once married to that Philip’ ... So Clio sang. Her learned sisters chimed in; Alcides bowed assent and twanged his lyre). (Ov. *Fast.* 6.801-12).

Indeed, Augustus apparently inspired the restoration (Suet, *Div. Aug.* 29.5), and the temple was even extended through the newly constructed Porticus Philippi.¹² But, rather than any specific attention to Hercules on the part of Augustus, the restoration ought to be seen in light of the entire restructuring of the area surrounding the Circus Flaminius.¹³ It would have been much more remarkable if the temple of Hercules Musarum had been exempted from this area of city planning. As it is, its position on the northeast side of the Circus Flaminius, decided its restoration, not the fact that a ‘peaceful’ Hercules was worshipped at the site. Location decided the refurbishment, not an ideological reformulation of the Hercules-figure.¹⁴ The temple of Hercules Custos, too, was situated in the same area.¹⁵ It is in this geographical context that the Porticus Octaviae was dedicated. It may, thus, be possible that the general surrounding influenced the role of Hercules in the iconographic programme of the portico. Topographical necessity might well have outweighed the need to deal with an association between Hercules and Antony, which, in any case, had long run out of steam by the time of the battle of Actium.¹⁶

¹² Plin. *HN*, 35.66, 35.114, 35.144; Ov. *Ars am.* 167-8; Mart. 5.49.12-3; A. Viscogliosi, ‘Porticus Philippi’, *LTUR* 4, 146-8; 146-7.

¹³ E. LaRocca, *Amazzonomachia. Le sculture frontonali del tempio di Apollo Sosiano* (Rome 1985), 83-5; Viscogliosi, ‘Hercules Musarum’, 19; L. Richardson Jr., ‘Hercules Musarum and the Porticus Philippi in Rome’, *AJA* 81 (1977), 355-61; 360 fig. 3, 361.

¹⁴ *LTUR* 4, 443 fig. 50. Contra Ritter, *Hercules in der römischen Kunst*, 134: ‘Hier deutet sich der Versuch an, die unverfänglichen Aspekte in seinem Wesen hervorzuheben, die nicht durch die Bürgerkriegspropaganda in Mißkredit gebracht worden waren’. Ritter’s argument that the works of art which were exposed in the Porticus all referred to Antonius (p. 133) seems exaggerated, particularly the claim that the punishment of Hippolytus (Plin. *HN*, 35.144) commented on Antonius and Cleopatra, ‘denn auch der von der Göttern bestrafte Hippolytos ging an der Begierde eines Weibes ... zugrunde’.

¹⁵ Ov. *Fast.* 6.209-12; A. Viscogliosi, ‘Hercules Custos, Aedes’, *LTUR* 3, 13-4.

¹⁶ Hekster, ‘Hercules, Omphale, and Octavian’s ‘counter propaganda’’, 174.

Divine depictions were not only dictated by location. Mythological associations, too, influenced which deity was to be brought forward in which location. Thus, for instance, the appearance of Hercules in the frieze of the temple of Apollo Sosianus appears to be dictated by the chosen theme.¹⁷ Once the choice was made to depict the *Amazonomachia*, including Hercules became unavoidable. In this context, he was, after all, one of the important positive characters, who symbolised the Greeks fighting the Persians.¹⁸ Nor should this depiction be explained in terms of contemporary politics. In that case, after all, one would expect a connection between Hercules and his mythological ancestor Antony. But if the theme is interpreted within contemporary Augustan politics, the Persians must surely represent the 'Eastern' Cleopatra and Antony. This would equate Hercules and Augustus.¹⁹ It seems impossible to argue that Hercules simultaneously symbolised Mark Antony *and* Augustus. If all images of winning heroes were meant to embody the emperor, then no image could ever broadcast a specific message.²⁰ One should, furthermore, also incorporate the importance of Roman perceptions of *spolia* into the discussion. To what extent were such older scenes perceived as a reflection of the present rather than the past, which they strictly speaking represented?²¹ A less specific interpretation of the frieze seems apt. The *Amazonomachia* showed a battle between east and west, which the west won. In that sense, it was a wholly suitable subject matter. The depiction of Hercules therein will not have been an attempt to renegotiate the divinity's ideological context, but was dictated by the constraints of the mythological narrative.

Another temple of Apollo similarly included Hercules in its iconographical programme. This temple was directly connected to Augustus' house. The impact of its

¹⁷ Rome, Capitoline Museums, inv. 3530; E. LaRocca, 'Der Apollo-Sosianus-Tempel', in: *Kaiser Augustus und die verlorene Republik*, 121-148; 128-9; Idem, *Amazzonomachia. Le sculture frontonali del tempio di Apollo Sosiano* (Roma 1985); Ritter, *Hercules in der römischen Kunst*, 136-7.

¹⁸ LaRocca, *Amazzonomachia*, 89.

¹⁹ LaRocca, 'Der Apollo-Sosianus-Tempel', 123-4: 'Die Amazonenkönigin ... ist Kleopatra ... Herakles und Theseus ... sind identisch mit Octavian'.

²⁰ T. Hölscher, 'Mythen als Exemple der Geschichte', in: F. Graf (ed.), *Mythos in mythenloser Gesellschaft. Das Paradigma Roms* (Stuttgart – Leipzig 1993), 68-87; 80: 'Wenn alles und jedes auf den Kaiser wies, dann war daraus keine spezifische Aussage mehr zu gewinnen'.

²¹ A. Haug, 'Constituting the Past – Forming the Present. The Role of Material Culture in the Augustan Period', *JHC* 13 (2001), 111-123.

imagery inevitably reflected more directly on the princeps. As is well known, the temple of Palatine Apollo incorporated a much-discussed depiction of Hercules on its Campana terracotta. This image, possibly more analysed in recent years than properly looked at in antiquity, shows Hercules and Apollo fighting over the Delphic tripod.²² Yet, the scene that adorned the walls of the Apollo-temple was depicted in a static and symmetrical composition, which is significantly different from the traditional iconography of the battle.²³ One could explain this modification by connecting the imagery with the civil war between Augustus and Antony.²⁴ After all, during Augustus' reign, Palatine Apollo himself came to symbolise, at least to some people, the victory at Actium.²⁵ The episode may emphasise the victory of Augustus' divine ally over Antony's divine ancestor. The rigid postures of the figures could then serve as a 'deflector' from too strong associations of civil war. By 'freezing' the action, attention was taken away from the actual fighting itself. The use of the Delphic tripod also directed the attention away from civil war to Delphi, that beacon of civilisation.²⁶

Alternatively, that very tripod could be a more important reason for depicting the stylised image of the episode. Suetonius (*Augustus*, 52) informs us how Augustus sold several silver statues of himself, and used the money to buy golden tripods for the Palatine temple; a generous action which Augustus valued so much that he even recorded it publicly:

²² G. Caretoni, 'Die «Campana»-Terrakotten vom Apollo-Palatinus-Tempel', in: *Kaiser Augustus und die verlorene Republik*, 267-72; Ritter, *Hercules in der römischen Kunst*, 129-31; P. Gros, 'Apollo Palatinus', *LTUR* 1, 54-57; 56; B. Kellum, 'Sculptural Programs and Propaganda in Augustan Rome: The Temple of Apollo on the Palatine', in: E. D'Ambra (ed.), *Roman Art in Context. An Anthology* (Englewood Cliffs 1993), 75-84; 76.

²³ Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 222-3; D. Von Bothmer, 'The Struggle for the Tripod', in: U. Höckmann/ A. Krug (eds.), *Festschrift für F. Brommer* (Mainz 1977), 51-63.

²⁴ T. Hölscher, 'Augustus und die Macht der Archäologie', in: A. Giovannini/ B. G. Grange (eds.), *La Révolution Romaine après Ronald Syme. Bilans et Perspectives* (Genève 2000), 237-81; 265; Ritter, *Hercules in der römischen Kunst*, 129.

²⁵ Prop. 4.6.67; L. Jones Roccas, 'Apollo Palatinus: The Augustan Apollo on the Sorrento base', *AJA* 93 (1989), 571-88; 585-6, 586 n.70: 'Augustan coins labelled ACT or ACTIO show (...) Apollo with kithara or lyre (...) This type is closest to the Apollo Palatinus image'. Perhaps Cleopatra was even present amongst the statues of the Danaids which reportedly adorned the temple's portico. After all, one of them was apparently named Cleopatra (Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.1.5, 4 and 7); Kellum, 'Sculptural Programs and Propaganda', 81.

²⁶ Already on the gigantic entrance doors of the temple, which were decorated with ivory panels, Apollo was depicted as a victorious avenger, slaughtering the children of Niobe and beating the Gauls who tried to sack Delphi; Prop. 2.31.12-4.

Statuae meae pedestres et equestres et in quadrigis argenteae steterunt in urbe XXC circiter, quas ipse sustuli, exque ea pecunia dona aurea in aede Apollinis meo nomine et illorum qui mihi statuarum honorem habuerunt posui. (Some eighty silver statues of me, on foot, on horse, and in chariots, had been set up in Rome; I myself removed them, and with the money that they realised I set golden offerings in the temple of a Apollo, in my own name and in the names of those who had honoured me with the statues).²⁷

Apart for political reasons to depict the tripod, there were also good non-political reasons, both topographical and mythological, to show Hercules in a temple on the Palatine. Tradition strongly connected the god to the location. On this hill, Cacus was said to have lived, and the steps of Cacus ended not far from the very temple of Apollo itself.²⁸ It may also be relevant that Augustus placed the famous Sibylline oracles in his new library in the temple.²⁹ What would be more fitting illustration for the new house of these oracles than a battle between two oracular deities about the most important oracle of them all?³⁰ A political, ‘Antonian’, interpretation of the role of Hercules on the Campana plates also omits to take into account the other Campana reliefs, which show several mythological scenes in static symmetry.³¹ Rather than assuming references to Hercules’ and Antony’s place in the civil war, the iconographic programme seems to stress the Apollonian balance that the outcome of the battle of Actium has brought about in all aspects of life. Again, the general dictated the specific.

Similarly, the presence of Hercules on the façade of the temple of Quirinus must have been connected to the importance of the divinity in the mythology of early Rome.³² Also, the reference to prosperous trade (another aspect of Hercules) must have been crucial to the positioning of a statue of Hercules in front of the temple of Concordia (if indeed Augustus

²⁷ *RGDA* 24.2. Similarly, *RGDA* 24.1 stresses Augustus’ piety, recounting how the princeps gave the booty that Mark Antony had taken from temples in Asia back to them. Thus, he restored to Samos the statues of Athena and Hercules of Myron, though he kept the Zeus, and placed it on the capitol; Strabo, *Geogr.* 14.1.14; F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World (31BC – AD 337)* (London 1992²), 145. On the tripod as a symbol for the princeps’ piety: Zanker, *Power of Images*, 86-8.

²⁸ Diod. Sic. 4.21.2; Sol. 1.17-8; Prop. 4.1.9, 4.9.3-9; Verg. *Aen.* 8.231; Ov. *Fast.* 1.551; P. Pensabene, ‘Saclae Caci’, *LTUR* 4, 239-40; Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 223. Cf. J. Aronen, ‘Atrium Caci’, *LTUR* 1, 132-3.

²⁹ Suet. *Aug.* 31.1-2.

³⁰ E. Simon, *Die Götter der Römer* (Darmstadt 1990), 78, 81 fig. 103.

³¹ Carettoni, ‘Die «Campana»-Terrakotten vom Apollo-Palatinus-Tempel’, 273-5 nos. 120-6.

³² Liv. 1.7; Verg. *Aen.* 8.185-304; Ov. *Fast.* 1.543-86; Prop. 4.9; Dion. Hal. 1.39-42.2; Ritter, *Hercules in der römischen Kunst*, 145.

placed such a statue there), which was dedicated on 16 January AD 10. Hercules perfectly complemented the functions of Mercury, whose statue stood alongside his.³³ Again, the fitting function of the deity overrode any possible political connotations. Even the much-discussed date of Augustus' great Actian triumph of 29 BC may have less political connotations than often presumed. Galinsky argues confidently: 'It is hardly accidental that Octavian scheduled his great triple triumph ... on the day of the official, annual festival of Hercules at the Ara Maxima, August 13'.³⁴ Apart from the fact that the official festival of Hercules Invictus at the Ara Maxima seems to have been the twelfth of August (with possibly a festival for Hercules Invictus at the Porta Trigemina on the thirteenth), it also appears that the starting date of the triumph was, to an extent, accidental.³⁵ Aelius Donatus' life of Virgil recounts how Octavian was delayed through illness in Atella for a while, thus postponing his arrival at Rome. It also gave Virgil the opportunity to recite his *Georgics*.³⁶ The princeps arrived later at the capital than he must have anticipated. Though this need not necessarily mean that the decision to start the triumph on the thirteenth of August was accidental, it does become more likely that the decision was made *ad hoc*.³⁷ The evidence for a deliberate attempt to make Hercules

³³ P. Zanker, *Forum Romanum. Die Neugestaltung durch Augustus* (Tübingen 1972), 22; Ritter, *Hercules in der römischen Kunst*, 146-7.

³⁴ G.K. Galinsky, *The Herakles Theme. The Adaptations of the Hero in Literature from Homer to the 20th Century* (Oxford 1972), 141. Galinsky seems to follow the theory set out by P. Grimal, 'Aeneas in Rom und der Triumph des Octavian', in: G. Binder (ed.), *Saeculum Augustum II. Religion und Literatur* (Darmstadt 1988), 240-54; 242-3 (originally published as: 'Énée à Rome et le triomphe d'Octave', *Revue de Études Anciennes* 53 (1951), 51-61).

³⁵ *Ara Maxima*: Fasti Allifani (*Inscr. Ital.* 13.2, no. 24, pp. 180-1); Fasti Amiternini (*Inscr. Ital.* 13.2, no. 25, pp. 190-1); *Herculi Invicto ad Circum/ Maxim(um)*. *Porta Trigemina*: Fasti Allifani (*Inscr. Ital.* 13.2, no. 24, pp. 180-1); *Her[culi]/ Invicto ad port(am) Trigemina*; Fasti Antiates Maiores (*Inscr. Ital.* 13.2, no. 1, p. 16); F. Coarelli, "'Murus Servii Tullii"; Mura Reppublicane: Porta Trigemina', *LTUR* 3, 332-3. Cf. Macrobian *Sat.* 3.6.10. The Fasti Vallenses (*Inscr. Ital.* 13.2, no. 18, pp. 148-9) mistakenly place the festival of Hercules Magnus Custos on the twelfth of August. The proper date of that festival was June 4th; Fasti Venusini (*Inscr. Ital.* 13.2, no. 6, p. 58); *Ov. Fast.* 6.211.

³⁶ Donat. *Vit. Verg.* 27; Huttner, 'Hercules und Augustus', 370. L. Morgan, *Pattern of Redemption in Virgil's Georgics* (Cambridge 1999), 133, however, follows the ideas of Grimal (*supra* n.33).

³⁷ Nonetheless Ritter, *Hercules in der römischen Kunst*, 131 argues that Octavian wanted to use the symbolism of the festival (Symbolkraft des Tagens) to enhance his own prestige, but that simultaneously his great triumph limited the impact of Hercules' festival (daß die Feier des "unbesiegt" Siegesgottes am Vortag vor dem Glanz der Triumphalfeiern verblassen mußte). Ritter even uses the context of the triumph of 29 BC to mention Octavian's prohibition of publishing an early

salonfähig seems arguable at best. The liberty of the princeps to make bold ideological statements was often hampered by the framework in which he had to operate.

Not only the emperor was constrained by the power of context. Poets, too, in their efforts to find modes of praise for the new ruler, had to work within long-established frameworks. This becomes clear, for instance, in the various poems by Horace, in which he repeatedly likens Augustus to various deities.³⁸ The notion to equate a ruler to the gods might be somewhat untraditional in Roman terms, but when doing so, the group of divinities to evoke was quite straightforward:

It was by such merits that Pollux and roving Hercules strove and reached the starry citadels ... it was for such merits, father Bacchus, that your tigers drew you in well-earned triumph, wearing the yoke on untrained neck. It was for such merits that Quirinus escaped Acheron on the steeds of Mars ... (Hor. *Carm.* 3.3.9-16)

The Dioscuri, Hercules, Bacchus, and Romulus – these are not divinities that are accidentally put together. All of them humans that became gods after their death, their relevance to the concept is obvious. Horace expands on the theme in his famous letter to Augustus, dated after 12 BC, in which Augustus is placed on a par with – and even above – the most important of Greek and Roman heroes.³⁹ Hercules formed an inseparable member of that group, and it seems that many of the Augustan poets felt that the *princeps* needed to be similarly described.⁴⁰ Augustus' inclusion in the same group was also indicated in a poem that was written whilst the princeps was in Spain, though here only Castor and Hercules were mentioned.⁴¹

Propertius makes a more particular use of Hercules. When the poet portrays Cleopatra as a danger to Antony and Rome (Prop. 3.11), Hercules is one of the comparisons put forward. As Propertius surrendered to Cynthia, heroes too had surrendered to women – as Cleopatra had

work of Caesar, called *Laudes Herculis*, according to Ritter in order to limit references to the civil war; 'damit ersparte er sich und seinem toten Adoptivvater wohl einige Peinlichkeiten' (p. 132). Suet *Iul.* 56.7, however, names this piece of writing explicitly alongside a collection of aphorisms, and a tragedy about Oedipus. How these two works could refer to the civil war does not become clear.

³⁸ Hor. *Carm.* 1.12.49-52; 3.3.9-16; *Epist.* 2.1.5-12; Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 314.

³⁹ *Epist.* 2.1.15-7; C. O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry 3. Epistles Book II: The Letters to Augustus and Florus* (Cambridge 1982), 49: 'The divinity of the living Augustus is contrasted with the posthumous divinity of Romulus and the Greek *hērōē*', 50-52, 553-4; Anderson, 'Heracles and his Successors', 44-5.

⁴⁰ Cic. *Tusc.* 1.28; Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.62; Brink, *Horace on Poetry 3*, 40, 52.

⁴¹ Hor. *Carm.* 4.5.35-6; Huttner, 'Hercules und Augustus', 378.

almost come to rule Rome because of her dominance over Antony. Interesting as the comparison is, Hercules is only one of the examples.⁴² He is more prominently present in a later elegy. The battle between Hercules and Cacus, which as we shall see was put to important use by Virgil, forms the subject of a parodic episode by Propertius. After this battle, Propertius writes (4.9), Hercules was so thirsty that he tried to get to the spring of the Bona Dea sanctuary, where only women were allowed. He first tried to persuade the priestess by emphasising his heroic efforts, in language oddly reminiscent of Augustan self-presentation – *Alciden terra recepta vocat* (line 38) echoes *ASIA RECEPTA* on Augustan coinage.⁴³ Afterwards, he emphasised his own time as a woman: ‘A gentle brassiere clasped my hairy chest/ and I proved a nimble girl, hard hands and all’ (lines 49-50). Eventually Hercules broke down the door, drank the spring empty, and founded his own festival of the Ara Maxima – forbidden to women.

This poem ought not to be read in a political context. If one were to try, it would not be quite clear whether the context would be positive or negative. Is it a compliment to be compared to Hercules, even if Hercules is ridiculed at the same time?⁴⁴ A clear answer cannot be given. Besides, the political function of the poem, if there was any, was not predominant.⁴⁵ A more important theme of the poem seems to be that of transgression. In the poem boundaries are continuously set up and crossed – of which the antithesis of sanctuaries forbidden for respectively men and women is but one.⁴⁶ Drawing major political conclusions

⁴² H.-P. Stahl, *Propertius: “Love” and “War”*. *Individual and State under Augustus* (Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 1985), 236-7: ‘Enough instances are known in which women ruled not only unimportant figures like poets, but held sway over undefeated warriors (Achilles, Hercules), handled a man’s affairs (Jason), acted as successful statesmen (Babylon), even bade other countries bow to their own (as Semiramis bade Bactra)’; 238-42. Propertius’ self-presentation was strongly related to the figure of Antony anyhow; J. Griffin, *Latin Poets and Roman Life* (London 1985), 32-47: ‘Propertius and Antonius’.

⁴³ *BMC* 1, nos. 647-9; Huttner, ‘Hercules und Augustus’, 381.

⁴⁴ U. Huttner, *Die politische Rolle der Heraklesgestalt im griechischen Herrschertum* (Stuttgart 1997), 143-5 indicates that this was the case in the Hellenistic period.

⁴⁵ F. Cairns, ‘Propertius 4.9: “Hercules Excludus” and the Dimensions of Genre’, in: G. K. Galinsky (ed.), *The Interpretation of Roman Poetry: Empiricism or Hermeneutics?* (Frankfurt et. al. 1992), 65-95; 91.

⁴⁶ M. Janan, *The Politics of Desire. Propertius IV* (Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 2001), 128-45; S. H. Lindheim, ‘Hercules cross-dressed, Hercules undressed. Unmasking the Construction of the Propertian *Amator* in Elegy 4.9’, *AJPh* 119.1 (1998), 43-66; 50-1. But cf. P. Fedeli, ‘Ideologia augustea e poesia: il

from this theme seems unnecessary. For in fact Propertius himself, earlier in his elegies, had already explained what he was doing: ‘I will sing of rites and days, of ancient names of places. This is the goal towards which my steed shall sweat’ (4.1.69-70). But in a counter-voice, the poet implies that amatory elements will creep back into the aetiological poems repeatedly: ‘Now elegy must be the work you fashion, and slyness the secret of your work. This is the camp for you’ (4.1.135-6).⁴⁷ Hercules just happened to fit that dichotomy extremely well.

A mainly political interpretation of the role of Hercules in Virgil appears more justified. In general, though many now hold the view that Augustus did not ‘groom’ publicists, Virgil is still often seen as an exception to that rule.⁴⁸ The classic line is that the *Aeneid*, and specifically the battle between Hercules and Cacus, was intended as unmitigated praise to the *princeps*.⁴⁹ Virgil elevated Cacus to represent a powerful monstrosity (even his name *Kavkoō* means *kakovō*, ‘evil’), creating a ‘simple dualism’ between Cacus and Hercules, as symbols of good and evil.⁵⁰ A series of further oppositions strengthens the point.⁵¹ This then leads to an equation in which Hercules, Aeneas, and Augustus form a continuous line, opposing Cacus, Turnus, and Mark Antony. Augustus’ incidental arrival in Rome on the day before the festival of Hercules at the Ara Maxima is put to good use by Virgil. As Morgan puts it:

The good Hercules thus parallels the good Aeneas, and of course the good Augustus, who towards the end of the book, like Hercules in this passage, arrives at Rome victorious; the triple

mito di Ercole e Caco in Properzio’, in: K. Rosen (ed), *Macht und Kultur in Rom der Kaiserzeit* (Bonn 1994), 109-121.

⁴⁷ K. O’Neill, ‘Propertius 4.2. Slumming with Vertumnus?’, *AJPh* 121.2 (2000), 259-77; 260: ‘Throughout the book we find a ... collapse of binary opposition ... in 4.9 Hercules dallies with the roles of both the *exclusus amator* and the *puella*’; J. B. DeBrohun, ‘Redressing Elegy’s *Puella*: Propertius IV and the Rhetoric of Fashion’, *JRS* 84 (1994), 41-63; 42-5: ‘clashing poetics of book IV’.

⁴⁸ It is worth pointing out that no classical sources presume that Augustus personally influenced the poetry of his own time: White, *Promised Verse*, 99, 208. Cf. Suet. *Aug.* 89.2-3.

⁴⁹ K. W. Gransden, *Virgil: Aeneid Book VIII* (Cambridge 1976), 8; G. K. Galinsky, ‘The Hercules-Cacus episode in *Aeneid VIII*’, *AJPh* 87 (1966), 18-51.

⁵⁰ L. Morgan, ‘Assimilation and Civil War: Hercules and Cacus. *Aeneid* 8’, in: H.-P. Stahl, *Virgil’s Aeneid: Augustan Epic and Political Context* (London 1998), 175-97; 176; P. R. Hardie, *Virgil’s Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford 1986), 111.

⁵¹ Morgan, ‘Assimilation and Civil War’, 176, with textual references.

triumph celebrated by Augustus ... followed immediately after the festival ... of which *Hercules and Cacus* is the aetiological myth.⁵²

But, as has been equally recognised, Hercules, and indeed Augustus, are often described in terms similar to Cacus – assimilation between enemies.⁵³ Nor can Turnus be easily placed among either ‘good’ or ‘evil’ within a ‘simple dualism’. Virgil apparently does not depict a straightforward opposition between ‘good’ and ‘evil’. Some of the monstrousness of Cacus rubs off on Hercules – and on Augustus. Morgan, quite rightly, connects this to the fact that Virgil could not simply ignore the civil wars. His task as a propagandist was more difficult. He had to ‘take the dreadful destruction that the Civil Wars represented and negotiate its potential for good’.⁵⁴ The battle between Hercules and Cacus becomes a ‘prequel’ to the eventual slaying of Turnus, in murderous rage, at the very end of the *Aeneid*, and of course to the civil wars themselves. Augustus, like Aeneas and Hercules before him, uses violent methods to defeat a greater evil.

One should emphasise that the evidence suggesting that Augustus prompted Virgil to write the *Aeneid* is scanty at best.⁵⁵ But even without direct involvement, it is clear that the image of Augustus is of great importance for reading Virgil’s Hercules. Morgan’s argument appears compelling. Here, then, appears to be a politically portrayed Hercules. Though historical circumstances and established mythological narratives limited Virgil’s room for manoeuvring, he still used Hercules to make a powerful ideological point. The comparison, however, could not be a direct one. As Servius explained: ‘Virgil’s intention was to imitate Homer, and praise Augustus through his ancestors’ (*intentio Vergilii haec est, Homerum imitari et Augustum laudare a parentibus*).⁵⁶ Hercules was not an ancestor of Augustus. The latter’s adoption by Caesar placed him into a lineage that traced its origins back to Aeneas and Venus. Even invented tradition may have defined the ways in which Hercules could be employed in

⁵² Morgan, ‘Assimilation and Civil War’, 176. Galinsky, ‘The Hercules-Cacus episode’, 22 points out that lines 200-1 can refer to Augustus as well as Hercules. It might also be relevant that ‘Hercules’ was perceived as the origin of the name of Italy itself (Varro, 2.5.3; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 1.35.1-3). Virgil explicitly discusses these origins in *Aen.* 8.329, perhaps emphasising that Hercules was the ‘founder’ of Italy, as well as Rome; L. Morgan, *Patterns of Redemption*, 132-4.

⁵³ R. O. A. M. Lyne, *Further Voices in Vergil’s Aeneid* (Oxford 1987), 27-35; Morgan, ‘Assimilation and Civil War’, 178-9.

⁵⁴ Morgan, ‘Assimilation and Civil War’, 183.

⁵⁵ R. Thomas, *Virgil and the Augustan Reception* (Cambridge 2001), 36-40; White, *Promised Verse*, 133.

⁵⁶ Serv. *Ad Aen.* 1.*prooem.*

ideological claims. The constraints of tradition posed continuous limits on Augustus' famous *Bildprogramm*.

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