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(Re-)Invention or Revival? The Emperor Augustus and the Re-Introduction of Rituals

The Emperor Augustus promised the revival of the Republic and its values, the revival of Rome's reputation as a great city and most importantly, he promised and ensured the revival of ancestral rituals. Augustus brought more attention to specific rituals, particularly when he performed them and thus set himself apart from earlier politicians. He also brought attention to rituals that, evidently, had not held a significant position within Roman religious traditions. By placing greater focus on the rituals, Augustus was able to paint himself as the savior of these rituals, thereby setting himself apart from his rivals and gaining the support of the people. This paper intends to look at a handful of examples that describe or depict Augustus actively participating in rituals. It will also explore whether Augustus performed the rituals as they were, or if he 're-invented' them for his own personal gain.

Keywords: Augustus, Late Republic, Rituals, Augustan politics, Roman religion

Introduction

There are many words that could be associated with Augustus. However, one that is repeatedly present throughout his career, is 'revival'. His revival of Republican, Roman values is a well-studied and analyzed topic.¹ He revived the City of Rome by renovating several derelict temples and transformed it by constructing several more memorable temples and monuments of his own. Likewise, through this building program, he simultaneously revived the economy and therefore the quality of life for those living in Rome as a result of the numerous jobs created through the transformation of the city. Similarly, the many improve-

¹ Key works on this topic include: SYME (1939), GALINSKY (2005), HÖLKESKAMP (2010), WALLACE-HADRILL (2008), RÜPKE (2012), GOLDSWORTHY (2014).

ments to the city's cleanliness also enhanced the quality of life for several people. However, what he was possibly the most known for, was the revival of rituals.

It has widely been acknowledged, that Augustus presented his own interpretation of *Mos maiorum* (or the ancestral traditions), one which was designed for the purpose of providing him with a positive political image, as well as for contrasting him against his rivals, whom he frequently presented as having neglected the ancestral morals and traditions.² This paper aims to explore how Augustus accomplished this interpretation by analyzing examples of rituals that he re-introduced over the course of his career. Rather than viewing the term simply as one that encompassed values that had held an important place in Roman society, this article will view it as an empty concept, on to which various socially accepted values and traditions and rituals could be attributed.

Because Augustus was able to alter the meaning of a supposedly fading ancestral concept to benefit his political career, it is likewise possible that he was able to achieve the same thing with the rituals he revived. This paper aims to explore the possibility of Augustus reviving these rituals for the basic purpose of drawing attention to his persona. Essentially, it will attempt to determine if he revived rituals as they had been, or if he re-invented them while inserting his own interpretation of their significance and/or meaning for the goal of placing himself at the center of these rituals and further highlighting his self-made image of being a champion of Roman morals and traditions.

The main argument of the paper will be formulated by way of comparison of various contemporary sources that detail the ritual proceedings of four major rituals – before and during Augustus' political reign. The rituals themselves will be analyzed in the context of four crucial events in Augustus' career: the proclamation of the Temple of Apollo Palatinus; the declaration of war by Augustus on Cleopatra; the closing of the doors of the Temple of Janus (which he did on three separate oc-

² For the purpose of keeping the argument concise, I have not approached the topic through an archaeological lens. For a general overview on archaeology of rituals see: LUGINBÜHL (2015), BEARD (2007), RYBERG (1955: 20–64), FOWLER (1922–1925), etc.

casions) and finally, the performance of the *augurium salutis*.³ The paper will attempt to demonstrate, that the rituals conducted during these events were not as important in the past as Augustus made them out to be. In fact, as will be demonstrated, nearly all of the traditions explored in this paper were only practiced on a handful of occasions prior to their reestablishment by Augustus. The paper aims to examine in detail, which changes to the rituals were instituted by Augustus – such as the frequency of their performance which I already alluded to – and in how far these alterations helped him shape his political career and image.

Building a character – why did Augustus need *Mos maiorum*?

Before going into the analysis of the main example, I would first like to provide some background on Augustus' program of cultural renewal, and how this shaped the legacy he left behind. Far before the program's conception in 29 BC, at the time of Julius Caesar's death in 44 BC, Augustus – who was then known as Gaius Octavius – was relatively unknown and largely inexperienced in terms of political and military affairs.⁴ The only thing that worked in his favour was the fact that he was Julius Caesar's adopted heir, meaning he had access to a powerful army and vast amounts of wealth. Caesar's will also provided the young Octavian with all of his titles, but these were not his to give away.⁵ Octavian was therefore effectively vying for a position of power in Rome among numerous other seasoned and powerful politicians. Without going into too much detail of the various alliances he made to move up the political ladder, I will move on to one of the most crucial alliances of his early career: the formation of the Second *Triumvirate* in 43 BC.⁶

This alliance alongside Mark Antony and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus provided Octavian (and the other two) with unlimited levels of authority which they were free to wield at their will. However, upon the exile

³ I aim to focus on the period leading up to the Battle of Actium and its immediate aftermath. These rituals were chosen because they were performed within this time frame, one that I consider a crucial period in the formation of Augustus' 'character' and definition of *Mos maiorum*, both of which this paper will discuss at length.

⁴ GOLDSWORTHY (2014: 87), SYME (1939: 113).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ SYME (1939: 188–189).

of Lepidus in 36 BC and a war with Mark Anthony being imminent, Augustus' time as *triumvir* was effectively coming to an end. This left him at risk of being targeted by his peers if the actions of the *triumvirate* were to be called into question. It is possible that Augustus' 'saviour image' was conceptualized in 36 BC. Such an image would have reduced the impact of any accusations of misconduct directed at him.⁷ Likewise, he also required valid grounds upon which he could declare Mark Anthony an enemy of the state. It is therefore logical that he then assumed a character which stylized him as the 'saviour' of Roman values.⁸ As this character was developed, temples, rituals and priesthoods that had been neglected as a result of the numerous civil wars and general unrest of the Late Republic, began to be reconstructed and revived. While this was happening, Augustus also connected the depleting quality of life among the Roman population to the neglect of these ancestral values in the Late Republic by key politicians at the time, including Mark Antony.⁹ In other words, Augustus began 'saving' aspects of Roman culture and religion that had allegedly fallen into decline, which in turn had caused unhappiness and misfortune among the people of Rome.

While doing this, Augustus simultaneously began redefining and highlighting various aspects of *Mos maiorum*, and then placing himself as a prime example of an individual that represented and upheld these newly defined rituals and morals.¹⁰ The key observations of this paper will be based on the argument that enough time had passed between the start of the ritual's supposed decline and Augustus' program of renewal, that the Roman populace simply did not recollect how vital the rituals and morals of *Mos maiorum* were to the lives and identities of previous generations. Furthermore, the concept of the 'ancestral traditions' or

⁷ MILLAR (2009: 61).

⁸ For reading on image-oriented leadership see WEBER (1947: 358): the central work on image-oriented leadership remains Weber's model of 'charismatic authority', which he describes as charismatic authority – A firm belief among the governed in the extraordinary qualities of a particular person, which in turn allowed said individual to rule over the governed. See also: SHILS (1965) and BELL (2004).

⁹ ZANKER (1990: 57).

¹⁰ Ibid (159–162).

Mos maiorum itself were both very generalized, meaning when Augustan propaganda referred to the importance of the ‘ancestral traditions’, there were no definite clues in terms of which specific point in the past (e.g. certain generations) or which specific traditions and rituals were meant. The general nature of his message, and the lack of knowledge about the traditions themselves, was what allowed Augustus to manipulate their meaning in a manner that benefitted his political growth. After a general analysis of the rituals Augustus supposedly revived, the paper will inquire further into the questions of whether these were indeed ‘revivals’, or if they were instead ‘re-inventions’ – or in some cases even inventions – of traditions.

The proclamation of the Temple of Apollo

This proclamation was made in 36 BC directly after the Temple of Naucleus and was evidently built in response to a lightning strike on Augustus’ land which was interpreted as Apollo requiring the land for himself. This interpretation was determined through the consultation of the *Haruspices*.¹¹

They decided that a house should be given him from public funds; for the place which he had bought on the Palatine for house-building he had made public property and had dedicated to Apollo, since lightning had struck it. – Dio 49, 15, 5 (Transl. Hekster & Rich, 2006)

He erected the temple of Apollo in that part of his Palatine house which, when it had been struck by lightning, haruspices had declared to be desired by the god. He added porticoes with Latin and Greek libraries . . . – Suet. *Aug.* 29, 3 (Transl. Hekster & Rich, 2006)

The reputation of the *Haruspices* had diminished over the course of the Late Republic, and the program of renewal only intensified both the arguments being made for and against the group. Individuals such as Cicero openly criticized the interpretations of certain divinatory groups, stating that the practice was mostly based on superstition and implying

¹¹ HEKSTER–RICH (2006: 152).

that the individual conducting the interpretation was not at liberty to say what he wanted, but rather expected to say the desired outcome.¹²

Nor indeed is any other argument brought forward why there should be no such kinds of divination as I say, except that it seems difficult to say with respect to each sort of divination what is its reason or cause. What can the haruspex say to explain why a punctured lung, even though the innards are sound, should make this the wrong moment and cause a postponement to another day. – Cic. *Div.* 1, 85 (Transl. Schofield, 1986)

‘To begin with haruspicina, which I think should be practiced for the sake of the state and of public religion (*communis religio*) - but we are alone: it is therefore the moment to inquire into the truth without attracting ill-will, especially for me, since I am in doubt on most questions-let us first, please, make "an inspection" of entrails’. – Cic. *Div.* 2, 28 (Transl. Schofield, 1986)¹³

Because *Haruspices* and the *Haruspicina* were no longer seen as a reliable group or practice when Augustus did consult them 36 BC, it may have appeared as if he was attempting to reinstate the reputation that they had supposedly lost. Furthermore, the fact that the construction of the temple did not appear to benefit Augustus could have helped to reinforce the idea that the *Haruspices* were still a trustworthy institution, and that Augustus himself would not manipulate a sacred ritual for his own personal gain.

However, upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that Augustus was being selective and only highlighted aspects of the *Haruspices* and

¹² SCHOFIELD (1986: 58–59).

¹³ It should be noted that these criticisms appear alongside praises of the *Haruspices*. For instance, in *De haruspicum responsis*, Cicero shows respect for the prodigies and their interpretations by the *Haruspices*. However, the accusations made against him, and the accusations he in turn aims at Clodius in this text, could be taken as evidence of how open to interpretation the interpretations themselves were. Similarly, the criticisms put forward in *De Divinatione* could reflect legitimate views on the *Haruspices* during this period of time. For a more in-depth analysis of *De haruspicum responsis* see: CORBEILL (2018) and MORELL (2018). For further analysis of Cicero’s views on religion see: RÜPKE (2012: 186–204) and KENTY (2016).

the *Haruspicina* that benefitted him. To determine just how selective he was, we must first investigate how temples were typically proclaimed.

Firstly, temples were constructed in response to prodigies when the prodigy in question detrimentally impacted an entire community. Secondly, temples were typically decreed by the Senate, who in turn only did so after consulting the Sybilline books. We do not know of any Senatorial involvement in this instance, nor do we know of the Sybilline books being employed in the interpretation of this prodigy. Finally, lightning strikes were, and still are a fairly frequent phenomenon and were therefore the most common form of prodigy. Thus, a temple could not, for practical reasons, have been proclaimed and later constructed every time lightning struck. The area struck by lightning was instead covered with inscribed stones according to the Etruscan and Roman tradition. Such stone coverings were also established as a result of interpretations made by the *Haruspices*.¹⁴

These observations make it clear that by constructing a temple, Augustus was doing far more than necessary, and was not adhering completely to the rituals that he was supposedly upholding. For instance, the lightning strike itself affected Augustus alone, and therefore did not have a detrimental impact on the collective community. The prodigy should therefore have only resulted in the area being covered in stones – a temple was simply not necessary. Furthermore, the lack of evidence showing any involvement of the Senate would suggest that Augustus was acting on his own accord. By employing the *Haruspices*, he was able to choose the priests who would conduct the *Haruspica*. The chosen priests were then able to provide a reading that was vague enough to allow Augustus to do as he wished. In other words, stating that the land was ‘desired by the god’ did not necessarily mean a temple had to be constructed – Augustus simply wanted to build one and therefore took the necessary steps to ensure a corresponding interpretation.¹⁵

Next, I would like to investigate why Augustus felt compelled to disguise his desire to build a temple as the need to satisfy a god, while simultaneously amplifying the ritual process required to proclaim such

¹⁴ HEKSTER-RICH (2006: 158).

¹⁵ Ibid (159).

a temple. If Augustus' intention was indeed to construct a temple all along, there was no need for him to wait for lightning to strike his property. As he already possessed significant amounts of wealth at this time, he could have simply dedicated a temple to a god of his choice. The dedication of private temples was a common occurrence during the Late Republic, meaning his actions would not have been called into question had he followed this route.¹⁶ However, he wanted to build a large temple, and he wanted to build it on the Palatine, a key political and religious location within Rome. To build there would therefore create the implication that he was seeking even greater amounts of power than he already had. Because he was still at a precarious point in his career – where his actions as *triumvir* and his inexperience could have been held against him – any insinuation that he wanted absolute power would have been detrimental to his position on the political stage.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I would like to explore why Augustus chose to dedicate this temple to Apollo. Apollo, at this point in time, was not a key god in Rome, and the god more famously associated with lightning strikes was of course Jupiter. Furthermore, there was no association with Apollo at the Battle of Naulochus. Rather, Naulochus was known for a temple dedicated to his sister Artemis, and the success of the battle was credited to her also. While Artemis does appear alongside her brother and Leto at the Temple of Apollo Palatinus, this is the only instance of her being present in a temple that was supposedly dedicated to a battle in a region where she was a primary goddess. There are two key reasons why this may be, the first being Augustus' famed and long-term association with Apollo. His relationship with Apollo had been established very early on in his career – Augustus having infamously dressed as Apollo the Tormentor in 'the dinner of the twelve gods'.¹⁷ This relationship then progressed into Augustus establishing a physical representation of this relationship by annexing the Temple of Apollo Palatinus to his own home and took its final form with Augustus declaring himself the son of Apollo. It is also important to note, that Mark Antony was still alive and very influential at this

¹⁶ Ibid (155).

¹⁷ Suet. *Aug.* 70, 1–2.

point. As mentioned previously, one of Augustus' main strategies in gaining popularity was to contrast himself against his rivals, particularly Mark Antony. Despite Mark Antony's standing within Roman politics, he was leading a lifestyle – alongside Cleopatra in Egypt – that was perceived as self-indulgent, luxurious and overall not according to the morals of the ancestral traditions.¹⁸ Augustus, on the other hand, wanted to present himself as the leader dedicated to Rome, one who upheld its traditions and morals.¹⁹ Much like Augustus' own ties with Apollo, Mark Antony adopted an association with Dionysus.²⁰ While the association with this god was supposed to present Mark Antony as the conqueror of the East, Augustus focused on the more negative connotations of Dionysus, namely his associations with all things debauched, immoral and 'un-Roman'. Mark Antony's claim of being a descendant of Hercules was likewise exploited by Augustus, as evidenced by a terracotta figure depicting Apollo in a contest against Hercules, which was placed within the temple.²¹ The decorations in the temple alluding to the struggle between Mark Antony and Augustus would suggest that the Battle of Naulochus was no longer the central theme being celebrated by the Temple of Apollo Palatinus. The temple was first proclaimed in 36 BC. However, by the time it was actually dedicated in 28 BC, the Battle of Actium had already been fought, and coincidentally a temple of Apollo stood in Actium as well.²² It is my belief that, when the lightning strike occurred and the temple was first proclaimed, it was planned for the battle of Naulochus to play a central role. A temple dedicated to Apollo with allusions to his sister Artemis may also have helped Augustus win the approval of his newly obtained colony. However, Augustus' struggle with Mark Antony became the greater priority in his life after the temple had been proclaimed. When the temple was dedicated, the Battle

¹⁸ DAVIES (2000: 51).

¹⁹ ZANKER (1988: 57–65).

²⁰ Plut. *Ant.* 24, 1–5.

²¹ HEKSTER (2004: 171–174).

²² According to Suetonius – *Aug.* 18, 2 – Augustus was also involved in the enlarging of this temple.

of Actium was his greatest achievement thus far, and it stands to reason that the central theme of the temple was changed to reflect this victory.

In any case, the Temple was not built purely because Apollo required the land for himself. Rather, it was primarily one of many ways in which Augustus associated himself with the god and drew attention to himself. His victory over Mark Antony just before the temple was finally dedicated, allowed Augustus to further utilize the temple for propagandistic purposes. Without the declarations made by the *Haruspices*, the construction of the temple would appear to be a blatant celebration of his own achievements. Augustus' use of the *Haruspices* simply provided a distraction from his true motives and gave the temple the appearance of being a product of a pious leader striving to please the gods and uphold the ancestral customs.

The declaration of War on Cleopatra

This declaration in 32 BC was a decisive event in Augustus' career, because the outcome of this war would determine the manner in which his career continued. As we know from the previous section, Augustus' relationship with Mark Antony had steadily deteriorated in the years prior to this event. Mark Antony's alliance and relationship with Cleopatra meant, that the declaration was aimed just as much against Mark Antony as it was against Cleopatra.²³

The war was declared according to the *Fetial* tradition. The *Fetiales* were a priesthood, whose primary concerns were rituals surrounding international treaties. At this stage, Augustus himself was the *pater patratus* (the head of the priesthood). Their duties involved the negotiation of terms of surrender, the writing down of – and giving their agreement to – treaties and of course the declaration of war itself.²⁴ There are three key sources that detail the ritual proceedings surrounding the declaration – Livy, Ovid, Cassius Dio – and a later source by Servius Danielis.

Livy's passage of the *Fetiales* involves the war against the Prisci Latini by Ancus Martius. Some key quotes from this passage include the claim that this war was labelled a 'pure and righteous war' before the

²³ RICH (2011: 205).

²⁴ Ibid (187).

ritual of declaring the war was begun. He then goes on to describe details of the ceremony, stating that ‘the customary practice was for a fetial to carry a bloody spear, tipped with iron or hardened in fire, to their (the enemies’) borders’. He further states that the declaration would then be made, and that the *fetial* ‘would hurl the spear across their borders’²⁵.

Ovid’s description defers slightly from that of Livy’s:

Her (the Temple of Bellona’s) founder was Appius, who, when peace was refused to Pyrrhus, saw clearly in his mind, though from the light of day was cut off. A small open space commands from the temple a view from the top of the Circus. There stands a little pillar of no little note. From it the custom is to hurl by hand a spear, war’s harbinger, when it has been resolved to take arms against a king and peoples. – Ovid. *Fasti*. 6, 205 (transl. J. Frazer, 1931)

While the casting of the spear remains the same, the key difference here is that the spear was cast at the Temple of Bellona rather than at the enemy’s borders. Cassius Dio writes a similar account of how the ritual was carried out:

For they (the Romans) voted to the men arrayed on his (Mark Antony’s) side pardon and praise if they would abandon him, and declared war outright upon Cleopatra, put on their military cloaks as if he were close at hand, and went to the temple of Bellona, where they performed through Caesar as *fetialis* all the rites preliminary to war in the customary fashion. – Cassius Dio 50, 4, 4–5 (transl. E. Cary, 1917)

It is possible that Livy’s account was an accurate representation of how the rituals were carried out before, and the alterations mentioned by the latter two authors became the norm in the years after Ancus Martius first performed it.²⁶ These alterations may well have been made for purely pragmatic reasons, i.e., due to the vastness of the empire at this time, travelling to the enemies’ borders would have been a difficult, dangerous and time-consuming task. However, it is worth noting that,

²⁵ Livy 1, 32, 13.

²⁶ WIEDEMANN (1986: 478).

no matter how pragmatic the reasons for staying in Rome were, by performing the ritual in Rome, Augustus (and anyone else that performed it) gained the inhabitants of the city as an audience.²⁷ In other words, I would suggest that the ritual can be seen as yet another Augustan strategy to shine a spotlight on himself and to demonstrate to the people of Rome that he was doing his best to uphold ancient traditions, unlike Mark Antony, the man he was about to go to war against.

Another fact worth noting is the evidence we have of the ritual being performed. We have the passage from Livy, detailing Ancus Marcius' war against the *Prisci Latini*; Vergil's observations on Pyrrhus; Augustus' performance of the ritual in 32 BC, described by Cassius Dio and finally Marcus Aurelius performing the ritual in 178 AD. It is clear that there are very few known, confirmed instances of the ritual being carried out prior to Augustus' performance of the ritual. Even if the ritual was performed on more occasions than this, it was evidently not important enough to be recorded. It could be argued that Augustus was simply hyperbolizing an event that was otherwise obscure or relatively unimportant, for the sake of celebrating himself and the show of morality and respect for the ancestral values that he was demonstrating to the public. Finally, it is important to note that Livy highlights the fact that the war declared must be 'pure and righteous'. As Wiedemann²⁸ points out, scholars from the earlier part of the 20th century – such as Frank and Scullard²⁹ – believed that the laws of the *Fetiales* were observed 'in good faith' because the values of *Mos maiorum* – the very concept Augustus was claiming to revive and uphold – would not have condoned a war of aggression. While the values of *Mos maiorum* may indeed have frowned

²⁷ It is important to note that this audience would have experienced this ritual long before the ritual itself was carried out. In the months, weeks or days leading up to the rituals, the public announcements for the rituals, coins minted for the rituals and preparations and decorations for the ritual, would have created an atmosphere of excitement and Augustus' name would have been at the center of it all. For more on the importance of rumour see: RAJA-RÜPKE (2021). For further reading on the use of Augustan coins as propaganda see: WALLACE-HADRILL (1986); GRUEBER (1910); CRAWFORD (1983); GRANT (1946); GRANT (1953), etc.

²⁸ WIEDEMANN (1986: 478).

²⁹ FRANK (1914: 9); SCULLARD (1959: 2).

upon actively starting a war, this did not necessarily mean that all the prior wars in Roman history had been defensive wars. Wiedemann and Harris argue, that the ceremony of throwing the spear may have simply been a ‘psychological mechanism’ that reduced any guilt that came with the declaration of a war that was in any way unjustified.³⁰ The war against Cleopatra could have been perceived as an unjust war, because Augustus’ conflict was clearly against Mark Antony. To declare war on a fellow Roman like Mark Antony, as well as the troops supporting him, would have meant that an overt Civil war rather than one which was – at least officially – fought against a foreign power like Egypt.³¹ It therefore seems very likely that Augustus performed the ritual in a theatrical manner to convince people that the war was indeed being carried out against non-Romans, this would simultaneously have helped reinforce the negative connotations of Mark Antony’s adopted foreign lifestyle and the idea that he had abandoned Rome as a result of his relationship and alliance with Cleopatra.³² Finally, it is worth noting once more that Augustus himself was the *Fetialis* that performed the ritual. In addition to disguising his conflict with Mark Antony, the ritual could also have allowed him to demonstrate just how much power and influence he had obtained.³³

We only have evidence of this ritual being practiced once during Augustus’ career. This could potentially indicate that Augustus only revived and performed rituals which had previously fallen into disuse when they could convenience his own political strategies.³⁴

Closing the doors at the Temple of Janus and the Augurium Salutis

A similar argument can be made for when Augustus ceremoniously closed the doors at the Temple of Janus in the Roman Forum, following the conclusion of the conflict against Cleopatra and Mark Antony in 29

³⁰ HARRIS (1979: 171); WIEDEMANN (1986: 478).

³¹ RICH (2011: 205). SCULLARD (2018: 156).

³² Sen. *Ep.* 83, 25.

³³ *Res Gestae* 4, 7. See also: WIEDEMANN (1986: 482).

³⁴ SALERNO (2018) provides an in-depth analysis of the *fetial* proceedings with specific focus on their re-invention during the Augustan age.

BC. This is an event that Augustus himself speaks about in his *Res Gestae*:

Our ancestors wanted Janus Quirinus to be closed when peace had been achieved by victories on land and sea throughout the whole empire of the Roman people; whereas, before I was born, it is recorded as having been closed twice in all from the foundation of the city, the senate decreed it should be closed three times when I was leader. – Chapter 13 (transl. A. E Cooley, 2009)

As Augustus states, the temple doors were to be closed whenever there was peace, and opened whenever there was conflict. Before Augustus, the ritual was only performed twice before in Roman history. Once, allegedly, by the legendary king Numa and a second time after the First Punic war in 241 BC by Aulus Manlius Torquatus.³⁵ This means that no one living had seen the ritual being performed in Augustus' time. Once again, the fact there were only two known instances of the ritual being performed would have meant, that the ritual did not hold a place of great importance among the numerous other rituals within Roman religion. The period from 241 BC to 29 BC was one of various wars and intermittent periods of peace, meaning that had the ritual indeed been of great importance, there would have been more known instances of it being performed.

Another source that details Augustus' performance of the two rituals explored in this section is that of Cassius Dio:

Nevertheless, the action which pleased him more than all the decrees was the closing by the senate of the gates of Janus, implying that all their wars had entirely ceased, and the taking of the augurium salutis, which had at this time fallen into disuse for the reasons I have mentioned. To be sure, there were still under arms the Treveri, who had brought in the Germans to help them, and the Cantabri, the Vaccaeii, and the Astures... – Cassius Dio, 51, 20, 5 (transl. E. Cary, 1917)

One detail that Augustus has quite clearly and conveniently left out of his own account, is the fact that Rome was still at war when the temple

³⁵ ZANKER (1988: 104).

doors were closed. This could be interpreted as a wish to deflect attention from the wars that were still happening. Rome had been through several decades of turmoil and Augustus, through his program of cultural and religious renewal, was trying to create a sense of stability by way of evoking a sense of a continuation of forgotten or disappearing past values. Because the war against Cleopatra (and Mark Antony) had been at the forefront of Roman events, it is quite possible that any smaller conflicts happening elsewhere in the Empire flew largely under the radar of the public. By celebrating the end of one major conflict, Augustus implied that peace as a whole had been restored. The awareness of ongoing wars would suggest that Augustus had failed to achieve the peace he had promised. Again, we see the by now familiar pattern of Augustus assuming the central position and painting himself as the bringer of peace, thereby helping boost his image. Maintaining a sense of peace was clearly important to Augustus, seeing as this was a ritual that he repeated at various points in his career.³⁶

While creating and upholding the semblance of peace and stability was no doubt a key strategy of Augustus, it would have been equally important for him to stress his victory against Mark Antony. Much like the declaration of war was to paint Mark Antony as a public enemy, closing the doors at the Temple of Janus was symbolic of said enemy being defeated. Furthermore, by being the individual leading on the ritual, Augustus was once more assuming a leadership position while simultaneously demonstrating his ever-growing power.

If we are to believe Cassius Dio, there was another ritual, alongside the closing of the doors of the Temple of Janus, which Augustus was evidently keen on performing, namely the so-called *Augurium Salutis*.³⁷ Essentially, it can be described as an inquiry conducted by the *augurs* to check if a prayer for the safety of the people could be conducted at the

³⁶ GREEN (2000: 305–307). For general reading on the Temple of Janus, see: MÜLLER (1943: 437–440).

³⁷ Cassius Dio 51, 20, 5. This ritual, like that at the Temple of Janus, was repeated by Augustus, as evidenced by a pointed pedestal (or *cippus*) found underneath the citadel of Rome (ILS9337): KEARSLEY (2009: 150).

time in question.³⁸ The prayer could only be uttered on a day ‘free of all wars’.³⁹ The first time Augustus performed the ritual was in January of 29 BC, the same time the doors at the Temple of Janus were closed.⁴⁰ Unlike the latter ritual, the *Augurium Salutis* had been performed not too long ago in 63 BC to celebrate Pompeius’ victory against Mithridates.⁴¹ However, enough time had elapsed for the ritual to be labelled as one which had been unduly neglected until Augustus’ ascent to power. A notable difference to the aforementioned cases is the fact that Augustus did not participate in or perform the ritual himself. Nevertheless, Suetonius suggests that the order for the inquiry came from him and was performed in his name – so Augustus seems to have made his presence felt in other ways.

He also revived some of the ancient rites which had gradually fallen into disuse, such as the augury of Safety, the office of Flamen Dialis, the ceremonies of the Lupercalia, the Secular Games, and the festival of the Compitalia. – Suet. *Aug.* 31, 4 (Transl. Rolfe, 1913)

It is thought that Sextus Appuleius, Augustus’ fellow consul, augur and also his nephew, consulted the augural college and performed the ritual on his behalf.⁴² While Augustus may not have been present, the conflict – or rather, the end of the conflict – being celebrated was, by this point, famously associated with him. Furthermore, since Cassius Dio and Suetonius both refer to Augustus’ involvement in the ritual, it can be surmised that it was well known that he was the one carrying out the prayer for the people of Rome despite his absence.

Much like closing the doors at the Temple of Janus, this ritual was performed specifically to highlight Augustus’ victory over Cleopatra and Mark Antony and the supposed peace that resulted from it. While a genuine desire to maintain the safety of the Roman people may have

³⁸ OCD (2012: 205). For further reading on the *Augurium Salutis* and the priesthood in general see: LINDERSKI (1986: 225–228).

³⁹ OCD (2012: 205).

⁴⁰ KEARSLEY (2009: 150).

⁴¹ KEARLSEY (2009: 151).

⁴² BROUGHTON (1952: 532); SYME (1986: 30); KEARSLEY (2009: 150).

existed, there can be little doubt that, in light of ongoing conflicts elsewhere in the Roman empire, the demonstrative focus on rituals and symbolism of peace was a form of distraction and political maneuver designed to bolster Augustus' popularity among the Roman people.⁴³ It is important to keep in mind that during the time period in which the four abovementioned rituals were conducted, Octavian had not yet assumed the name of Augustus. The association with an augural tradition not only highlighted Augustus' position as an *augur* – another impressive religious title among the many he had already obtained – but it also foreshadowed the change of his name from Octavian to Augustus which was to follow two years later in 27 BC.

Similarly, it should be realized that the other conflicts taking place elsewhere in the empire were not his own, but the campaigns of other powerful men whose military accomplishments were just as impressive – if not more impressive – as Augustus'. In addition to diverting from the fact that peace had not been completely restored, the splendor of the rituals also outshone the achievements of these men.⁴⁴ As Kearsley points out, this overshadowing, combined with the Senate's approval for both the event at the Temple of Janus and the *Augurium Salutis* to take place, effectively implied that the campaigns carried out by Augustus somehow trumped any others being carried out, and that the result of his conflicts had a greater impact on the future of Rome than any others. This would therefore have made it difficult for any other political contenders to gain the same level of popularity among the Roman people that Augustus was actively obtaining.⁴⁵

Finally, both rituals naturally involved some form of communication with the gods. By taking the central stage during the performance of such highly symbolic religious acts, Augustus demonstrated a certain proximity and intimacy to the Roman gods, giving the impression of their benevolence and support for him and his undertakings. This dis-

⁴³ For a list of conflicts still occurring during this period, see Cassius Dio 51, 20, 5.

⁴⁴ A key figure whose achievements may have threatened Augustus was Licinius Crassus who had been hailed as an exceptional military leader who according to Cassius Dio (51, 24, 4) had won the armour of an enemy king through single combat.

⁴⁵ Ibid (151). See also BEARD-NORTH & PRICE (1998: 188).

play of being favoured by the gods, in addition to having the approval of the Senate, would have only further enhanced and consolidated Augustus' reputation among the people of Rome.⁴⁶

Revival vs. Re-invention

It is striking that Augustus seems to have placed focus on rituals and religious groups that had ambiguous and somewhat obscure proceedings and history attached to them. In fact, the fact that history was already rather obscure for the Romans of the latter half of the 1st century BC, then begs the question of whether Augustus revived or rather re-invented them according to his own goals and ambitions? This question will be addressed in this part of the paper.

While there are several factors which point to this being the main motive behind the changes, there may also have well been some pragmatic reasons, and some level of desire to ensure the well-being of the Roman people. For instance, when considering the proclamation of the Temple of Apollo, it is important to note that, although Augustus was the prime beneficiary, since it allowed him to build a large temple – which commemorated the military victories of Naulochus and later Actium –, the temple was for public use. Several of the temples constructed in the Late Republic were private, meaning that numerous large and intricate temples had been constructed that few had access to. It seems plausible to suggest that the inability to access and take part in the rapid cultural change and the growing wealth of the Roman empire left many groups feeling isolated and alienated. By constructing a temple that was open to the public on his land, Augustus provided such groups with the ability to actively participate in the changes being brought about through Rome's growing wealth and success.⁴⁷ The dedication of this temple occurred around the same time that Augustus was starting his temple renovations, and at the same time his followers were investing in the beautification of the city. In addition to an overall progress in the quality of life, the renovation of the city would have created several jobs,

⁴⁶ LINDERSKI (1986: 2226; 2291). See also LINDERSKI (1995: 490).

⁴⁷ ZANKER (1988: 18–25).

and therefore new sources of income.⁴⁸ In short, these renovations not only boosted the image that Augustus was in the process of building as well as his political career, but also benefitted the populace of Rome. Similarly, despite the liberties taken with the proceedings of the *Fetiales* analyzed above, the change of the location happened prior to Augustus' performance of the ritual, which was in all likelihood a pragmatic decision. In terms of the closing of the doors of the Temple of Janus, the extraordinary thing was not so much what Augustus did – namely that he celebrated a major military accomplishment, which was very much a fixture of Roman culture – but how he did it. Augustus was simply doing what numerous military leaders before him had done, but he was doing this in a manner that involved and signaled the safety of the entire public.

The open and rather obscure nature of the rituals he renewed could allow us to view them as being a form of 'invented tradition'. According to Hobsbawm, an invented tradition is 'a set of practices normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition.'⁴⁹ He then goes on to argue that such traditions are 'responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations.'⁵⁰ Because Augustus based his own ideology and the newly shaped ritual processes on *Mos maiorum*, a concept that had existed for generations before, the basic aspects of the rituals were, as Hobsbawm puts it, 'accepted' by the general public. Augustus therefore provided his own definitions, while simultaneously making use of the authority of – and general reverence for – 'old situations' (or institutions, traditions etc.). Furthermore, by re-introducing numerous rituals and highlighting the importance of their consistent practice, he also introduced the element of repetition. Therefore, it could be argued that the repetitive practice of numerous rituals that had all been redefined according to Augustus' own ideas and thus reflected the 'saviour of Rome' character he had created for himself – allowing his views to be 'inculcated' into the minds of

⁴⁸ RÜPKE-RAJA (2021: 60–61).

⁴⁹ HOBBSAWM (1983: 1).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

the Roman people, thereby influencing them to believe that these rituals had always been performed in this manner and that the virtues surrounding them had likewise remained the same for many generations. As Assmann⁵¹ also points out, repetition is a vital aspect for the establishment and perpetuation of tradition and ritual as relevant symbolic forms of cultural memory. Augustus, being the purveyor of these traditions and rituals, and the values that they stood for, clearly stood as a prime example of an individual who upheld and adhered to these principles. By publicly placing himself at the center of these ritual performances, he became directly associated with their symbolic content. The repeated performance of rituals such as the closing of the doors and the *Augurium Salutis* ensured the remembrance and long-term relevance of the ritual itself, but also cemented Augustus' place in the cultural memory of Rome.

The rituals discussed in this paper could, on the surface, be classified as revived, given that they had once been practiced, fell into varying levels of oblivion, and were then reinstated in a more notable manner by Augustus. Moreover, the fact that the performance of the rituals largely involved the same priesthoods and at times similar ritual procedures, would also imply a revival. Nevertheless, there were also significant changes made in most instances, and, when there was insufficient evidence of how certain procedures had been conducted, new procedures appear to have been introduced. Furthermore, these changes in the ritual proceedings drew attention to – and centered on – the persona and political career of one person. Therefore, while the rituals cannot be viewed as being completely invented, there are key differences that demonstrate that the rituals were also not revived in the sense of having been restored in its original form. The key thing here is that an element of continuity was maintained in spite of the changes that were made, we can therefore argue that instead of the rituals being revived or invented, they were in fact re-invented, with Augustus adding new elements onto those that already existed and altering them in certain ways.

⁵¹ ASSMANN (2006: 17).

Conclusion

Augustus' career was one of extreme and rapid change. By the end of his career, Rome had seen massive shifts in both its political and its religious practices. This was in addition to dramatic transformation made to the infrastructure of the city and an overall shift in how the Roman people viewed themselves in relation to the empire and their known world. The changes made to the ritual traditions attributed to *Mos maiorum* were one among many that occurred. It is clear that Augustus tapped into aspects of specific rituals that helped highlight his own achievements. He employed these aspects to develop the character that he presented to the Roman people. The growth of this character, alongside the development of the rituals, in turn allowed him to contrast himself against his rivals. Simultaneously, the performance of the rituals permitted him to detract from their deeds and successes. All these factors – enabled by the abovementioned alterations made to the rituals – ultimately led to Augustus' power and standing in Rome being gradually strengthened and consolidated. As the paper argued, the specific rituals explored had been either forgotten, or had always been in a state of obscurity or general unimportance. It therefore stands to reason that many – if not all – all the changes Augustus instituted went unnoticed or were imperceptible, because there was no evidence at the time suggesting that the rituals were performed any differently in the past. In essence, what this paper aimed to demonstrate is how Augustus looked to the past when trying to create and present an image of stability and continuity that would in turn gain him popularity and power. However, a simple revival of the rituals alone would not have allowed him to stand out to such a degree. on the other hand, altering them in a manner that placed him in the center of their proceedings meant that he could establish a lasting association between the ritual and himself. The re-invention of rituals was, in conclusion, a necessary measure in ensuring the establishment of the dominant and long-lasting legacy that Augustus left behind.

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