The Failure of Augustus

The Failure of Augustus:

Essays on the Interpretation of a Paradox

By

E.A. Judge

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

The Failure of Augustus: Essays on the Interpretation of a Paradox

By E.A. Judge

This book first published 2019

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-2592-9
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-2592-4

For Tom Hillard *nostro*
rerum Romanarum scrutatori peritissimo.

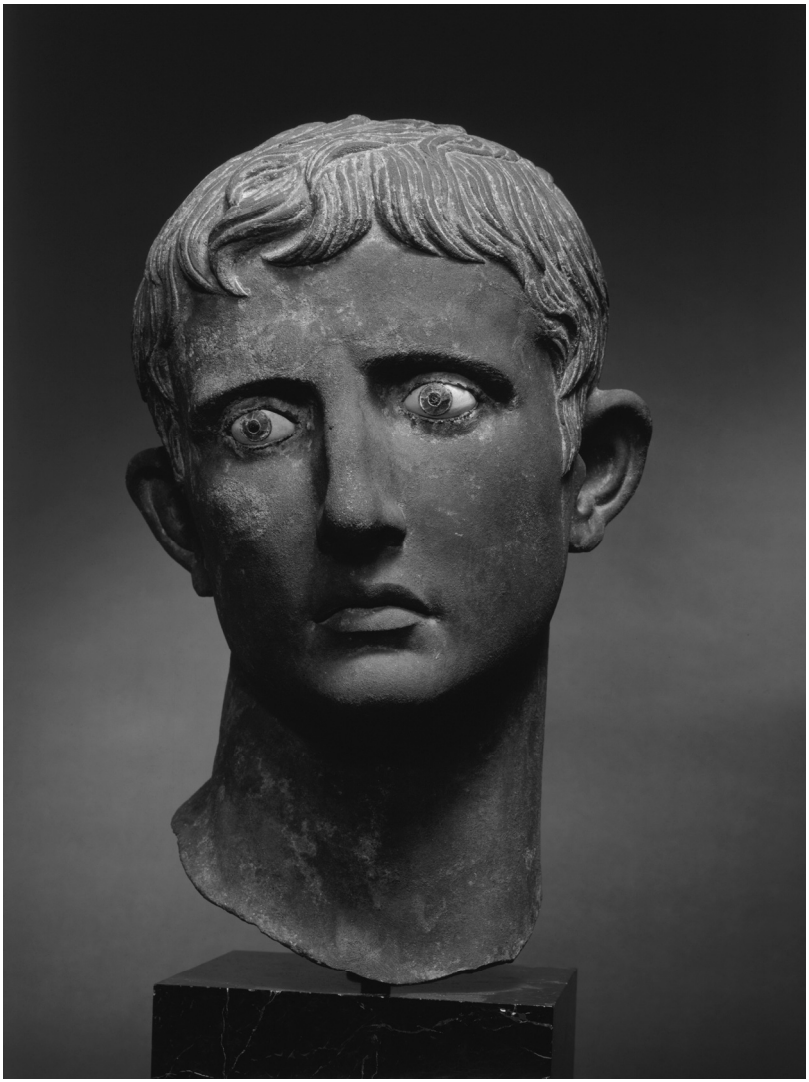

Fig. 0-1: The Meroë head. Larger than life-size head in bronze from a statue of Augustus captured in 25 BC from Egypt and buried at Meroë in the Sudan. Now in the British Museum. Used with permission.

CONTENTS

TABLES & FIGURES

Tables

Figures

PREFACE

The proud and tragic ideal of Augustan Rome was profoundly unreal to a New Zealand schoolboy in 1944. This first dawned on my conscious mind by its juxtaposition with the radically different life crisis of that far-sighted provincial citizen under Tiberius Caesar, Paul of Tarsus. From Virgil I was writing a translation of the sad fate of Orpheus and Eurydice (*Georgics* 4.453–527). At the same time the national curriculum of public schools required the silent reading in class of the apostle's letters. The contrast transfixes me to this day.

In our 1949 MA class for Latin Honours Professor Pocock pointed us dramatically to the graffito he had written on the wall of his study, *contemptu famae contemni virtutes* (Tacitus, *Annals* 4.38.5, "by despising fame virtues are despised"). Ronald Syme was visiting us then. Pocock passed us a copy of *The Roman Revolution*. It ends with a warning (p. 523) against taking the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* "as a sure guide for history … no less vain the attempt to discover ultimate derivation and exact definition as a literary form".

I was already engrossed with the letters of Cicero, and their urgent quest for glory (to be transposed by Paul!). The fourth-century commentator, Servius, said that Orpheus and Eurydice had displaced Virgil's inopportune encomium of his fellow poet Gallus, the over-proud deputy renounced by Augustus. The philosophical accommodation of glory to the needs of the Roman nobility was comprehensively analysed (also in 1949) by A.D. Leeman, as I was to learn.

By 1962 I had already been teaching Roman history for a decade in three different countries (as well as beginning on the historical geography of my Pauline question as Sir James Knott Fellow in Ancient History at King's College, Newcastle upon Tyne). From the University of Sydney I was granted leave in Cologne under the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung. My mentors there were L. Wickert (author of the exhaustive entry in *RE* on "Princeps") and H. Volkmann, the reigning custodian of the text of the *RG*. The Humboldt study was not however discussed with them.

Sidestepping the warning of Syme, the Humboldt report explained the message of the *RG* in terms of the cultural ethos of the nobility (and not as a bid for monarchy oriental-style, such as had been much canvassed in Europe). To this was added the identification of particular patterns of

literary and epigraphic self-display at Rome. I was to prepare an historical study of the *RG* for the use of the flourishing echelon of non-Latinate students of Ancient History in New South Wales. Syme must have been aware of this. On his arrival in Sydney in August 1967, as Secretary-General of the CIPSH (Conseil Internationale de Philosophie et Sciences Humaines), in order to open the Australian Society for Classical Studies which we had founded, he passed to me at the airport a copy of the just published Oxford edition of the *RG* by Brunt and Moore.

English-language students had so far been dependent on translations from the twenties by E.G. Hardy and F.W. Shipley. The Latin text of Brunt and Moore was taken from Ehrenberg and Jones, derived itself from the advanced editions of Volkmann and Gagé (Paris). Only now do we have comprehensive and up to date editions of the *RG* by Scheid (Paris) and Cooley (Cambridge). The latter expertly opens the text to non-Classical readers by providing separate translations for the Latin and Greek versions on facing pages.

The 26 chapters of the present collection were first presented mostly as lectures for advanced secondary students or their teachers, or as academic conference papers, between 1966 and 2016. They are now arranged however in a broad thematic sequence across the career of Augustus. They are in no way a biography of him, nor a history of his time. A student-level familiarity with the two centuries from the Gracchi to Nero is assumed (*cf.* Scullard).

The particular chapters are all guided by two principles of study. The first, inspired in my mind by the lectures of A.H.M. Jones at Cambridge in 1953, is that one must start with the precise meaning of each of the documented terms that bear on the question. The second, arising from my personal convictions, and not usually argued by me in academic debate, is that anyone is first entitled to an account of their motives at the time, irrespective of the vast consequences that may have flowed for everyone else, however glorious.

Augustus did not intend to become “the Founder of the Roman Empire”. He failed to escape the early onset of such a categorical mis-construction of his ambition, losing for ever the actual glory he tried in vain to win.

As a one-time Geordie I am grateful to the Cambridge Scholars of Newcastle for refloating this unfamiliar interpretative scenario. The miscellaneous essays were selected by myself. At Macquarie University I have had the private assistance of A.D. Macdonald in adapting the texts to the Newcastle style.

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT DID AUGUSTUS THINK HE SHOULD BE DOING?[1]

Young Gaius Octavius (63 BC-AD 14) was the orphaned son of a minor Roman nobleman. But at age 15 he had been slotted into a vacant pontificate, and briefly made ceremonial urban prefect (Table 1-1, 47 BC). Neither he nor anyone else seems to have seen much more in that. He was, after all, only the grandson of the sister of the dictator, Julius Caesar (Fig. 25-1). He no doubt anticipated the usual cadetship in the latter's provincial command. Then in the second quarter of his adult life he might stand for election in the magisterial career (*cursus honorum*) proper, with the ultimate goal of winning an independent imperial command in his forties as praetor, or even consul.

But he was catapulted into power at 19 years of age (*Res Gestae* [=*RG*] 1.1) by the news of Julius Caesar's will (44 BC). He was to be principal heir (three-quarters of the estate), if no son had been born, but on condition of adoption into Caesar's name. Against parental advice, Octavius set out for Rome, after landing in Italy secretly in response to the Ides of March.

He soon discovered the troops were already treating him as a Caesar, and expected him to avenge his adoptive father against the assassins. The name gave him the upper hand instantly in the public eye as well. But its political legacy was to prove a poisoned chalice, for Caesar had been made dictator for life (which was why his protégés assassinated him).

By the end of 44 Cicero, the elder statesman, was urging the senators to co-opt the hero of the hour against his main rival. The next year saw their progressive capitulation as half a lifetime of magisterial honours were collapsed into the one year 43 in favour of Octavius. His career table records co-option as a senator (with consular status in the speaking order), the grant of military command (*imperium*) with rank of praetor, his first formal salutation as *imperator* for a victory in action, and election to the now vacant consulship itself. A retrospective enactment in 43 in law also validated his (testamentary) adoption by the dictator.

With two rivals Octavianus (as the new Caesar might have conventionally been called) settled for a quasi-dictatorial "commission of three for settling public life" (*triumviri rei publicae constituendae*) which lasted for two five-year terms (43–33 BC). By his victory at Actium in 31 over his colleague Antonius (who had been consul with the dictator Caesar in 44), Octavianus was left unchallenged in the Roman world, but without any ongoing appointment carrying the title to power. He had been granted *imperium* ("command") in 43, however, and was still holding it at his death (AD 14). He had been consul for the second time in 33 BC, and (like the dictator Sulla in 79) might have retired to the dignity of political eminence in the senate while lesser men took their turn in the magistracies.

In retrospect Augustus justified his failure to do so in various ways. For the year 32 he could appeal to the oath of personal loyalty by which "the whole of Italy" (not the Roman state) had "spontaneously" (*sponte sua*) "demanded me as general" (*dux*, *RG* 25.2). In 22 BC he had repeatedly been voted the dictatorship (*RG* 5.1) but had refused it, as also with a perpetual consulship (5.3), and then twice rejected the unheard-of position of "supreme curator of laws and morals" (6.1). To avoid any suggestion of window-dressing he spelled out the more restricted terms under which he had nevertheless actually dealt with the political demands of those occasions.

In 27 BC Augustus had been given a ten-year provincial command. It was renewed at intervals, sometimes only for five years. In 23 BC, on resigning the 11th consulship, he was granted "the power of a tribune". This would enable him to have a convenient (though not supreme) standing in the senate when on leave from his command.

The ostensibly familiar sound of these arrangements was however lost in the booming prestige that was only magnified as he lived on beyond all expectation (he was ready to die when ill in 23 BC). Thus increasingly an explanation was needed for the unparalleled ascendancy over 58 years that outstripped the memory of almost everyone.

At three dramatic sessions of the senate attempts were made to express the essential legitimacy of this position:

I – 13 and 16 January, 27 BC;
II – 5 February and 12 May, 2 BC;
III – 4 and 17 September, AD 14.

In each case one should distinguish:
(a) What actually happened;
(b) What Augustus intended should follow;
(c) What others made of it later.

I – Consuls imp. Caesar VII, M. Agrippa III (27 BC)

(a) On 13 January in the senate Octavianus announced the "transfer of public life" (*rem publicam transtuli*) from his own control (*potestas*) to the discretion of the senate and people of Rome (*RG* 34.1). Already in the previous year an issue of gold coins had announced, "He has restored to the Roman people (their) laws and rights" (*leges et iura p(opulo) r(omano) restituit*). The *Fasti Praenestini* (a calendar compiled by Verrius Flaccus, tutor of Gaius and Lucius Caesar, before their grandfather's death) list for 13 Jan. 27 the award of the laurels and civic crown to Augustus which the latter records in *RG* 34.2 (along with the golden shield commemorating his *virtus*, "enterprise", and *clementia*, his *justitia* and his *pietas*, "loyalty").

(b) The name Augustus had been given because it reflected the contemporary understanding of Numa, the second founder of Rome, the one who "founded it in law and morality" (Livy 1.19.1), rather than Romulus (Suetonius, *Aug*. 7.2) who had founded it "by force of arms" (Livy). This may even have been the year in which he pronounced the edict cited by Suetonius, *Augustus* 28.2: "So may it be granted me to settle the public life (*rem publicam*) safe and sound in its place, and to win from that the reward which I seek, that I may be known as the author of the best possible order (*optimi status auctor*) and at my death take with me the hope that the foundations I have laid for the public life will remain in place."

At the founding of the city the ceremony was defined (by Ennius, cited in Suet. *Aug*. 7) as the *augustum augurium* ("the august augury"). Being himself an *augur* (a member of that priestly college), the name "Augustus" echoes this. It also reflects the status of *auctoritas*, lit. "authorship", or being the "developer" (*auctor*) of something. In *RG* 34.3 Augustus states that while he was now no greater in lawful power (*potestas*) than his colleagues in each magistracy, in *auctoritas* he stood ahead of everybody.

(c) A century later, when Suetonius quoted the edict in which Augustus had aspired to be known as *optimi status auctor*, he added that Augustus also saw to it no one regretted "the new order". Augustus would not have thanked him. Innovation was certainly not his aim. But we have made him "the founder of the empire", as though that was something new in the "public life" (*res publica*) of the Roman people. *Imperium* had always been there, invested in the magistrates through whom Rome was ruled, and herself ruled over other places. Conversely the "public life" (*res publica*) continued to be the domestic usage of this imperial power even in the sixth century AD.

We owe to the third-century Greek historian Cassius Dio the theory that Augustus in 27 BC had to choose between two constitutions, democracy

and monarchy. He chose the latter, but masked it as the former (Dio 53.11). In the year 1863 such a constitutional theory led Theodor Mommsen to restore the broken text of the *Fasti Praenestini* to make it say that they gave the oak crown to Augustus because he "restored the Republic" to the Roman people.[2] By 1883 Mommsen thought better of this, but "the restored Republic" lingers on in our textbooks (though abandoned by the revised *Cambridge Ancient History* of 1996).[3]

II – Consuls imp. Caesar XIII, M. Plautius Silvanus (2 BC)

(a) On 5 February, the *Fasti Praenestini* list a holiday to commemorate the day when Augustus was called "father of his country" (*pater patriae*) by the senate and people of Rome.

On 12 May, the temple of Mars Ultor was dedicated in the new Augustan forum (though Dio 60.5.3 says 1 August).

The two events must be connected, since Augustus states that the resolution of the senate on the title included its inscription under the *quadrigae* (his triumphal chariot) which they decided should be set up in the Forum Augustum (*RG* 35).

(b) Since Augustus made this title the climactic point of the *RG*, it clearly represents the final validation of *auctoritas* as the principle of his leadership (*RG* 34.3). He was named *pater patriae* by senate, equestrian order, and Roman people acting "as a whole" (*universus*). This was not a novel salutation, but had historic precedent, and as long ago as 29 BC had been anticipated for him in Horace, *Odes* 1.2.50. Why then did they wait until now?

Prior to the battle of Philippi in 42 BC Augustus is said to have vowed a temple to Mars Ultor ("the Avenger") if given the victory over Caesar's assassins. This seems to have become parasitic upon Caesar's own vow for such a temple to celebrate his planned recovery of standards lost to the Parthians by Crassus. Augustus needed a show of strength before it could be built in the new forum, to be set at right angles to the Julian one. Mars was to gaze down from his temple across the *quadrigae* of Augustus and on towards the statue of Julius in the latter's forum. In this coherent panorama the divine Avenger beheld his avenging agent facing the avenged parent.

Yet this potent scene was constricted by the owners of property essential to its more spacious implementation, perhaps including a relative of Pompeius, Caesar's old rival (Ovid, *Ex Ponto* 4.5.10). Augustus did not "dare" dispossess them, says Suetonius (*Aug*. 56.2). The vow must be

fulfilled by personal means, not public ones (*RG* 21.1). In the end Augustus could wait no longer. The forum was truncated.

Not only was the past at stake, but also the future leadership of Rome. Suetonius says that next to the gods Augustus honoured the "generals" (*duces,* 31.5) who had from nothing "made the *imperium* of the Roman people all powerful". He had therefore put up statues of them all in his forum, declaring by edict: "I have done this so that by their model as it were I myself so long as I live and the leaders of subsequent ages may be tested by the citizens."

Suetonius must not have checked. Not all of them were "generals", but as Augustus says, they were "leaders" (*principes*). Moreover, the inscriptions beneath their statues reveal what makes one the leader of his age. It is crisis management: where others have broken down, and all regular solutions are out of reach, the leader is the one who finds a way to set it all right again.

There is a strong doctrine of history here. It asserts continuity, not change. But it depends upon initiative. That same *auctoritas* ("capacity to lead") which had always saved Rome must do so also in the future. Augustus embodies it on a grand scale, and will transmit the pattern to future leaders. The public acclamation of him as *pater patriae* on the nones (=5th) of February is treated by Ovid (*Fasti* 2.133-44) as though it echoes a formal "inauguration" of Rome (Kearsley), the "restoration of rights"in 28 BC perhaps.[4] The dedication of the promised temple on 12 May (Ovid, *Fasti*, 5.552, 595) may have been tied to the prospective military success in the East of Gaius Caesar, the adopted son of Augustus, who was to deliver the show of strength needed to lend martial substance to the standards already returned (Herbert-Brown).[5]

(c) The message of this ceremonial combination, both the new title and its monumental setting loaded with historic meaning, has often been lost, in ancient times and modern alike. As a propaganda coup it has failed. It contradicts our retrospective assumption that a major change in Roman statecraft must have governed the mind of Augustus.

III – Consuls Sextus Pompeius, Sextus Appuleius (AD 14)

(a) On 4 September the senate met following the arrival of the body of Augustus (died 19 August) with Tiberius, on the previous day (Dio 56.31.2). Drusus, son of Tiberius, presented the will of Augustus, which was read by his freedman Polybius. Tiberius was allocated two-thirds of the estate, the remainder going to Livia. Then Drusus himself read the four associated documents:

1) funeral instructions;
2) the *Res Gestae*;
3) the public accounts;
4) advice for Tiberius and the public.

On 17 September the senate met again, to deify Augustus. The consuls asked Tiberius "to succeed to his father's position" (*statio*, Velleius 2.124.2), but Tiberius disclaimed it. They had surely invited him to sit in the third curule chair between them, as Augustus had done since 19 BC. Tiberius however insisted on standing up when the consuls were present (Dio 57.11.3).

(b) Augustus made no plans for any "succession" in the magisterial sense (as when a consul succeeds his predecessor). As head of his family he was providing by will for succession only to his property (he held no magistracy anyway). But the money gave his principal heir the means to succeed to his station in political life, as the ethos of the nobility (and the public) expected. The term *statio* is used this way in a private letter of Augustus to his adopted son Gaius in AD 1 (Aulus Gellius 15.7.3). It lay with Gaius however to win his way by "taking the lead", as Augustus put it.

Augustus advised the public "to entrust the public business to all who had the ability both to understand and to act, and never to let it depend on any one person" (Dio 56.33.4). As Drusus read out the words on 4 September it was no surprise to Tiberius. He had long been conscripted by Augustus as a full partner in his provincial obligations. This appointment did not lapse with the death of Augustus. But it did not cover metropolitan leadership. On 17 September Tiberius insisted "the public business would be more easily managed by sharing the work" (Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.11.1). He then it seems read out (once more) the written advice of Augustus on this principle.

(c) By contrast with II (c) above, the battle of wits between Tiberius and the senate has captivated the ancient sources and modern debate alike. Although we have two contemporary authorities (Ovid and Velleius), two second-century ones (Tacitus and Suetonius), and a studious one from the third century (Cassius Dio), none has managed to state the technical details of the issue. Modern taste cannot easily evade the insinuation of hypocrisy on Tiberius' part. Yet what we know of his character matches his protestation. He had no appetite for a monopoly of power. At his own death he split the family estate equally between two heirs.

As for Augustus, he deeply regretted having to pass the substance of it on to one not of his blood-line. Nor did he assume Tiberius would prevail.

At the end, according to Tacitus (*Ann*. 1.13.2), he noted four others likely to bid for "political leadership" (*principem locum*).

The problem is ours. We retroject our classificatory way of understanding how things change in history. But the Roman nobility did not think in terms of a constitutional choice between democracy and monarchy (as Dio, a Greek, already saw it). Nor were "republic" and "empire" chronological epochs to them. *Imperium* was the supreme command within *res publica*, both after Augustus as before.

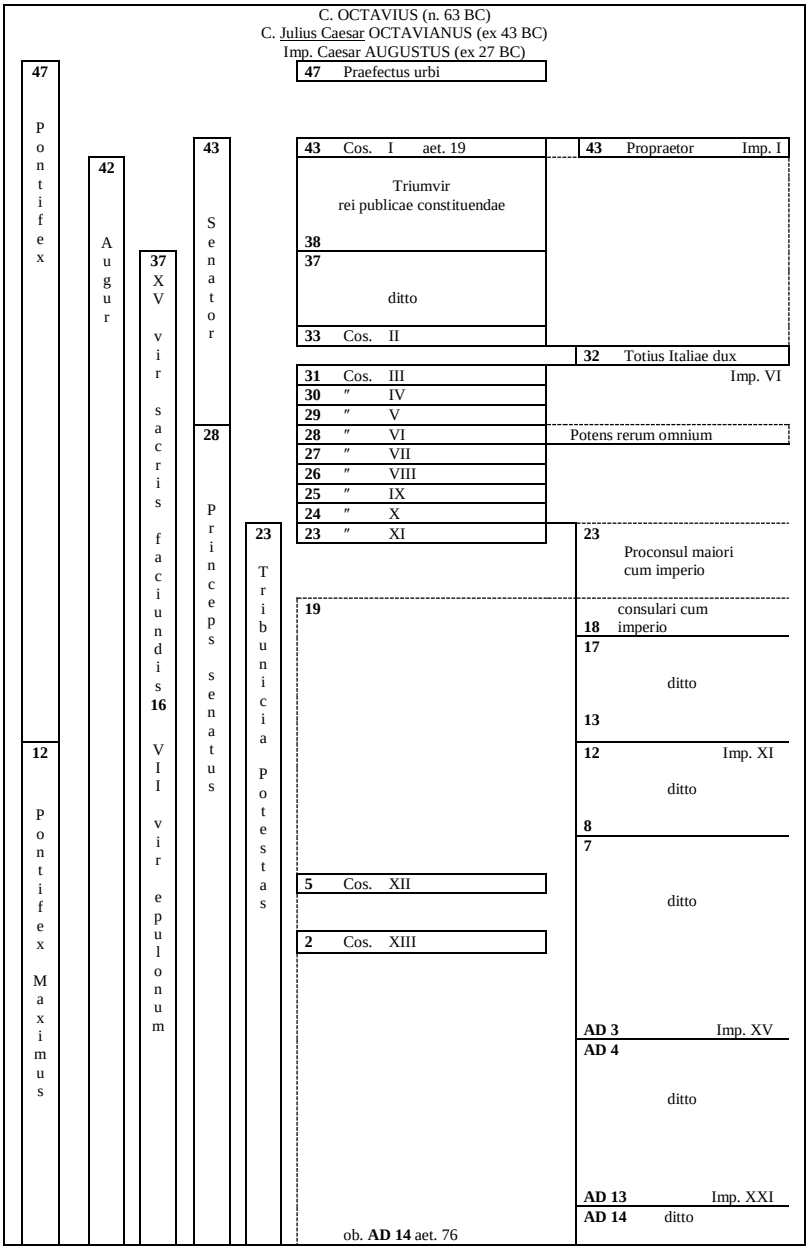

Table 1-1: Cursus honorum of Augustus

CHAPTER TWO

WHAT DID THEY THINK WAS HAPPENING AT THE TIME?[1]

Everyone takes Augustus as the great turning point in Roman history. with him the "Republic" ended and the "Empire" began. But, so far as we know, no one at the time saw it this way. Indeed the idea that history is properly seen in terms of changes in the constitution of the state is foreign to the Romans. It is imported from Greek political science.

In this system of thought the constitution was supposed to be the basic cause of changes in the affairs of states. This may have been broadly true for Greek states, which did have formal constitutions, so that the competition for power typically took the form of proposals to change the constitution.

But the Romans did not have a formal constitution. Nor did they express the competition for power in terms of proposals for change of any kind. They did not see change as desirable at all. Anyone bidding for control would therefore say he was trying to preserve the existing order against his rivals who were threatening to upset it.

The first hint in our sources that anyone was talking in the modern way about Augustus comes when Tacitus (writing about a century later) says that at Augustus's death there was hardly anyone left who had "seen the Republic." This constitutes an insinuation that Augustus had destroyed the old order. It does not say what he had put in its place. It is a consciously loaded way of talking about the matter. It deliberately converts the term "*res publica*" into the name for a period of Roman history which, by implication, has come to an end.

But the term remained in normal use throughout Roman history as the standard way of referring to the state, regardless of who ruled it or what its constitution, if any, was supposed to be. Modern usage has gone over to the assumptions of this clever, in-group remark of Tacitus. It has converted the Latin term into the name of a constitutional form or period (so that "Republic" can now mean only that in modern languages). It condemns us

all to see Roman history through the eyes of later times, and to a foreign way of understanding Roman politics.

It is the same with the word "Empire." Romans normally used the term "*imperium*," at all stages of their history, for the power of command. This was vested in a magistrate and exercised by him on behalf of the Roman people over foreign nations. It did not mean a particular form of the state, nor the second half of Roman history, as does the word "Empire" which we have derived from it.

It is Cassius Dio, a Greek historian writing over two centuries after Augustus, who spells out for us the view of him that has dominated the tradition. Once Augustus was firmly in control, Dio has him sit down with his advisers, Agrippa and Maecenas, to decide what kind of constitution Rome shall now have.

Agrippa advises democracy but Maecenas persuades Augustus that monarchy is best. Since the Romans are not likely to tolerate it, however, Augustus decides to conceal his monarchy under the guise of democracy. Hence the famous speech of January 13, 27 BC, in which, according to Dio, Augustus pretends to be giving everything back to the people.

This "façade" theory of the Augustan revolution is basic to all modem studies of it, including Sir Ronald Syme's *The Roman Revolution*, the greatest and most innovative study of Roman history from the 20th century.[2] The cliché about "the restoration of the republic" is part of the same conceit. It rests upon no contemporary evidence and it is not clear to me that it was even possible for Romans to have thought in such terms.

The "façade" theory is a juggling act of the Greek historians to make the facts of Roman history fit their constitutional doctrines. They are like the Marxists who try to save their theory by ever more tortuous interpretations of the facts. But history does not consist of processes that carry people along.

History is the record of individual people, each of whom is confronted with the onus of choice in his relations with others. Basic desires, like the craving for approval, may lend a pattern to human affairs, but the possibility of variation seems as unregulated as we know our own motives to be.

The historian who comes with his explanations ready-made has written the recipe for misunderstanding. We all insist upon our own individuality and freedom. We shall surely therefore get closer to the reality of people in the past if we approach them on the same assumption. More than that, we recognise that the fair dealing we expect for ourselves is also owed to the dead. Why this should matter to us is a more profound question than I can tackle here. But clearly the student of history takes upon himself a delicate exercise in personal understanding, the more demanding and subtle for

being addressed to those who have finished all they have to say. Our task is to question the record they have left as carefully as we can, and to temper the verdict we know we cannot avoid with the fallibility of all human judgement.

What did they expect to happen after Caesar's death?

The plot to kill Caesar on the Ides of March was made among the leading men of Rome. It does not seem to have occurred to any of them that anything would change. With the dictator out of the way, public life would resume its normal course. When Cicero later complained that an "heir to the throne" had been left, he was alluding to Mark Antony. He had been Caesar's fellow-consul. Cicero's jibe means that he saw Antony as another potential dictator. It does not mean that he thought Rome was turning into a monarchy.

But within a few weeks of the assassination it was clear that a profound shift of power had occurred. Caesar's great-nephew, Octavius (the future Augustus) had assumed his name. Although only 19 years old, he was raising troops without authority and setting himself up as a political leader. Why had this possibility not been foreseen, and how did it come to pass?

Octavius was Caesar's closest male relative. He had received the usual minor distinctions and military opportunities that noblemen made available to the cadets of their families. He had shown the usual level of ambition by extracting from Caesar the promise that at some time in the future he would be appointed for a year as his deputy in the dictatorship.

At the time of the assassination he was in Greece, training with the legions for the Parthian expedition. For the past six months his name had been entered in Caesar's will as the principal heir, on condition that he took over Caesar's name and perpetuated the family—assuming no son was posthumously born to Caesar.

We know why no one had spotted the significance of this in advance. Caesar had not even told Octavius himself. (This is proved by the fact that Nicolaus of Damascus, the contemporary biographer of Augustus, says Caesar kept it secret to avoid turning the boy's head—Nicolaus could not have dared say this if it was not what Augustus himself asserted, and the latter concedes thereby that he had not been informed of the so-called "adoption.")

Had Caesar wanted to adopt Octavius, nothing stood in the way of his doing it earlier (it was the normal recourse of noblemen without natural heirs). The idea of a posthumous "adoption" was unprecedented, and Octavius had to resort to special legislation to secure it. It seems certain

therefore that this had not been Caesar's aim. He must have had some other obvious expectation (for example, that his wife would soon bear a son), which caused the whole matter to attract no attention at all among the nobility.

At an earlier stage Caesar's heir had been his political collaborator (and son-in-law), Pompey. The fact that the will was now opened, after a senatorial debate, in the house of Antony the consul probably means that it was expected to favour him. Because Caesar had no son, and had not adopted one, the idea that the bequests to the family might have political consequences was not on people's minds at all in Rome.

The news of the assassination reached Octavius in Greece without details of the will. He was advised to flee while he still had the option. This shows that in the mind of his friends at any rate he was already politically identified with Caesar, and in danger. But Octavius set off instead for Rome. This was one of the decisive acts of history. It made possible the vast movement of Caesarism, which was to shape the pattern of rule in the West down to modern times. It was the clear decision of a single individual—and hardly characteristic even of him. We know him later as the embodiment of caution and compromise. But at 19 he was determined to be in the action, whatever it was to be.

Upon crossing the Adriatic he landed secretly down the coast from Brindisi, because he had no idea what kind of reception to expect. Only then did he hear of the will. In spite of repeated warnings, including the plea of his own mother, to keep out of harm's way, he decided to make an approach to the army at Brindisi. Only when they greeted him as Caesar's son did he assume that name.

From there support snow-balled. Within a few weeks the young man found himself the leader of a private army of veterans, whom he paid out of his own pocket (*RG* 1.1). It was a development neither he nor anyone else had anticipated. The spirit of vengeance, which united the young Caesar with the men who had worshipped the old one, swamped all the accumulated prestige of the establishment (*RG* 2). Its momentum created a new fountain of power at Rome: the personal memory of Julius Caesar was quickly forgotten—or buried—but his name and mystique now set the style of rule permanently.

Who authorised Octavian to fight Antony at Actium?

It was 12 years, however, before the final confrontation occurred between Antony and Octavian (to give him the adjectival form of his original name, which concedes that he was now officially called "Caesar").

Antony had chosen as his power-base the rich provinces of the East, including a liaison with the Queen of Egypt, Cleopatra. Against him Octavian had to make the most of the less civilised West, but with the moral advantage of being in possession of Rome.

By the year 32 BC the triumviral commission of 43 BC had expired (as Augustus was later implicitly to concede in *RG* 25.2). Both men retained command of their armies, each accusing the other of preventing a return to normality.

In retrospect, Augustus was to claim an entirely different source of legitimacy. He asserts that "the whole of Italy" swore personal allegiance "of its own free will" to him, and "demanded" that he be their "leader" in the war which he won at Actium (*RG* 25.2). The terms all come from the language of political obligation rather than of law.

Italy is not the name of a state but of a community. It could not speak for the "Senate and People of Rome," who alone were the source of lawful power. A leader (*dux*, the same term that was to be used by Mussolini as his title) is not a magistrate, or anyone else entitled to command Roman troops.

The oath is a personal commitment. Octavian even "excused" (!) the citizens of Bononia from it on the ground that they were traditionally clients of the family of Antony. In other words, the validity of his position rested on the same kind of moral bonds as clientship did, so that he needed to respect that even if it helped his enemy. We know from later copies of the oath that it committed those who swore it, and their descendants, to be political supporters of the family of the Caesars for ever. One noble house was asserting its hold over the whole community.

The *Res Gestae* (15.1–4) demonstrates that the effective guarantee of this loyalty was a succession of individual cash grants on a huge scale. If one wants to know why Augustus was in power at Rome, there is a simple answer: he paid for it. No Roman would have turned a hair, however. Their whole social system rested upon the use of wealth to ensure political support.

What was different in Augustus's case was simply the comprehensive scale of it. He was to endow the Roman *plebs* en bloc, not just his family's traditional clients. If one wishes therefore to discover the secret of Caesarism, one should perhaps ask where Augustus was getting all the money from.

But Augustus knows that there was another test of legitimacy at Rome that was more valid than that of public support. It is all very well to have the masses demonstrating in your favour. But the lawful government was vested in the magistrates, and especially in the two consuls, who were the heads of State. In *RG* 25.3 he turns from the oath to the question of the level

of backing he had in the Senate, cleverly using the figures to suggest that it was also overwhelming. He does not directly indicate that nearly a third of the senators had taken the much more difficult option of going to the East with Antony, and that they included many of those of consular rank.

His preoccupation with this problem of backing shows that what is really on his mind is the damaging fact, which we know from the other sources, that both consuls of that year had abandoned Rome at the beginning of 32 to join Antony. The Roman Government was on the other side, exactly as it had been after Caesar's death. We know that Octavian was intensely embarrassed. He claimed he had sent them away because of their personal connections with Antony.

But it is very significant of his profound grasp of the realities of power that he made no attempt, either then or in retrospect, to suggest that his position was correct in law. Instead he committed his fortunes and reputation entirely to an appeal to the will of the people. This is basic to what we mean by Caesarism.

Why did Octavian surrender control of the state in 27?

After the death of Antony, as after the death of Caesar, it was not clear at first why the normal competition for power should not simply resume, in spite of the scale of support for Octavian. One of his subordinates, Cornelius Gallus, appointed to manage Egypt because Octavian would not risk a senator's doing it, assumed as much. He filled Egypt with his own statues, and put his name on the pyramids. In other words, he acted as if he were already a nobleman. Octavian took personal offence, and struck him off the list of his friends.

Then something happened which no one could have anticipated, and which certainly caught Octavian off guard. The senators apparently ruled that what Gallus had done was tantamount to treason against the state. He was driven to suicide before the case was tried. Octavian protested that it should have been left to him to deal with privately. Was this a collective ganging up by the senators against a parvenu? Or was it a mass capitulation by them to the dominant house?

Another shadowy confrontation of the time suggests the latter. Marcus Crassus, grandson of Caesar's old colleague, and heir to a far more distinguished family record, performed the feat of personally killing the enemy's king in battle. This heroic deed ranked him with Romulus and with only two others in all Roman history. Octavian was said to have been considering taking the name of Romulus himself, but if so, the feat of Crassus must have promptly put an end to that idea.

The honour of dedicating the "supreme spoils" to Jupiter, however, was denied to Crassus. The argument was advanced that as proconsul he was only a subordinate of Octavian (now consul) anyway. The collision that we may imagine must have loomed up over this matter could explain the puzzling claim of *Res Gestae* 34.1. I take it to mean that Octavian, in the year 28, was suddenly placed in full control "by general consent." As soon as the crisis was solved and the disaster of another civil war avoided, Octavian divested himself of this superior degree of control, resuming his normal duties as consul.

Whatever the actual cause, Octavian was awarded the new name of Augustus (signifying the reverence due to him), a permanent laurel-wreath (symbolising victory), the "civic" crown (for having saved the lives of citizens in battle), and a shield spelling out in words the political virtues he stood for (*RG* 34.2). From that time, he claims his ascendancy was based upon personal authority only. As a magistrate, he was no longer superior to the others.

This celebrated but now irretrievably obscure manoeuvre is what Cassius Dio took as the decision to found a monarchy disguised as democracy, and what convention calls "the restoration of the republic." Both formulae are inventions. They elevate to a (spurious) exercise in constitutional theory what must surely have been a political crisis of some sort. One thing is clear. The mass adulation upon which the coups d'état of 43 and 32 had been based has now thoroughly infected the nobility itself.

Why did Augustus resign the consulship in 23?

Augustus was voted a provincial command for 10 years from 27. This signifies a return to the normal rotation of posts in the government. But it did not work out that way. For reasons not recorded he went on being elected to the consulship each year although not present in Rome to exercise it. This must have been caused by an unplanned public demand, in the face of which we may imagine that those in the queue for consulships thought it more prudent to default.

Resentment built up among the nobility, however, and the memory of Brutus, the tyrant-killer, revived. Augustus was seriously ill anyway, and everyone speculated upon what would happen at his death. In spite of tenacious public resistance, he resigned the consulship in the middle of 23 and was replaced by a political rival.

Augustus now ranked as an ordinary proconsul. He does not mention the matter in the *Res Gestae* because this was simply giving effect to what should have happened at the end of 27. There is no reason to treat it as a

stage in a master-plan (the "second settlement") which has been suppressed for sinister reasons. Nevertheless, the loss of the consulship was now compensated for by a set of (emergency?) privileges which in time came to be seen as elements in a new structure of rule.

To prevent collisions with other proconsuls his use of the *imperium* was to take precedence over theirs (just as it would have done had he still been consul). As proconsul he would have to lay down his command automatically if he returned to Rome. But in view of the long term of the appointment, and the public demand for his presence, he was freed from this obstacle. (The command still had to be renewed, however, if it was to run beyond its term.) To give him the right to some initiative in the Senate and assemblies if he should return, he was allotted the powers of a tribune of the plebs, which no doubt also satisfied the populist sentiments of his following. He showed no interest at first in using them, and deliberately stayed away from Rome. Even national and political emergencies, with offers of a dictatorship, failed to move him.

Finally, in 19 BC. he did return, and from that stage adopted the practice of taking a third curule chair between those of the consuls. This must mean that exercise of the *imperium* (which he would continue to hold so long as his provincial appointment was renewed) was to be equated with that of the consuls. He was in effect a supernumerary head of State even when not holding one of the consulships of the year (*RG* 8.3.4). It was a thoroughly anomalous arrangement, being an attempt to reconcile public desire for a permanent and conspicuous leader with his awareness as a politician of how easily that could bring him to his own Ides of March. It was not a plan to change the Roman "constitution."

What was the meaning of the new Augustan forum of 2 BC?

The claim that the pattern of Roman government was changing was by now starting to be heard, even within the family of Augustus. He worked hard to suppress the dangerous idea. For his new forum (needed because of the pressure of court sittings) he prepared a display of statues that were to fix the traditional understanding of Roman history in the public mind and project it into the future. In an edict, he called upon the people to test the "leaders of subsequent ages"—and himself so long he lived (there was no question of his giving up)—by this standard from the past.

Who was exhibited in the parade in the forum? On one side were Aeneas and other noble ancestors of the Julian family. On the other were Romulus and leading generals of Rome's past.

The forum as a whole formed a kind of forecourt to the temple of Mars the Avenger, which Octavian had promised 40 years before in the event of his victory over Brutus and Cassius. It had been delayed all this time because at least one property owner had refused to sell out to him. It was essential to the ideology of the project that it be built on his own land (*RG* 21.1). He meant to identify the self-serving military adventures of his youth with the imperial interests of Rome itself. All military ceremonial was henceforth to be centred in the forum.

The inscriptions beneath the statues prove, however, that the military heroes of the past were there to teach a political lesson. It was not simply their having won triumphs that earned them a statue in the forum. There had to have been some unique feat of statecraft, by which the man had risen above what could ordinarily be expected of a magistrate. In some crisis where the very existence of Rome was in jeopardy, he had to have seized the initiative and carried the city through. The people must have seen him as their deliverer.

Augustus's own statue stood in the middle of the forum faced by those of Aeneas and Romulus. The inscription on it recorded that in this very year the nation had unanimously named him "father of his country" (*RG* 35.1). By what feat of statecraft had he deserved this? By the celebrated surrender of control of 25 years before, it is implied in the *Res Gestae* (34.1–3).

It is a very elaborate exercise in the stage-managing of history, designed to stifle the growing assumption that his overwhelming personal power had altered the nature of leadership. He certainly meant to win more decisively than anyone had ever done before, but he needed to prove that the rules had not changed, or the satisfactions of winning would turn sour.

What did they expect to happen after Augustus's death?

In contrast with the imperceptiveness of everyone at the time of Caesar's death, the remarkable advantage that Octavian had won from it ensured that the sequel to his own death was the subject of intense speculation, at least for the last 40 years of his life. His mere survival, of course, must have made both his own power seem more unique and the possibility of anyone repeating it more unlikely. Compare the sense of unpredictability that has surrounded the long-expected deaths of Franco and Tito in our own times.

Yet in Roman politics there was always a loose principle of succession at work. Every nobleman hoped a son of his name would repeat his honours and thus perpetuate his memory. It was a kind of immortalisation, Cicero says, which one can both claim for oneself and from one's heirs and from the public.

Essential to this succession, however, was the belief that the heir must win the honours afresh by his own merits. Augustus used to get very irritated when the senators tried to confer automatic preference upon his "sons" from time to time. It reflected badly on the nature of his own ascendancy. To make it more complicated, he did not have a natural son, and several possible or actual substitutes had predeceased him.

His last "son", Tiberius, had only been adopted "to satisfy the public interest", as he had deliberately stated at the time. The two men did not like each other at all, but both were trapped in the web of political honour and public expectation. But there were no formal arrangements made for what was to happen to the government after Augustus died. He had spent half his life planning his funeral, the *Res Gestae*, and other matters to do with his own reputation. But apart from a lengthy dossier of good advice that was read out in the Senate, Augustus deliberately threw the competition open again, as it had always been in Roman history. He himself was said to have speculated on the likely winner.

In the event no one knew what to do, and for over a month the Senate was gripped in a crisis of indecision. It seemed obvious to everyone that the Augustan kind of monopoly, which was the only style of leadership they were now at home with, would have to continue. But no one knew how to give effect to it, because it had been built up in circumstances entirely peculiar to Augustus.

Tiberius took the basic step, by having the Caesarian oath renewed in his own name. The consuls perhaps moved in the Senate that he should take a third curule chair between them, as Augustus had done. But this Tiberius flatly refused. He was prepared to take only limited responsibilities, which he was well used to. There was no formal succession.

The state lurched from crisis to crisis over this matter so long as there were personal descendants of Augustus to conjure up the public loyalty to the name of Caesar. Only after the death of Nero was an attempt made to embody in a law the miscellaneous constitutional prerogatives which had accumulated around the Caesars.

The Augustan revolution was simply the aggrandisement of one family within the conventions of noble competition. The so-called "Empire" is a rationalisation by subsequent analysts whose tidy minds and familiarity with the smooth functioning of the system in later centuries could not envisage that Augustus had not intended to change the form of government. It is an ominous example of the tyranny of historical theory over contemporary propaganda and facts alike.