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The Crisis of 2 B.C.

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I. At the age of sixty Caesar Augustus, assuming the consulship for the thirteenth time, inaugurated the year which a later epoch knows as 2 B.C. Augustus had reason to look forward to a felicitous year, and he intended to make it memorable. Casting his eyes backwards over a long tract of time, the Princeps would observe with serene contentment the way things had gone since he won supremacy. Several disappointments, it is true, but no disasters. Though death had cut off Marcus Agrippa in his prime, partner in his powers and husband of his daughter, the two Claudii, the sons of Livia Drusilla, were ready at his call to prosecute the wars of conquest in Illyricum and in Germany. And, although Drusus died on campaign beyond the Rhine, Tiberius took up the task and, consul for the second time in 7 B.C., celebrated a triumph over the Germans.

To advertise conquest and peace, Augustus had already closed the Gates of War on two occasions. The third closing of Janus belongs about this time, so it may with some confidence be conjectured (the date has escaped all record). Active warfare lapsed for a season. A large number of legionary soldiers were released from service in the period 7-2 B.C.; and the titulature of the ruler registers no fresh imperial salutation for many years after he was acclaimed 'imp. XIV' (in 8 B.C.).

East as well as west and north, the horizon was clear of menacing clouds. The Parthians put up historic but hollow claims to be reckoned as a world power, claims which Caesar Augustus appeared to acknowledge when for prestige and propaganda he magnified Parthia in order to exalt the success which his diplomacy earned at the expense of an accommodating enemy. In his *Res Gestae* Augustus was able to proclaim that he had compelled the Parthians 'to implore as suppliants the friendship of the Roman People.' Recently the Parthian monarch had delivered his four sons as hostages to Caesar's legate in Syria (about 10 B.C.).

A cause for friction subsisted, it is true, in Armenia, that disturbed country over which Rome asserted suzerainty. Hence the need for intervention from time to time to support or replace a vassal

prince. Thus in 20 B.C. the young Tiberius had been sent out to install Tigranes. Such interventions were often dilatory and seldom entailed much military effort. The men of sober understanding at Rome, the 'prudentes', would not be disposed to set an exorbitant value on Armenian affairs. In a later season, while the government had to confront the great insurrection in Illyricum and the disaster in Germany, it was not clear for something like a decade, who, if anybody, exercised control over Armenia.

In 6 B.C. Augustus made Tiberius his partner in the *tribunicia potestas* and proposed to send him on a mission to Armenia (no doubt with a grant of *imperium* covering the eastern provinces). At this point Tiberius broke with his father-in-law and went away in sullen anger to Rhodes, there to pass his leisure quietly in erudite pursuits, in the company of classical scholars, experts in mythology, and astrologers.

The reasons for this abrupt renunciation excite legitimate curiosity. Estrangement from his wife was surmised. Too simple, and it impairs the diagnosis of a situation made acute by the coincidence between high politics and human personalities. The true explanation is to be sought in Augustus' designs for the dynastic succession: it was his fervent wish to promote rapidly the two boys he had adopted, Gaius and Lucius, the sons of Agrippa and Julia.

It will be enough to cite two writers of diverse tone and intent. First, Velleius Paterculus. Tiberius, he says, craved release from his labours in order that his station and renown should not impede the ascent of the young Caesars. Tiberius thus comported himself admirably, *mira quaedam et incredibili atque inenarrabili pietate*.¹ Second, the sober biographer Suetonius, who furnishes an unusually perceptive analysis of causes and motives. Regard for the prospects of Gaius and Lucius was the reason given by Tiberius himself – but subsequently.²

Tiberius had benefited from the favour of his stepfather, becoming consul at the age of twenty-eight, four years ahead of the norm accessible to his coevals in the high aristocracy. Much more

¹ Velleius II.99.2.

² Suetonius, Tib. 10.2, cf. 11.5.

was being contemplated for the boy princes, as was divulged and decreed in the next year (namely consulships at nineteen). Meanwhile, Tiberius was to carry the burden, in loyal subordination. That is, to play a role like M. Vipsanius Agrippa, whose merits, it might seem, had not been accorded adequate recognition.

Never congenial to Augustus, Tiberius had all the inborn obdurate pride of the Claudii. After having conquered the nations of the Pannonians which, so Augustus was to assert in his *Res Gestae*, no army of the Roman People had ever approached, was the great general to betake himself to Armenia for the enthronement of a prince at Artaxata – or perhaps also to superintend the reduction of recalcitrant mountain tribes in the Taurus?³ Armenia looked like a convenient pretext for thrusting him aside from the central station of power or influence. It was a flagrant insult to his ‘dignitas.’

According to Velleius Paterculus, the whole world felt the shock of his departure: the Parthian revoked his alliance with Rome, laying hands on Armenia, and Germania rebelled as soon as the eyes of her conqueror were averted.⁴

The exaggeration is patent. At least there is no echo of grave disturbances in Germany. As concerns Armenia, a Roman setback happens to be on curt and casual record.⁵ The incident eludes dating. It may fall as late as 2 B.C.

II. The name of Velleius brings up the multiple inadequacies of the ancient sources for the decade during which Tiberius was absent from the political life of Rome. By what he says and by what he suppresses, by lavish laudation and dishonest detraction, this writer

³ That is, the operations in fact carried out by P. Sulpicius Quirinius (cos. 12 B.C.) against the Homonadenses (Tacitus, Ann. III.48, cf. Strabo XII, p. 569). Probably about 4 B.C.

⁴ Velleius II.100.1.

⁵ Tacitus, Ann. II.4.1: *dein iussu Augusti inpositus Artavasdes et non sine clade nostra deiectus, tum Gaius Caesar componendae Armeniae deligitur*. This Artavasdes (PIR² A 1162) was omitted by Augustus whose statement passes at once from the installation of Tigranes (in 20 B.C.) to *eandem gentem postea d[e]sciscientem et rebellantem domit[a]m per Gaium filium meum* (RG 27).

puts Tiberius on exhibit as the unique general, the indispensable 'custos vindexque imperii', the predestined successor to Caesar Augustus.⁶

Chance conspires with design to the same sad result. There are the gaps in the text of Cassius Dio between 6 B.C. and A.D. 4: in three places two *folia* are missing from the manuscript. Hence notable transactions are truncated, garbled, or lost to knowledge. It is hardly possible to work out a satisfactory narrative. Mere paraphrase or amalgamation is not enough. Investigation of this obscure decade calls for various resources, and rational conjecture cannot be dispensed with.

When histories fail, profit accrues from the study of senators and their careers, of kinship and alliances, though many relationships emerge only by accident, though many persons of rank and consequence are little more than names on the consular *Fasti*.

This method has disclosed facts of central importance for Roman social and political history. For example, a lowering of the minimum age for the consulate, inherited from the revolutionary years. In the Republic of Caesar Augustus the descendants of consular families can accede to the *fasces* in their thirty-third year. Casual items confirm it: the date of some aristocrat's birth, or the consulate with two years interval after the praetorship.⁷

Statistics also help when there is a restricted area of names and persons. Of the *consules ordinarii* holding office in the first decade of the new dispensation (26–17 B.C.) seven were *nobiles*, nine *novi homines*. Despite birth and family, the former are dim figures for the most part. Some were well on in years; and few seem to have acquired any great public distinction. In sharp contrast stand the *ordinarii* of the next ten years (consuls in 16–7 B.C. inclusive). Excluding the three consulates of the stepsons of the Princeps, they are seventeen in number. Only one is a *novus homo*.⁸ An age group

⁶ For a more friendly view of Velleius, G.V. Sumner, *Harvard Studies LXXIV* (1970), 257 ff.

⁷ E.g., the age of L. Calpurnius Piso, consul in 15 B.C. (Tacitus, *Ann.* VI. 10.3), or Iullius Antonius (cos. 10 B.C.), praetor in 13 (Dio *LIV.*26.2).

⁸ Viz. P. Sulpicius Quirinius (12 B.C.). The only *suffecti* in the period are

emerges, a veritable constellation of birth and talent (or at least opportunity). The sixteen young aristocrats represent the generation born in the years of tribulation between 50 and 40 B.C. They became consuls, it may plausibly be assumed, either *suo anno* or not more than two or three years later.

Quite a lot is known about some of these men, from a variety of sources. Thus notably L. Piso the Pontifex (*cos.* 15 B.C.), P. Quinctilius Varus (13), Paullus Fabius Maximus (11), all of whom governed military provinces in the portion of Caesar. But there are gaps and hazards everywhere. Of the sixteen *nobiles* only seven had wives whose names have escaped oblivion.⁹

When the second man in the State deserted the post of honour and duty, Caesar Augustus had to turn to sundry other ex-consuls. He was not at a loss. The chance now came for rivals of Tiberius, for the safe men and the time-servers. In any event, even if Tiberius had not seceded, some of them enjoyed fair prospects. When Tiberius left Illyricum in 9 B.C., his place was taken by Sex. Appuleius, as is revealed by a chronicler in late antiquity.¹⁰ This man had been consul twenty years previously, but is not to be assumed elderly or incompetent. The immediate successor in Illyricum of Sextus Appuleius is nowhere on express record. The precise date at which L. Domitius Ahenobarbus (*cos.* 16 B.C.) took up that command would be worth knowing (perhaps it was as early as 5 B.C.).¹¹ Likewise the identity of the legate on the Rhine following Tiberius. The history of Germany is a blank for some eight years. Syria is a little better served. P. Quinctilius Varus was there from 6 to 4 B.C., in which years he displayed decision and energy of no mean order, promptly crushing the rebellion in Judaea provoked by the death of Herod.¹²

L. Tarius Rufus (16); and C. Valgius Rufus, C. Caninius Rebilus and L. Volusius Saturninus (12, an abnormal year). All *novi homines* except for Rebilus.

⁹ The seven are L. Domitius Ahenobarbus (*cos.* 16 B.C.), P. Quinctilius Varus (13), M. Valerius Barbatus Appianus (12), Paullus Fabius Maximus (11), Iullus Antonius (10), C. Asinius Gallus (8), Cn. Calpurnius Piso (7).

¹⁰ Cassiodorus, *Chron.* Min. II.135.

¹¹ Dio LV.10a.2, see further below.

¹² As shown by the full account in Josephus, BJ II.40 ff.; AJ XVII.250 ff.

Sextus Appuleius was the first consul in his family, but his father (so it can be established) had married Octavia, a half-sister of the Princeps.¹³ The stock of Varus was ancient and patrician: the Quinctilii were one of the families retrieved by the Princeps from long centuries of obscurity and exhibited as a proper and necessary endorsement for his aristocratic Republic. And something more, thanks to a recent discovery, namely the papyrus fragment of the oration which Augustus delivered in March of 12 B.C. at the funeral of Marcus Agrippa. At this time Varus had for wife a daughter of Agrippa and was thus brother-in-law to Tiberius, his consular colleague the year before.¹⁴

As for Ahenobarbus, the Domitii were prominent in the long established plebeian *nobilitas*, felicitous with seven consuls, son following father each time.¹⁵ The wife of Ahenobarbus was Antonia, the elder of the two sisters born to Octavia, the sister of the Princeps and the Triumvir Marcus Antonius.¹⁶ Consul in 16 B.C., and proconsul of Africa, Ahenobarbus had not hitherto held one of the great military commands, as had several of his coevals in the high aristocracy. For this man the absence of Tiberius brought clear benefit. Clear also is his importance in dynastic politics, though it has not always been adequately estimated.

So far a brief indication about the consular legates, who alone possessed the resources needed to threaten the government or supersede the ruler. Such was the great *arcanum imperii* revealed

According to Velleius, *otio magis castrorum quam bellicae adsuetus militiae, pecuniae vero quam non contemptor Syria, cui praefuerat, declaravit quam pauper divitem ingressus dives pauperem reliquit* (II.117.2).

¹³ PIR², A 961. His daughter was called Appuleia Varilla (Tacitus, Ann. II.50.1): he had married a sister of P. Quinctilius Varus, cf. AE 1966, 422 f.

¹⁴ P. Colon. inv. 4701, published by L. Koenen ZPE V (1970), 239 ff. This Vipsania, he suggests, was the daughter of M. Agrippa by the elder Marcella (a match contracted in 28 B.C., cf. Dio LIII.1.2). Perhaps rather a daughter from the first marriage, to Caecilia Attica, as was the wife of Tiberius. The subsequent wife of Varus was Claudia Pulchra (PIR², C 1116).

¹⁵ Velleius II.10.2.

¹⁶ PIR², D 158; A 884. By an easy error Tacitus assumed that she was the younger Antonia (Ann. IV.44.2; XII.64.2).

to the world, we are told, by the fall of the last Caesar in the line of Augustus.

III. At the moment the vulnerable point resided at Rome itself, in palace and dynasty, with the two extremes of hazard: an elderly ruler and a pair of boy princes.

A later epoch in the history of Europe offers a striking parallel. Louis Quatorze, who emulated Augustus so ostentatiously, found himself towards the end of a long reign in a similar and even worse predicament. The Dauphin and his son the Duc de Bourgogne both died within a few weeks early in the year 1712. A second grandson of the monarch perished in 1714. He now was left with a great-grandson, a boy aged four – and also with his nephew, the Duc d'Orleans whom he detested, and whom by a crafty and despotic testament he tried to exclude from the post of Regent.

At the beginning of 2 B.C. C. Caesar was only seventeen years old, Lucius his junior by three years. The Palace harboured an alarming collection of the immature of both sexes, ranging from adolescents to young children. The marriage of Agrippa and Julia had also yielded two daughters, Julia (born in 19 or 18 B.C.) and Agrippina (c. 14), also another son, the late born Agrippa Postumus (12). Next, Drusus, the only child of Tiberius and Vipsania, born probably in 14 B.C. Finally, the issue of Tiberius' brother Drusus and the younger Antonia. The eldest was Germanicus (15), then Livia Julia (? 14), ugly as a young girl but later becoming a great beauty, and the unpromising Claudius whose eighth birthday would not attract much public attention on August 1 of this year.

This kindergarten, carefully supervised by the austere and formidable Livia Drusilla and by Antonia (seven years the widow of Drusus), who had somehow managed to escape a second husband, offered generous promise of dynastic matrimony in the sequel – which might be foreshadowed by the early betrothals normal in high society. Several marriages were already in the offing, for the girls were generally consigned to husbands when fourteen or fifteen. Livia Julia, the daughter of Antonia, was to go to her cousin C. Caesar as soon as practicable, during his consulship two years later.

One match of some weight and consequence had been celebrated

in 5 or 4 B.C. Julia, the granddaughter of Augustus was given to a resplendent Aemilius who vaunted a Scipionic ancestry: L. Aemilius Paullus, destined to share the *fasces* with C. Caesar in A.D. 1.¹⁷

The Princeps had sundry other kinsfolk and connections whom it would be instructive to enumerate, but tedious in this place.¹⁸ Moreover, Tiberius having edged himself out, Augustus was impelled to cement his own position by promoting useful alliances among the aristocracy. He did not disdain some of the families or groups that hitherto had held aloof – or been kept at a distance. The discarded Triumvir Lepidus whom the clemency of the victor preserved to live in dishonour and under various humiliations had two sons. The elder, Marcus, was executed in the year after the Battle of Actium, the vigilant Maecenas having detected a conspiracy before it could come to anything.¹⁹ The other, Quintus, is only an item in genealogy and the surmised husband of a lady who carried the lineage of Sulla and Pompeius. The daughter of Q. Lepidus was betrothed to the other boy prince, Lucius Caesar.²⁰

IV. To proceed. Caesar Augustus proposed to set his stamp on the year in more ways than one. First of all, by the consulate itself. The Princeps now assumed the *fasces* for the thirteenth time (and he retained them into the month of August). It was for the express purpose of inducting L. Caesar into public life. Augustus thus re-enacted what had been done in his twelfth consulate three years before when C. Caesar put on the *toga virilis*.

Next, on February 5 the Senate conferred the title of *pater patriae*, to the accompaniment of manifestations from the *equester ordo* and the *Populus Romanus*. The young Caesars had already been appointed honorary presidents of the corporation of the Roman knights, with a novel office and appellation, *principes iuven-*

¹⁷ PIR², A 391; J 635. See further below.

¹⁸ The marriages of the younger Marcella (PIR², C 1103) are an intricate problem.

¹⁹ Livy, Per. CXXXIII; Velleius II.88; Appian, B.C. IV.50. Not in the narration of Dio although vaguely alluded to at a later point (LIV.15.4).

²⁰ Tacitus, Ann. III.23.1, cf. 22.1 (her lineage). On the death of L. Caesar she was transferred to the elderly novus homo P. Sulpicius Quirinius.

tutis. It was further decided that the title *pater patriae* should be inscribed in the vestibule of the ruler's house, in the Curia – and below the chariot of honour set up by decree of the Senate in the new Forum of Augustus.²¹

Commemorating that calendar day in his *Fasti*, the poet Ovid exclaims that the title was long due, for it merely corroborated an oecumenical fact,

*res tamen ante dedit. sero quoque vera fuisti
nomina. iam pridem tu pater orbis eras.*²²

Ovid duly equates the ruler of the world with Jupiter. Further, so he goes on to asseverate, Romulus will now have to forfeit primacy. Indeed, the Founder of Rome incurs damage and censure on comparison. Romulus was a man of violence, a tyrant even,
vis tibi grata fuit, florent sub Caesare leges.

*tu domini nomen, principis ille tenet.*²³

Twenty-five years previously, when it was expedient to devise a distinctive and superior *cognomen* for the ruler of Rome, and the name of Romulus was much on the lips of men (and even uttered in the high assembly), the motion of the astute Munatius Plancus provided the elegant solution, and the *patres conscripti* concurred, no doubt unanimous, on 'Augustus'. The word carried an echo of Rome's foundation. This time likewise due preparation had been made behind the scenes and a suitable sponsor came out with his 'sententia'. Not, so it happened, the senior among the ex-consuls, who was Asinius Pollio, the author of a notable history of the Civil Wars not much to the liking of some people. Instead, the illustrious Messalla Corvinus²⁴, who under a show of Republican independence accommodated himself to the new order in state and society. It was the proud manner of Messalla to avow and proclaim that he had held a command under Cassius at the Battle of Philippi. Messalla, that was the perfect choice. There could be no better advertisement of concord and harmony.

²¹ RG 35.

²² *Fasti* II.129 f.

²³ *Fasti* II.141 f.

²⁴ As disclosed by Suetonius, who quotes the *sententia* of Corvinus and the reply of Augustus (*Divus. Aug.* 58.2).

The older members of the Senate whose habit and delight it was to evoke the past and dwell upon the paradoxes of history were soon presented with a fresh excuse for instructive disquisition. They would be looking forward to August, the month so named by decree of the Senate as *huic imperio felicissimus*, for three reasons: the first consulship of Caesar's heir, the fall of Alexandria, the triple triumph held in 29 B.C. at the end of the wars.²⁵ And some might recall the Altar of Victory set up in the Curia in that year, also the dedication of the Temple of Divus Julius.

That month on its first day now witnessed celebrations the like of which had not been seen since then. The new Forum was dedicated, with the great temple of Mars Ultor, which had been vowed by the heir of Caesar long ago on the field of Philippi. The edifice was designated to be the scene for various state actions and martial ceremonies. In the Forum Augusti stood bronze statues of the great generals, recent as well as from the glorious past, with record of their 'res gestae'. Nor would Caesar Augustus lack due honour there. Men could contemplate sundry 'tituli' recording victory and conquests in Spain and in other lands.²⁶

The season had now arrived for a man to take stock of what he had achieved – and to make provision for his end. First of all, his will and testament, placed in safe custody with the sacred virgins of Vesta, to be opened in the Senate and read out after his decease.²⁷ The last dispositions of a despot might well carry items likely to embarrass the new government, or even an attempt to bind its policy. In this instance there were probably no startling or dangerous novelties to be expected. Nonetheless, men cannot have failed to wonder what the text might have to say about the son-in-law now living at Rhodes. The ultimate version, drawn up in April of A.D. 13 was not reticent about two members at least of the family.²⁸ And speculation might go to legacies waiting for friends and

²⁵ Macrobius quotes the *senatus consultum* (I.12.35).

²⁶ Velleius II.39.2.

²⁷ Compare the full particulars in Suetonius about the will drawn up in April of A.D. 13 (Divus Aug. 101).

²⁸ Suetonius, Divus Aug. 101.3: *Iulias filiam neptemque, si quid iis accidisset, vetuit sepulchro suo inferri*. Nothing was said (it is to be presumed) about Agrippa Postumus: he had been disinherited.

agents of the Princes. He might further name as heirs in default some of the 'principes civitatis', less from amity perhaps than for ostentation. That was done in A.D. 13.

Nor would the grandson of a banker neglect to bequeath other documents in proper and perfect order. In fact, when Augustus died he left three state papers. First, the arrangements for his obsequies. Second, drawn up in his own handwriting, a statement of the resources of the Empire (financial and military) to attest the precision and excellence of his stewardship, not without prudent advice about foreign policy. Third, the record of his actions in war and peace, to be inscribed on pillars of bronze outside the Mausoleum.

The composition of the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* (early versions and subsequent remodelling) excites the curiosity of scholars and historians. The conjecture is reasonable that the text was drawn up in 2 B.C. much in the form and order that posterity knows. That is, apart from some minor additions and expedient alterations made in the light of later events both domestic and foreign.²⁹

The chapter which registers the conferment of *pater patriae* in the thirteenth consulship represents the proper end and culmination, with the adjunct indicating the author's age. What follows in the *Res Gestae* as published is an inferior appendix, an anti-climax, a mere sum of details about buildings and payments. Not worthy of Caesar Augustus, so Mommsen exclaimed in indignation: 'tamquam duumvir oppiduli alicuius Augustus fuisset.'³⁰

His accounts in order, the sexagenarian ruler could indulge in a sense of liberation. Men of great power and eminent station often utter the wish (and even feel it) that they may be vouchsafed release and retreat. Thus Seneca in the treatise *De brevitate vitae*. Augustus, he continues, was always talking about his yearning for a 'vacatio a re publica'. Seneca further quotes a letter which the Princeps addressed to the Senate in that sense. While conceding that it could not be, he found that the mere words helped to

²⁹ E.g., in the matter of Germany (ch. 26), and perhaps an enhancement of Tiberius' conquest of the Pannonians (ch. 30).

³⁰ In his edition of the *Res Gestae* (1883), p. 156.

enchant and console: *ut quoniam rerum laetitia moratur adhuc, praeciperem aliquid voluptatis ex verborum dulcedine.*³¹

The autocrat professing fatigue or disillusionment is a familiar and delightful topic. Caesar the Dictator affirmed that his life had lasted long enough, whether estimated in duration or in renown. Caesar was trapped in a tight predicament. He could get out of it only by going to the wars again – or by succumbing to the best form of death. That is, the quickest, for so he styled it in conversation at the dinner party held in the house of Lepidus on March 14, 44 B.C.³²

Caesar Augustus, however, knew that he had to abide at the post of duty, his 'statio', steadfast to the end. He would soon be facing the hazards of the sixty-third year, the 'grand climacteric', which in the common persuasion of educated men in that age was likely to bring annoyance or malady, disaster or death. The letter is extant which he wrote to C. Caesar on his sixty-third birthday (September 23, A.D. 1). It conveyed exhilaration at his escape and the firm hope that for the rest he might pass the years *in statu rei p. felicissimo*, with Gaius and Lucius duly taking over *statio mea*.³³

V. And now to revert to the known events of this memorable year. The month of August was occupied with lavish pageantry. Mars Ultor by epithet and origin stood for vengeance upon the assassins of Caesar. The edifice had been long in the building. In the meantime a significant shift of emphasis supervened both in domestic and in foreign policy.

Divus Julius already had his temple, consecrated in 29 B.C. But the memory of Caesar, after fervid acclaim and exploitation, came under an almost total obscurity in the early years of the Republic of Caesar Augustus. Such was the intention of Emperor Caesar, Divi f. The testimony of Virgil and Horace speaks clear and unequivocal. In the evocation of the Roman past in the Aeneid it is Caesar, not Pompeius, who is exhorted to lay down his arms,

³¹ De brevitate vitae 4.3.

³² Suetonius, Divus Julius 87; Plutarch, Caesar 63; Appian BC II.479.

³³ Quoted by Gellius XV.7.3.

with solemn adjuration against the crime of civil war. In the Odes of Horace, Caesar earns an entry merely in the label for Caesar Augustus, namely 'Caesaris ultor'.

Like Caesar as a person, the need and the credit for his avenging fades out. Vengeance upon a foreign enemy (even exacted without blood or battle) was more decent and more useful. Hence a transference, the result of a victory gained by diplomacy. When in 20 B.C. the Parthian monarch was persuaded to surrender the Roman standards lost by Crassus and by Antonius, they were lodged for the present in a shrine of Mars Ultor in the Capitol, with *Ludi Martiales* to be celebrated each year on May 12.³⁴

Referring to the temple in the Forum Augusti, Ovid struck the right note. After brief mention of Philippi he proceeds to expatiate on the Parthians,

*nec satis est meruisse semel cognomina Marti,
persequitur Parthi signa retenta manu.*³⁵

After the dedication of Mars Ultor, magnificent spectacles delighted the *Populus Romanus* in the course of the month. Augustus in the *Res Gestae* allots a whole section to the naval battle exhibited in a basin excavated across the Tiber, giving its precise dimensions, the total of the ships of war and the soldiers that manned them (about three thousand).³⁶ Other sources reveal what is not there stated, a conflict between the navies of Athens and Persia, the former victorious as was intended.³⁷ Significant and patent. This piece of pageantry advertised Rome as the champion of Hellas against the Orient.

An expedition to the East, ostensibly directed against the Parthians, was in the air. In the next year C. Caesar, after a brief sojourn with the Danubian armies, went to the eastern lands. He was in Syria during his consulship while negotiations went on with the Parthian monarch who early in A.D. 2 came to meet the prince

³⁴ Dio LIV.8.3, cf. Ovid, *Fasti* V.550 ff. On Mars ultor see E. Buchner, R-E. IX A, 572 ff.

³⁵ *Fasti* V.579 f.

³⁶ RG 23. The emphasis agrees well with the hypothesis of a redaction of the *Res Gestae* in this year.

³⁷ Ovid, *Ars amatoria* I.171 f.; Dio LIV.10.7.

on the Euphrates. And so, once again a success for Augustan diplomacy, as might have been predicted by the 'prudentes' at Rome.

The significance of the *naumachia* of 2 B.C. was not lost upon a contemporary writer. Ovid in the *Ars Amatoria* briefly notes this spectacle as an occasion where the youth of both sexes might congregate opportunely:

quid, modo cum belli navalis imagine Caesar

*Persidas induxit Cecropiasque rates?*³⁸

He then subjoins a long digression on the prospective campaign. It opens with

ecce parat Caesar, domito quod defuit orbi,

*addere. nunc, Oriens ultime, noster eris.*³⁹

The poet foretells warfare, victory – and a triumph at the end, with all the paraphernalia, with kings led in chains, with images of cities, rivers and mountains. The valiant young prince, *nunc iuvenum princeps, deinde future senum*, goes out to war under the best of auspices:

*Marsque pater Caesarque pater, date numen eunti.*⁴⁰

With all that, one did not require the fortuitous fact of a dedication at Athens where C. Caesar is designated 'the new Ares'.⁴¹ Nor is the conjecture needed (albeit valid) that either now or in the previous year solemnities were enhanced by the opening of the Gates of War.

The *Ars Amatoria* is otherwise void of references to contemporary events. On the basis of the passage here cited, the first publication of Book I at least is assigned a date in standard manuals of erudition and in books about Latin literature.⁴² That is, 1 B.C. or not much later. However, doubt was in order, and a strong suspicion that the poem was composed a number of years earlier. What is said about the *naumachia* and the expedition of Gaius Caesar looks like a subsequent insertion: the context reads well (and better) without it.

³⁸ *Ars Amatoria* I.171 f.

³⁹ *ib.* 177 f.

⁴⁰ *ib.* 203 f.

⁴¹ IG² II.3250.

⁴² E.g. Schanz-Hosius, *Gesch. der r. Lit.* II⁴ (1935), 211; W. Kraus, *R-E* XVIII (1943), 1934; E. J. Kenney in *OCD*² (1970), 764.

In Book II of the *Tristia*, written in A.D. 9 when he was fifty-one years old, Ovid looks back to the *Ars* as belonging to a distant past. In his life and writings it is comparable to the Eclogues of Virgil. Ovid is explicit. He was a 'iuuenis' then,

*ergo quae iuveni mihi non nocitura putavi
scripta parum prudens, nunc nocuere seni.
sera redundavit veteris vindicta libelli.*⁴³

That is to say, the *Ars* was not written only nine years before A.D. 9. More like nineteen. It was indeed a 'vetus libellus'. If one accepts a close parallel of age with the 'iuuenis' who produced the Eclogues, the first edition of the *Ars Amatoria* should fall c. 13-10 B.C. (Ovid was born in 43 B.C.).⁴⁴

However that may be, this erotic treatise launched on the Roman public in 1 B.C., whether for the first time or for the second, was an action that disclosed a singular if not perverse want of tact, following as it did so closely upon distressing transactions in the autumn of the previous year. Ovid's exploit can hardly have passed unnoticed by the angry parent of the delinquent Julia.

The passage from Seneca may now be quoted again. The men in high places who yearn for repose or retreat are well aware that their good fortune may collapse without external impulsion: *in se ipsa fortuna ruit*.⁴⁵ On one estimate Caesar Augustus stood as the paragon of human felicity. As Seneca says, *di plura quam ulli praestiterunt*. On another view, that of Pliny, he furnished an example of calamities no less striking than his success.⁴⁶

No sooner was all the pageantry over than Fortuna exhibited her caprice and malice. In the autumn came the catastrophe of Julia. Then two more blows for Augustus in quick sequence, within the space of eighteen months. Lucius Caesar died in August of A.D. 2, Gaius in February of 4, after an indifferent performance in the

⁴³ *Tristia* II.543 ff. Observe also I.9.61: *scis vetus hoc inveni lusum mihi carmen*; III.1.7 f.: *id quoque, quod viridi quondam male lusit in aevolheu nimium sero damnat et odit opus*.

⁴⁴ Hence the second edition in 1 B.C. - and about the same time the remodelling of the *Amores* (three books instead of five).

⁴⁵ *De breuitate vitae* 4.1.

⁴⁶ *NH* VII.149.

East. That was 'atrox fortuna', so the Princeps declared in his testament.⁴⁷ The cherished dynastic plan was in ruins.

VI. In the tragic destiny of Julia indignation and horror have fastened avidly on her wanton excesses. She had a whole pack of lovers, they revelled riotously by night in the Roman Forum; and Julia defiled the Rostra where the Princeps had promulgated those very laws which, so he hoped, would announce and enforce moral regeneration. Such is the account of Seneca.⁴⁸ It reproduces a vivid piece of writing that has left its traces in other writers, notably in Cassius Dio (here entire from the dedication of Mars Ultor as far as a late point in the story of Julia).

The language of Seneca is ornate and dramatic. At first sight it may evoke suspicion. Nonetheless, one of the items, a garland placed on the statue of Marsyas in the Forum occurred in the despatch which Augustus sent to the Senate, if Pliny is to be believed.⁵⁰

The allegations of adultery were precise as well as general. When registering the decease of Julia in the first year of Tiberius Caesar, the historian Tacitus is content with the curt notice of her banishment for 'impudicitia'. But the episode subjoined discloses more and worse, misconduct going back many years. Recording the death in exile of Sempronius Gracchus (killed about the same time by soldiers in Africa), Tacitus makes a firm and solemn asseveration: Gracchus had seduced Julia when she was the consort of Marcus Agrippa.⁵¹

The same moral preoccupation recurs in another passage where

⁴⁷ Suetonius, Tib. 23, cf. RG 14: [*filios meos quos iuv[enes mi]hi eripuit for[tuna]*].

⁴⁸ De ben. VI.32.1: *admissos gregatim adulteros, pererratam nocturnis comissionibus civitatem, forum ipsum ac rostra ex quibus pater legem de adulteriis tulerat filiae in stupra placuisse, cottidianum ad Marsyam concursum, cum ex adultera in quaestuariam versa ius omnis licentiae sub ignoto adultero peteret.*

⁴⁹ Dio LV.10.2-15.

⁵⁰ NH XXI.9: *filia divi Augusti cuius luxuria coronatum Marsyan litterae illius dei gemunt.*

⁵¹ Ann. I.53.3: *eandem Iuliam in matrimonio Marci Agrippae temeraverat.* This ornate and emotional verb is employed only once elsewhere in the Annals (I.30.3).

the historian, in reference to the delinquencies of Julia (and of her daughter), administers a rebuke to the Emperor: he punished adultery as though it were an offence against religion and the state and thereby went beyond the penalties which his own legislation prescribed. Mere adultery, so Tacitus gently styles it – *culpam inter viros atque feminas vulgatum*.⁵²

Nor are historians in the modern age immune. A standard work, nothing less than the Cambridge Ancient History, comes out with a confident pronouncement: 'it was impossible for the author of the *Lex de adulteriis* either to attempt concealment of facts which were of common knowledge or to fail to enforce his own laws.'⁵³

The alternatives thus formulated arouse disquiet. Rulers are capable of all sorts of things, as expedience may dictate. Various hard questions clamour for an answer. How and when did the Princes first become aware of scandalous behaviour? Was it a single drunken frolic in the Roman Forum that at last put him on the track of the graver enormities?

That is what Cassius Dio seems to imply – a tardy discovery and sudden anger. Dio adds the comment that the holders of power are the least aware of what concerns them nearest.⁵⁴ Seneca also puts the emphasis on anger. He states that Augustus conceived shame and repentance in the sequel.

Now Julia had been without the restraining presence of a husband for four years, her father had surely been able to form some estimate of her character and her proclivities. If disposed to indulgence towards a wilful daughter, Augustus did not lack counsellors. From early years he had been in the habit of listening to advice. In this instance, so Seneca avers, Augustus declared that the mishap would not have occurred, if only he had Agrippa and Maecenas. On which Seneca cannot help observing that it was not their custom to tell him the truth.

The supreme power isolates, and an ageing monarch may break loose from his normal advisers and surrender to impulse or hasty

⁵² Ann. III.24.2 (in annotation on *impudicitiam filiae ac neptis quas urbe depulit, adulterosque eorum morte aut fuga punivit*).

⁵³ CAH X (1934), 156.

⁵⁴ Dio LX.10.13.

actions. But there was one person from whom Augustus could not escape, the sagacious and hard-headed partner of his days and nights, Livia Drusilla.

The value Augustus set upon her judgement is manifested in a piece of improving fiction which deceived the historian Cassius Dio.⁵⁵ When the nobleman Cinna Magnus, a grandson of Pompeius, was reported to be conspiring against his life, he was in a grave quandary. Livia told him what to do – reason with the malcontent and demonstrate the folly of his ambitions.

The known influence of this potent matron encouraged rumour and sinister imputations about those sudden and untimely deaths of young princes which in fact cleared the path for her own son.⁵⁶ Nor was the temperament of Julia responsive to the strict training which Augustus and Livia sought to impose by precept and example. Enmity ensued. The hypothesis might therefore seem attractive and even compelling that Livia instigated Augustus to take action against Julia. No evidence survives to incriminate her – and the disgrace of Julia did nothing to help the exile at Rhodes. Livia, it might be argued, was willing to sacrifice her son for her husband, and for reasons of state.

Augustus might have been able to curb moral transgressions in the family without insisting on public exposure. Yet he denounced his daughter in a despatch to the Senate. Whereupon Julia was sent away to an island and her partners in guilt were punished with death or exile. Five names are furnished by Velleius Paterculus.⁵⁷

Pride of place belongs to Iullus Antonius, the son of the Triumvir, consul in 10 B.C. and proconsul of Asia, who had married Marcella, the niece of Caesar Augustus when Agrippa divorced her in 21 B.C. to take over Julia. According to Velleius, Iullus committed suicide. Tacitus says that he was killed.⁵⁸ The discrepancy is not material. Next another consular, T. Quinctius Crispinus Sulpicianus (*cos.* 9 B.C.) whose ‘ferociously austere eyebrows disguised

⁵⁵ Dio LV.14 ff. (under A.D. 4), cf. Seneca, *De clem.* I.9 (apparently indicating the period 16–13 B.C.).

⁵⁶ Not only Lucius and Gaius (*Ann.* I.3.3) but Marcellus (Dio LIII.33.4).

⁵⁷ Velleius II.100.4 f.

⁵⁸ *Ann.* I.10.4; IV.44.3. Also Dio LV.10.15.

his singular depravity', so Velleius avers. Crispinus belonged to a patrician family that had shown no consul for over a century.

Finally three more *nobiles* with historic names, of lower rank: a Sempronius Gracchus, a Scipio, an Appius Claudius. Gracchus is the man alleged guilty of adultery with Julia a long time previously. No Sempronius Gracchus had been on record since the ill-starred tribunes. Scipio may be a son of P. Cornelius Scipio (cos. 16 B.C.).⁵⁹ If so, he should have enjoyed fair promise, being also a nephew of that Cornelia who was a half-sister of Julia. The identity of Appius Claudius evades ascertainment.⁶⁰

So far the five *nobiles*. Velleius has something more. He states that there were other criminals of lesser note, knights as well as senators. Only one name can be recovered. It is supplied by an author in late Antiquity: a certain Demosthenes at length confessed to adultery after his slave, put to the torture, refused to incriminate him. This Demosthenes is no doubt one of the Greek intellectuals who found admiration and support in high society.⁶¹

The numerous company that enjoyed the favours of Julia, as alleged in several sources, will excite surprise without imposing credence in her promiscuity. The moral legislation of Caesar Augustus provoked opposition in the aristocracy, for it ran counter to a tradition of tolerance, 'clementia maiorum', as Tacitus called it in deprecation of that legislation. There was also mockery and a kind of 'silent conspiracy' in fashionable circles. For the ruler it was thus both expedient and easy to advertise the punishment of transgressors in order to divert attention from any political basis or background of Julia's friendships.

Yet such there was. As Seneca in another treatise sets forth the

⁵⁹ Another son of that consul is surely the P. Cornelius Scipio attested as quaestor pro praetore on an inscription of Messene, probably in A.D. 1/2 (AE 1967, 458 = SEG XXIII.206). On this document see J. E. G. Zetzel, *Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies* XI (1970), 259 ff. These two are the last Scipiones. The next to bear the cognomen (the *suffecti* of A.D. 2 and 24) are Cornelii Lentuli.

⁶⁰ Perhaps a son or a nephew of Ap. Claudius Pulcher (cos. 38 B.C.). For a conjectural new stemma of the family, see T. P. Wiseman, *Harvard Studies* LXXIV (1970), 220.

⁶¹ Macrobius I.11.7.

matter, *iterum timenda cum Antonio mulier*. And he describes her band of youthful lovers as a menace to the old Princes, a kind of conspiracy of misconduct: *tot nobiles iuvenes adulterio velut sacramento adacti iam infractam aetatem territabant*.⁶²

The purge had wide ramifications, in appearance at least. According to Cassius Dio, many other women were now accused of adultery, but Augustus refused to admit all the indictments, and he set a limit to retrospective investigations. The student of Roman society will observe with regret that no names have been preserved.

The vengeance of Caesar Augustus was a grim warning to the address of the world of fashion and polite letters. The crafty and subtle Sempronius Gracchus was no stranger to the art of eloquence. *Sollers ingenio et prave facundus*, such is the label attached by Tacitus.⁶³ Further, it was Gracchus (so men believed) who composed the nasty letters which Julia had sent to her father, complaining about Tiberius. Gracchus happens to figure in Ovid's long list of contemporary poets: the elegant Iullus Antonius is not there named, although Horace acclaimed him as a performer in the Pindaric vein.⁶⁴

Julia herself was a proud and pretentious lady. In her liberation from the marital tie she refused to acquiesce in the matron's domestic task of supervising the youngest of her five children (Agrippina and Agrippa Postumus). Julia interpreted liberty as license.⁶⁵ And something more. Julia was a wit and an intellectual, with a ready gift of repartee in a wide range. Julia could be graceful, as when, blamed by Augustus for her frequentation of young men rather than grave and steady seniors, she replied 'they will grow old along with me'.⁶⁶ Julia could also be coarse and cynical, in the traditional manner of 'Romana simplicitas'.⁶⁷

⁶² De breuitate vitae 4.6.

⁶³ Ann. I.53.3. Gracchus may (or may not) be identical with the unnamed tribune of the plebs in Dio LV.10.15.

⁶⁴ Ex Ponto IV.16.31; Horace, Odes IV.2.

⁶⁵ Velleius II.100.3: *quidquid liceret pro libito vindicans*.

⁶⁶ Macrobius II.5.6.

⁶⁷ *ib.* 7: *cumque conscii flagitiorum mirarentur quo modo similis Agrippae filios pareret, quae tam vulgo potestatem corporis faceret, ait: numquam enim nisi nave plena tollo vectorem*.

In any age immoral behaviour is suitably adduced to enhance, or to cover up, offences of another order. And, to repeat, preoccupation with Julia has tended to obscure the whole problem. Attention must go to Iullus Antonius and to what is said about him, or rather not said.

Iullus earns no mention from Suetonius in his account of Julia (which is fairly full) nor is he admitted to the list of those who conspired against Augustus.⁶⁸ In Tacitus the son of M. Antonius is named at the outset among the victims of the murderous peace of the Principate; and later on in two places Iullus Antonius makes brief appearance as an adulterer, the lover of Julia.⁶⁹ In Dio, however, he is also guilty of high treason.⁷⁰

It is seldom indeed that one must rebuke Cornelius Tacitus for a lack of political insight, and it is much to be regretted that he did not somewhere bring out the significance of Iullus Antonius in brief and explicit annotation. Before Tacitus had gone far with the *Annals*, he found himself drawn more and more towards Augustan history. Scandals in the dynasty were one of the incentives. Coming upon the repercussion of one of them, his curiosity was excited. So much so that he now proposed to go back and deal with that epoch, if life were vouchsafed.⁷¹ Tacitus was coming to see that he had set his exordium too late; and in fact he had gone to work without studying adequately the last two decades of the reign of Caesar Augustus. He ought to have begun with 6 B.C. – or perhaps with 2 B.C.

Julia and Iullus Antonius were much more than the central and conspicuous victims of a moral purge. The five criminal *nobiles* were punished in a manner appropriate to a charge of *maiestas*. Therefore, on a proper assessment, adultery was only a pretext or an aggravation.⁷² What then was their real offence? Was it conspiracy?

⁶⁸ Suetonius *Divus Aug.* 65.2 ff.; 19.1.

⁶⁹ *Ann.* I.10.4: *interfectos Romae Varrones Egnatios Iullos*; III.18.1: *Iulli Antonii, qui domum Augusti violasset*; IV.44.3: *Iullo Antonio ob adulterium Iuliae morte punito*.

⁷⁰ Dio LV 10.15: ὡς καὶ ἐπὶ τῇ μοναρχίᾳ τοῦτο πράξας ἀπέθανε. The text of Dio breaks off with the word καί; the rest comes from Xiphilinus.

⁷¹ *Ann.* III.24.2.

⁷² For the political assessment of the affair, E. Groag, *Wiener Studien* XLI

If so, to what end? Pliny in his catalogue of the misfortunes that befell Caesar Augustus mentions *adulterium filiae et parricidae consilia palam facta*.⁷³ That implies that Julia made a plot to murder her parent. Which passes belief.

There is a large question. What is conspiracy or treason? It has to be faced ever and again in the annals of Rome under the Caesars, and seldom with the prospect of a proper answer. The word 'conspiracy' can cover anything from poison or the assassin's dagger to secret plans or subversive language. How determine at what stage a political plan develops into a plot? It is easier for a government to detect or suppress a conspiracy than provide convincing proof of its existence. As in other ages, one must reckon with rumour, delation and false witnesses, with faction and intrigue in the Palace.

VII. The situation at Rome in summer and autumn of 2 B.C. calls for exacting scrutiny. Augustus, as it has been assumed in this enquiry, had made a number of dispositions. There remained certain matters not to be set down in his testament or consigned to state papers which would be made public. That is to say, for the event of his death, confidential instructions about the conduct of government, the princes being so young. Such 'secreta mandata' might be verbal rather than written, for all that Augustus liked documents and even preferred to communicate with his spouse by letter.

It would be needful to know about his confidants among the senior consulars. One might make play with various names, to no avail. Further, some of his friends were absent in provincial posts at this time. Again, the influence of a doctor, an astrologer or a philosopher may acquire dominance over an ageing monarch (among the Romans a philosopher often exercised the function of a domestic chaplain).

In an earlier season, Maecenas had been the chief minister (no title, only a necessary function) and the repository of state secrets.

(1919), 79 ff.; R. Syme, *Rom. Rev.* (1939), 427; E. Meise, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der julisch-claudischen Dynastie* (1969), 17 ff.

⁷³ NH VII.149.

Maecenas lapsed from power and had been replaced long since by Sallustius Crispus, who like Maecenas concealed craft and energy under the show of luxurious indulgence.⁷⁴ This is the man who on the decease of Augustus at once issued the order that Agrippa Postumus, the surviving grandson and now in exile on an island, should be put to death. There was various speculation then and later about the authorisation for the deed. Instructions from the dead Princeps seem the best answer. On that occasion Sallustius Crispus warned Livia about the dangers of publicity, adding a maxim of statecraft.⁷⁵

Together or apart, both Sallustius Crispus and Livia (her friends should not be left out of account) would be on guard to secure the succession and preclude rivalries. A council of regency has to be postulated, in fact though not in name. Hence competition in advance, compacts and intrigues among those who stood closest to the palace and the dynasty. The health of Augustus was precarious. He had suffered dangerous illnesses several times throughout the whole course of his life, and the dreaded climacteric loomed ahead, to begin in September of the year 1 B.C.

Therefore it was high time for Julia, the mother of the young princes, to be on the alert. Also for other persons in her entourage. It was expedient to forestall rivals, avert the collapse of the government and prevent the outbreak of a civil war. In fact, such might be prescribed as their plain duty, any personal desires or ambitions apart.⁷⁶

Augustus dying, a guide and guardian for the two Caesars was requisite – and perhaps a fourth husband for their mother. Tiberius abode at Rhodes. That he would ever come back, only the science of the stars could predict, as interpreted by the great master Thrasyllus. A centurion conveying the order to put an end to his life would dispose of that distant obstacle. As for Marcella, divorce would once again be the easy remedy in dynastic politics. It had happened to her before.

⁷⁴ Ann. III.30.

⁷⁵ Ann. I.6.3: *eam condicionem esse imperandi ut non aliter ratio constet quam si uni reddatur.*

⁷⁶ cf. Tacitus (1958), 403 ff.

Hence, with or without marriage to Julia (and the pair may have been closely congenial as they were close in age), the son of Marcus Antonius was a suitable and even predictable president for an eventual council of regency. Others in eager ambition would be looking for strategic positions. Accident, premature operations or crafty informers may have betrayed a plan and precipitated the crisis.

The conjuncture of 2 B.C. thus admits a ready explanation. Julia had plans, they brought in Iullus Antonius along with allies highly heterogeneous (for the recorded names do not quite add up to a comprehensive faction). Other persons of some weight and value came into the reckoning for Julia – as they must for any who are bold enough to assess this crisis in the Roman government.

For the historian, the fragmentary nature of the record is an insuperable bar; and, as has been made clear, it was necessary to employ the fortuitous and imperfect evidence of Seneca and Tacitus. There is no point or profit in cataloguing individuals or groups in the aristocracy that may be deemed influential and potent. Nonetheless, two characters can be recovered and put on show. Each absent from all ancient accounts of these transactions, and unduly neglected in the sequel. Namely L. Domitius Ahenobarbus (*cos.* 16 B.C.) and L. Aemilius Paullus (*cos.* A.D. 1).

VIII. Ahenobarbus at this juncture was away from Rome. In a precious fragment Cassius Dio registers under A.D. 1 his operations against the tribe of the Cherusci in Germany; and he adds that previously, while holding the command in Illyricum, he had crossed the river Elbe and set up an altar there in honour of Augustus.⁷⁷ Tacitus in the obituary notice was responsive to that achievement⁷⁸, but Velleius Paterculus duly suppresses exploits that infringed the martial fame of Tiberius.

The grandfather of Ahenobarbus (*cos.* 54 B.C.) fell in defence of the Republic at the Battle of Pharsalia. The parent (*cos.* 32 B.C.) had been active for that cause as an admiral after Philippi. He passed over to Antonius, and, the most illustrious of the Triumvir's

⁷⁷ Dio LV.10a.2 f.

⁷⁸ Ann. IV.44.2.

adherents, stood out towards the end as the head of the party hostile to the Queen of Egypt. His son, betrothed as a boy to the elder Antonia, married her in due course.

For the rest, the report is hostile or silent. The Domitii were a proud and contentious family, and this Ahenobarbus is described by Suetonius as 'arrogans, profusus, immitis'.⁷⁹ He was noted for skill as a charioteer, he gave lavish spectacles, and there was so much bloodshed at one of his gladiatorial shows that Augustus had to intervene with a minatory edict. Ahenobarbus had one son (the consul of A.D. 32) whom Suetonius calls 'omni parte vitae detestabilem'. According to Velleius, however, the father and the son each exemplified the virtue of 'nobilissima simplicitas'.⁸⁰ As elsewhere when verdicts of Velleius are in cause, a clash of testimony will amuse but not alarm a philosophical enquirer.

The ruthless ferocity of the family also comes out in stray anecdotes about the two daughters of Ahenobarbus, Domitia and Domitia Lepida. The latter is labelled by Tacitus as 'impudica, infamis, violenta'.⁸¹

Whatever the defects in his education and character, the husband of Antonia must have been a factor of some consequence in the politics of the dynasty, a present object of hopes and fears. Conjecture is baffled. His name is absent from the notorious piece of annotation which Tacitus inserted into his account of the debate in the Senate (September 17, A.D. 14): Augustus when near to the end held discourse in private about the quality and ambitions of three of the 'principes civitatis'.⁸² However, a partial explanation avails to exclude Domitius Ahenobarbus. He does not fit in easily with the others. Being now some seven years the senior of Tiberius Caesar, he had passed, on one count at least, the optimum age for acquiring the supreme power at Rome.

More remarkable is the silence that envelops Ahenobarbus in the sequel. He has no entry in the annalistic narration for long years before the notice of his death in 25. What is to be surmised? Ahenobarbus

⁷⁹ Suetonius, Nero 4.

⁸⁰ Velleius II.10.2; 73.2.

⁸¹ Ann. XII.64.3. For anecdotes about the pair, PIR², D 171; 180.

⁸² Ann. I.13.2.

barbus may have lapsed into torpor or rancour – or he may have become painfully aware of distrust and dislike on the part of Tiberius Caesar and have chosen security and prudence, mindful of the turbulent history of his ancestors.

Ahenobarbus could parade a double claim to be reckoned ‘capax imperii’, glory in war enhancing his link with the reigning house. Emergency at Rome and the consular commands stand in a close nexus. The identity of Ahenobarbus’ successor in Illyricum is lost to record, as is that of his predecessor in Germany.⁸³ Likewise unknown is the consular legate who followed Quinctilius Varus in Syria. It may have been L. Piso (*cos.* 15 B.C.), a safe and prudent man who enjoyed the confidence of both Augustus and Tiberius.⁸⁴ Nor should Spain be left from view, with an army at this time of four legions. As legate of Tarraconensis Paullus Fabius Maximus is on attestation for 3/2 B.C.⁸⁵ Maximus, on conspicuous show with an ode from Horace, and known as a friend and patron of Ovid, possessed ready eloquence and all the social graces. He was much liked by Augustus, whose cousin Marcia he had married.⁸⁶

IX. The other aristocrat presents sundry points of contrast to Ahenobarbus. In 2 B.C. Ahenobarbus would be completing his forty-seventh year, if it be assumed that he acceded ‘suo anno’ to the *fasces*. L. Aemilius Paullus was much younger, about thirty-one (perhaps several years less, on which see below).

Paullus his father (*cos. suff.* 34 B.C.), nephew of the Triumvir Lepidus, had been one of the few aristocratic adherents of Caesar’s heir, in whose company he is discovered at the time of the Sicilian War. It was now or a few years later that he secured for wife Cornelia, a lady of Scipionic ancestry, the daughter of one of the two marriages Scribonia had contracted before the brief union in 40

⁸³ That M. Vinicius (*suff.* 19 B.C.) followed Ahenobarbus in Illyricum, as later in Germany (in A.D. 2, cf. Velleius II.104.2) was argued in CQ XXVII (1933), 12 ff. = Danubian Papers (Bucharest, 1971), 26 ff., cf. 34 ff. (the Addendum).

⁸⁴ As suggested in Klio XXVII (1934), 128. See now Vestigia XVII. Akten des VI. int. Kongresses für gr. u. lat. Epigraphik München 1972 (1973), 597 f.

⁸⁵ ILS 8895.

⁸⁶ PIR², F 47.

B.C. to the heir of Caesar: her father, it now seems clear, was P. Cornelius Scipio, consul suffect in 35 B.C.⁸⁷

The last poem of Propertius conveys a noble tribute to Cornelia who died in 16 B.C., the year of her brother's consulship. In a message from beyond the grave Cornelia addresses her two sons, *tu Lepide, et tu Paulle, meum post fata levamen*.⁸⁸

Paullus was selected to be the bridegroom of Julia, the granddaughter of Augustus, close kin already for their mothers were both daughters of Scribonia. Julia was born in 19 or 18 B.C., and the marriage took place in 5 or 4 B.C. as may be deduced from the presumed age of the daughter she bore to Paullus. This Aemilia Lepida, consigned in matrimony to M. Junius Silanus (*cos.* A.D. 19), gave birth to a son in the last year of the reign of Caesar Augustus.⁸⁹ Julia was thus a grandmother at the age of thirty-two or thirty-three – which need occasion no surprise.

By the hazard of his shorter life, and for other reasons, Paullus has been almost eclipsed by his brother Marcus (*cos.* A.D. 6).⁹⁰ Serving as legate under Tiberius, Marcus Lepidus won laurels during the great insurrection in Illyricum (A.D. 6–9), and he stayed on there as governor of either Pannonia or Dalmatia. In A.D. 14 he is discovered in charge of the Spanish army.

Marcus is described as 'nomini ac fortunae Caesarum proximus'.⁹¹ Not an exaggeration. In the questionable anecdote reported by Tacitus, Marcus comes out best in the comparison with the other two consulars, being judged worthy of empire if he had wanted it. Thus Tacitus styles him, *capacem sed aspernantem*.⁹²

In truth, lineage and military renown marked M. Lepidus for high eminence, but restraint and sagacity kept him clear of the perils of dynastic entanglement. He died in his bed, not the normal

⁸⁷ Describing Scribonia as *nuptam ante duobus consularibus*, Suetonius presents problems that have not yet been resolved (*Divus Aug.* 62.2), cf. Groag in *PIR*², C 1395.

⁸⁸ Propertius IV.11.63.

⁸⁹ Pliny, *NH* VII.58, cf. *PIR*², A 419.

⁹⁰ *PIR*², A 369.

⁹¹ Velleius II.114.5.

⁹² *Ann.* I.13.2. Marcus, not Manius (*cos.* A.D. 11) as shown in *JRS* XLV (1955), 22 ff. = *Ten Studies in Tacitus* (1970), 30 ff.

end of any senator whom history or legend pronounces capable of empire. Tacitus singles him out as one of the few aristocrats who managed to follow the middle path in life under the Caesars, avoiding the extremes of dishonourable servility and fractious contumacy. The example of this Lepidus moved the historian to confess dubitations about the dominance of fate in human affairs, and about the doctrines of the astrologers.⁹³ Dying in A.D. 34, Lepidus receives a brief but monumental commemoration.⁹⁴

By a sharp contrast, which is nowhere alluded to by Tacitus, the destiny of his brother Paullus, about whom there obtrude more problems than one. In the first instance, a problem that has not hitherto been recognised by historians or by commentators on Pro-per-tius. Paullus was consul in A.D. 1, Marcus in 6. Therefore it seemed clear, and it was assumed without hesitation, that Paullus was the elder of the two brothers. Hence if Paullus became consul *suo anno*, at the age of thirty-two, his birth would fall in 33 B.C., Marcus being his junior by about five years.

Fresh inspection may debilitate if not overthrow that assumption. Paullus married the grand-daughter of Caesar Augustus. He might therefore benefit from some acceleration in his advance to the consulship.⁹⁵ Thus the two Claudii, stepsons of the ruler, who became consuls at twenty-eight. The remission of a full *quinquennium* would indicate 28 B.C. as the year of his birth (hence marriage to Julia at the suitable age of about twenty-three).

As for Marcus, he stands prior in the valediction of Cornelia, *tu Lepide, et tu Paulle*. If he were the senior by a year, he would reach his consulship at the age of thirty-three.

So far Paullus, who inaugurates the year A.D. 1 as colleague of C. Caesar, his wife's brother. The young Paullus serves to illustrate the advantage of adducing persons and factors absent from the written record. Also some of the hazards inherent in the obscure decade 6 B.C.—A.D. 4.

Even were the text of Cassius Dio entire, sundry problems would subsist. Dio wrote at a distance of more than two centuries, and in

⁹³ Ann. IV.20.3.

⁹⁴ Ann. VI.27.4.

⁹⁵ As suggested in JRS XLV (1955), 24 = Ten Studies in Tacitus (1970), 34.

various ways was at the mercy of his sources. Those historians, albeit much closer to the events, sometimes lacked discernment, failing to recognise omissions or distortions in the official version. Dio's narration of the year 30 B.C. neglects the alleged conspiracy of Marcus Lepidus, the son of the Triumvir. That was not from scepticism.

Nor was Dio, although a Roman senator, informed with the keen prosopographic insights of Cornelius Tacitus. He evinces no interest in those necrological notices which contribute so powerfully to the appeal of the Tiberian books. Furthermore, his gaze fixed on the ruler and his family, Dio might miss eminent consulars or potent agents who operated behind the scenes and leave few traces. His pages yield no mention of Sallustius Crispus.

This man (it has been suggested) should have had a role to play in the crisis of 2 B.C. Again, the aristocrats Ahenobarbus and Paulus must have come into calculations. But the dearth of evidence precludes and deters speculation. In the present state of knowledge, a surmised link between their families would be of no help: the second daughter of Ahenobarbus carries the name Domitia Lepida.

X. The catastrophe of Julia brought no amelioration in the lot of the Rhodian recluse. Augustus pronounced divorce from Julia, an act which served to emphasize Tiberius' severance from the dynastic circle. When in the next year Tiberius craved leave to visit Rome and see his family again, he got a harsh answer. Suetonius quotes the words: Tiberius must forfeit all thought of those he had been so eager to desert.⁹⁶ Then, after suffering humiliation in various forms and even fear for his life when C. Caesar came to the eastern lands, Tiberius was permitted to return to Rome in the summer of A.D. 2, but under condition that he abide in a private station. Such was his existence for the space of two years.

The decease of C. Caesar left the Princeps with no alternative now. So at least it appears. There is no word of Ahenobarbus (now aged about fifty-two). Perhaps that 'nobilissima simplicitas' (which could suggest some less amicable appellation) provoked hostility

⁹⁶ Suetonius, Tib. 11.5.

and alarm. And Aemilius Paullus lapses from record between his consulship and his calamity. For the rest, once again several boy princes. As for the two sons of Drusus, Germanicus was just eighteen, while nobody would have given a thought to the boy Claudius (aged twelve); and Agrippa Postumus, the last son of Agrippa and Julia, now fifteen, hardly showed more promise than Claudius.

Augustus was therefore compelled to associate Tiberius in his name and powers. It was a dramatic reversal of fortune, with secret hopes or precise ambitions disappointed, with alert changes of alliance and new compacts forming in the ranks of noblemen and ex-consuls. A different oligarchy of government now emerged, as can be discerned if casual facts are set in order and brought into relation. It is not made explicit in the pages of any extant historian.

The loyal enthusiasm of Velleius Paterculus expatiates on the felicitous turn of events when Tiberius came back to his proper and predestined station of 'perpetuus patronus Romani imperii'. Now, so Velleius discloses, parents can feel liberated from anxiety about their progeny, husbands about the sanctity of the matrimonial tie, and owners of property about their rights and security. In short, the blessings of 'salus', 'quies', 'pax', 'tranquillitas' are universally diffused.⁹⁷

The outcome soon belied those pious vaticinations. There ensued first of all famine and plague in Italy, then the rebellion of Pan-
nonians and Dalmatians (it took three years to quell), and the final calamity: three legions destroyed in Germany with Quinctilius Varus.

Hence a second obscure decade, darkened in more ways than one. The foreign wars (which were fully narrated by Cassius Dio) tend to cover up strain and discord in the dynasty. Posterity might easily be left with an imperfect or distorted account of domestic transactions. And, once more, accident intervenes in the transmission of a historian's text and increases the perplexity. For A.D. 8, four more *folia* are missing from the manuscript of Dio.

In that year fell the scandal of Julia, inevitably linked to her mother by history and legend. For immoral behaviour she too was

⁹⁷ Velleius II.103.5.

sent away to an island. Hence another mysterious episode, likewise liable to be misconstrued.

One of her lovers happens to be named in a valuable passage in the *Annals*. This nobleman, D. Junius Silanus, suffered no penalty by law or by decree of the Roman Senate. Conscious of the ruler's displeasure, he saw that he had to go.⁹⁸ That was all. By contrast, rancour and a harsh punishment were visited upon an innocent bystander, the poet Ovid.

However, it was not merely outraged morality that was being so signally vindicated. L. Aemilius Paullus was condemned for treason or conspiracy. He could not be indicted for adultery with Julia since he was her husband.⁹⁹ But that is another story, and totally obscure. The bare name of Paullus has all but vanished from the pages of history.¹⁰⁰

Dynastic and family politics are only one aspect of the Principate of Caesar Augustus. And these enquiries may incur dispraisal or censure as being a narrow theme, occupied with tedious pieces of information about names and persons, consuls and commanders of armies. On the contrary, this is the stuff and matter of political and social history, a necessary counterpoise to consecrated fashions that have taken as the central point of interest either the biography of the ruler or the juristic defining of his position in the 'res publica'.

⁹⁸ *Ann.* III.24.3: *exilium sibi demonstrari intellexit.*

⁹⁹ *Rom. Rev.* (1939), 432. E. Hohl suggested that the conspiracy of Paullus might have occurred as early as A.D. 1 (*Klio* XXX (1937), 337ff). But there are no grounds for this disjunction. To be sure, the scholiast on Juvenal VI.158 alleges that Julia was relegated, then allowed to return, and finally sentenced to perpetual exile. The notice (quoted without disquiet in *PIR*², J 635) looks like an amalgamation with her mother, cf. Ammianus and the *Historia Augusta* (1968), 86. Others beside myself had failed to take into account the decisive testimony lurking in Suetonius, *Divus Claudius* 26.1. Claudius had to forfeit his betrothed Aemilia Lepida because *parentes eius Augustum offenderant*; he was then *admodum adulescens*. Now Claudius reached the age of seventeen on August 1, A.D. 8.

¹⁰⁰ Paullus is named only in Propertius IV.11.3; Suetonius *Divus Aug.* 19.1; 64.1; schol. ad Juv. VI.158 The 'Paullus' in modern texts of Seneca, *De brevitate vitae* 4.6 is a conjecture: to be replaced by 'Iullus'.

Moreover and finally, families and individuals illuminate the transition from Republic to Principate. Rivalry and alliances in the great houses of the Roman *nobilitas* persist and propagate, the imperial dynasty of Julii and Claudii being a nexus of aristocratic families. The power might have gone to an Aemilius Lepidus. In the event, the successor of Augustus turned out to be a Claudius. The next two rulers carried the blood of the Triumvir Marcus Antonius, as did the last in the line of succession, who was also the last Domitius Ahenobarbus. That is, the Emperor Nero.