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Cyrene and the Caesars: Two Studies

In the transition from Republic to Empire, members of the Roman elite engaged with and adapted conceptions of rulership that they had encountered in their eastern provinces. In this essay, I examine two moments in which Cyrene may have played a part in the construction of imperial identity at Rome.¹

I.

In a forthcoming paper entitled «Augustus' Emergent Judicial Powers, the “Crimen Maiestatis”, and the Second Cyrene Edict», Michael Peachin begins by observing: «More and more in recent times, scholarship treating the powers and duties of the Roman emperor – or indeed, the entire nature and structure of the early imperial government – has tended to stress the conviction that Augustus did not engineer anything like a fully formed or nicely coherent system. He did not simply create the Principate. Rather, he set in motion a sustained experiment» (p. 3), and he adds: «Now, among the various functions performed by Roman emperors, one of the most salient was adjudication» (p. 4).² Among the areas over which the emperor came increasingly to exercise judicial authority was that of offenses against his majesty. Nor is this a peripheral issue in understanding the role of the *princeps* as judge; as Peachin notes, Augustus' «judicial undertakings, aside from being principally limited to criminal issues, apparently very often arose from allegations of one specific crime, namely, purportedly treasonous behavior directed at him» (p. 5).

1 This paper has emerged from reflections I was invited to share in a small workshop held on 15 May 2015 at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study on the topic, «The Arts of Imperial Portraiture and the Cultural Construal of the Self», in honor of the Sinologist Bernhard Karlgren. It is my pleasure to thank the participants in the workshop, and especially Christoph Harbsmeier, for their thoughtful comments, and in turn to dedicate this paper to Carlo Santini, whose interests span all of ancient culture.

2 Quotations from this paper are cited with the kind permission of the author, who distributed an advance copy to colleagues.

Having systematically collected all possible references to offenses of this type in early Rome, Peachin concludes that a change in the nature of such charges took place in the year 7-6 BC: «Before there were statutes to regulate this area of the criminal law, Republican-era treason seems to have encompassed at least the following types of malefaction: joining the enemy; rousing the enemy against the state; delivering a Roman citizen to the enemy; cowardice in command; misappropriation of war booty; neglect of religious duties by a magistrate; putting Roman citizens to death without trial; excessive savagery against the provincials exercised by governors; plotting against the state; criminal attack against a magistrate» (pp. 18-19). This is an ample list, yet it omits a category that was to become hugely important, that is, defamation, and it appears that, apart from one dubious instance, there is no record of such accusations under the Republic. What is more, the pattern continues down through much of Augustus' reign, whether under the so-called second triumvirate, when he was still known as Octavian, or after 27 BC when the Senate bestowed on him the title Augustus.

In 2 BC, there is evidence that something had changed: «Augustus' daughter, Julia, and those who had committed adultery with her ..., are prosecuted *nomine laesarum religionum ac violatae maiestatis* – “with the label of infringed obligations and violated sovereignty”», according to Tacitus (*Annals* 3.24.2). Julia was tried by her father, who assumed authority to judge this offense. Another case, dated to 6 AD, involved anonymous pamphleteering; of this, Peachin remarks: «it seems relatively clear that this is the moment when abusive language began to be shifted, by Augustus, in the direction of being conceived as potentially treasonous behavior» (p. 32), and it inaugurated a series of such judgments around the same time, including the banishment of Ovid for some kind of mistake (*error*) but also, it appears, something he wrote (*carmen*; Ovid *Tristia* 2.207). Now, as Peachin makes clear, such trials depend on the idea that an attack on Augustus is equivalent to treason against the state, and this sensibility will have evolved in the course of his reign. As Peachin puts it: «First and foremost, there is the question as to why any offense ... perpetrated against Augustus could or would be interpreted as treason» (p. 39); and then there is the further question of where jurisdiction for such an offense might lie (p. 42). For all the ambiguity or vagueness surrounding individual cases, Peachin detects at the crucial moment of 7 or 6 BC «a significant – indeed, what looks to have been an absolute – transformation» (p. 46). Something seems to have happened just then, and Peachin identifies what it was: the affair that led to the so-called Second Cyrene Edict (an inscription first published in 1927) which was promulgated at precisely that moment.

The story behind the decree is complicated, and I can do no better than summarize Peachin's reconstruction of the events. Three Romans in the province of Cyrene were engaged in an altercation with local Greeks, and trumped up a charge against them involving some kind of danger to the emperor. The three Romans were sent to Rome so that their complaint could be heard, but Augustus saw through their pretensions

and dismissed them. In the meantime, however, «ambassadors from the Hellenic community in Cyrene, who must have come to Rome either at the same time as, or very shortly after, the three Romans», alleged that one of the Romans «had removed statues, which had been erected by the community, from public spaces at Cyrene; and upon one of these, the *polis* had inscribed the name of Augustus» (p. 48). Scholars have tried to eke out further circumstances, but this much, at least, seems certain. With this latter charge, the Cyrenaeans hoped to pre-empt the accusations against themselves. No doubt, as Peachin observes, it was illegal to move statues from public spaces without authorization, but why should it have engaged the attention of the emperor? It is difficult, Peachin concludes, not to suppose that Augustus chose to investigate it «because there was an insinuation (or even, perhaps, a specifically voiced charge) of an infraction precisely against his own *maiestas*» (p. 52). It is the kind of charge that became far more common under Tiberius, but the procedure seems really to have got rolling with this particular episode – not something planned in advance, but the consequence of a set of events that changed the way defamation of the emperor would henceforth be viewed.³

In Peachin's learned and meticulous analysis of the Second Cyrene Edict and its place in the evolution of the emperor's conception of his *maiestas*, there is, however, one aspect of the case that he does not consider, perhaps because it is not directly relevant to his theme: this is the fact that the first charge concerning mistreatment of a statue of the emperor was, to all appearances, leveled by Greeks, and, what is more, Greeks living in Cyrene, a Greek city which had been under Egyptian suzerainty for over two hundred years; frequently, it was a brother of the ruling Ptolemy in Egypt who held sway in Cyrenaica. Cyrenaica was ceded to Rome in 96 BC, and became a province in 74 – forty-four years before the same fate befell Egypt itself. Hellenes would have been accustomed to regarding their king as a Pharaoh, since the Ptolemies had assumed the divine prerogatives of their Egyptian predecessors. Once Rome absorbed Egypt, Augustus followed in their path: As Diana Kleiner observes: «Octavian became master of Egypt even before he became Augustus, and thus inherited the traditional rights of the pharaohs and their Ptolemaic successors. One of these was to celebrate the official cults and to be depicted as so doing on the walls of Egypt's temples».⁴ Kleiner suggests that «what motivated Augustus to allow himself to be depicted with the posture, clothing, and headdress of an Egyptian king was his wish to be viewed in Egypt as the natural successor to the Pharaohs and the Ptolemies and their most recent queen, Cleopatra» (p. 195). This was not the practice of Augustus in other parts of the empire; rather, Egypt «had a special status, a unique position that distinguished it from all the other territories

3 For the way a legal tradition may have its start in a specific or adventitious case, see Corke-Webster (forthcoming), who traces the almost accidental steps by which Pliny's efforts to deal with a local situation (*Letters* 10.96-97) came to be interpreted as a legal precedent for the repression of Christians throughout the Empire.

4 Kleiner 2005, 189.

in the Augustan age», since it was the special province of Augustus, belonging to him and not under senatorial jurisdiction (p. 196).

While the Second Cyrene Edict does not give any specifics about the statues that were moved, or why Greeks living in Cyrene should have supposed that Augustus would regard this as a culpable breach of respect, it is reasonable to suppose that they were transferring expectations concerning the treatment of images of their local kings, back in the days of the Ptolemies, to their Roman ruler, and that they had good reason to imagine that Augustus would take such a charge seriously. The Romans involved might well have supposed, in turn, that the charge was nugatory, since there was no tradition at Rome of regarding such an action as treasonable; thus they were not particularly worried about Augustus' reaction, and the individual who was so charged, named A. Stlaccius Maximus, must have been surprised to discover that, after he had been released without penalty for having fabricated a story about an allegedly real danger to the emperor's safety, was now detained under guard because of an accusation involving nothing more than moving some statues. For Stlaccius' charge against the Greeks specifies a threat to Augustus's safety, not a mere gesture of disrespect. Something new was indeed occurring, and that Augustus followed up this episode with further verdicts of the same type shows that he recognized his judgment in the case as a new precedent and was eager to confirm it.

In a recent study, John Ma, in examining how honorific statues and portraits work «to constrain elites within communitarian norms», observes that, in Greek dedicatory inscriptions, «datives do not designate the human recipients of statue honors, but divinities who are offered gifts. Datives are very rare on the inscribed bases of statues for humans in the Hellenistic period».⁵ For this reason, «the dative has the force of a religious gesture of homage and dedication, and hence is likely to indicate statues set up as part of, and used in, Hellenistic ruler cult» (p. 19). The normal format for inscriptions accompanying statues of human beings is to put the name of the honorand in the accusative, for it is he who is dedicated. Alternatively, the name may appear in the genitive, indicating that it is the statue of so and so; if the genitive is used alone, however, and does not modify a noun such as *eikôn*, then it marks divine ownership of the altar or sacrosanct space, and hence typically represents a cult statue (pp. 20-21). Was the inscription at the base of one of the statues that had been moved from its place by Stlaccius Maximus in the dative, and therefore a sign that the image had religious significance? We do not know, but it is intriguing to speculate that a small detail of grammar, no greater than a single case ending, may have set in motion a process that led to a new phase in the conception of the Roman emperor's status.

The transformation of the emperor's identity was gradual. When he first assumed complete power in the state, Augustus had been careful to distance himself from claims

5 Ma 2013, 11, 13.

to divinity in Rome. Gilles Sauron, in a detailed investigation of the way ideologies assumed plastic form in Rome, has argued that Augustus' apparent modesty in this regard was a departure from that of his adopted father, Julius Caesar. According to the ancient commentator on Virgil, Servius Danielis (ad *Ecl.* 9.46), there was a statue of Julius on the Capitoline Hill, his head crowned by a golden star, bearing an inscription on the base that read: «To Caesar, the Demi-God» (*eique in Capitolio statuam, super caput auream stellam habentem, posuit: inscriptum in basi fuit "Caesari emitheo"*): note the dative, combined with the Greek epithet).⁶ Augustus, by contrast, refused to have his statue placed inside the Pantheon, as Agrippa had intended when he dedicated it in 25 BC, nor did he allow the temple to be called the *Augusteum* (Dio Cassius 53.27.2-3); rather than be *sunnaos*, co-habitant, with the deities within, he preferred, in Sauron's words, a «rupture avec l'héritage de son père César», and was content to represent himself as Apollo's regent on earth, an «émanation actuelle d'Apollon» (p. 510). Two decades later, another statue in a far-off place may have contributed to nudging Augustus' sense of his status in another direction.

II.

We have remarked that Augustus took on the cultic attributes of the Greek rulers of Egypt, who had in turn adopted the divine status of the Pharaohs. There too a process of adjustment must have been required for Greek citizens of Alexandria to accept the idea that a human general ought now to be regarded as a god, and doubtless the first Ptolemies faced challenges in assuming their new role. The prior Greek tradition had been loath to confer divine honors on mortals; as Roger Brock observes in his recent study of Greek political imagery: «It is ... rare for Greek rulers to be straightforwardly characterized as divine».⁷ Brock notes: «By the end of the fifth century, however, we can detect a change in the fortunes of the image which reflects the rising stock of monarchy» (p. 13), and by the end of the fourth, the new attitude was palpable. A well-known instance is the famous hymn which the Athenians sang to Demetrius Poliorcetes upon his triumphant approach to the city, after he had driven out the pro-Macedonian regent, Demetrius of Phalerum (cf. Athenaeus 6.62, Plutarch *Life of Demetrius* 2.2). In a subtler fashion, Callimachus' *Hymns*, and in particular the fifth and sixth (to Athena and Demeter, respectively), illustrate how a poet might manipulate traditional motifs as a way both to honor rulers as divine and, in Ma's words, «to constrain elites within communitarian norms».⁸

6 Sauron 1994, 246.

7 Brock 2013, 12.

8 Cf. Konstan 1996 for discussion of *Hymn* 6.

Callimachus' most explicitly political poem is «The Lock of Berenice». As is well known, the Berenice in question was the wife of Ptolemy III (Euergetes), and Callimachus composed the poem to celebrate the dedication of a lock of her hair which she had promised on condition that her husband return safely from his military expedition against Syria – a campaign that had brought him all the way to the borders of Bactria in the east. Berenice fulfilled her vow in the summer or autumn of 245, and when the offering mysteriously disappeared a short while afterwards, the court astronomer Conon purported to discover a new constellation in the heavens, which he identified with the shorn tress of the queen.⁹ The text, which was appended as the conclusion to the four books of his *Aitia*, is fragmentary, but it can be reconstructed thanks to Catullus' Latin translation (c. 66).

Catullus introduced his translation with a short poem (c. 65) addressed to the great Roman orator Hortensius Hortalus, explaining why he cannot produce a new work for him, as Hortensius had requested: he is still too distraught at the recent death of his brother, Catullus explains, to create something fresh, and so he offers instead his version of Callimachus' 'Lock'. Scholars have remarked on Catullus' debt to Callimachus' learned and pithy style, but few have raised the question of why Catullus might have chosen to translate this poem in particular.¹⁰ A few years ago I offered, very tentatively, a possible reason.¹¹ Late in the year 62 Pompey returned from the east, where he had finally eliminated the threat of Mithridates and restored Roman control over the Seleucid kingdom of Syria. It is not hard to see an analogy between Pompey's campaign and that of Ptolemy Euergetes in the same region. Furthermore, Pompey married Caesar's daughter Julia just two or three years later (the wedding took place in April 59), a union that resulted in an alliance between Rome's most powerful leaders; here again, there is a parallel with the wedding of Berenice and Ptolemy, since with her ascent to the throne of Egypt on 27 January 246, Berenice, queen of Cyrene, had brought about the union of two territories whose relations had hitherto been marked by rivalry and hostility. Of course, the circumstances of the two poems are not exactly the same: Julia had not been married to Pompey when he was fighting, and it is unlikely that she made any vows for

9 For details, see Marinone 1997, 19–21.

10 Clay 2013, 215 observes on 65: «The verse epistle not only covers a translation; it connects with the poem Catullus translated from the Greek. His words expressing his grief over the death of his brother introduce Callimachus' expression of the grievous separation of Ptolemy III from his new bride ... It is a remarkable coincidence – and no coincidence at all – that Catullus should describe Berenice's separation from Ptolemy as a "grievous parting from a dear brother" (*fratris cari flebile discidium*, 66.22; cfr. 65.5-14) ... [Catullus'] loss of his brother was as painful for the poet as the separation of the new bride from her husband» (p. 215). We may also note the description of Berenice's other locks as 'sisters' in mourning (51). But even if Catullus chose to send the translation because it resonated with his own recent loss, it is hard to imagine that this was his reason for translating it in the first place (even assuming that he did so after his brother's death, on which see below).

11 See Konstan 2007, 82-83.

his safe return. All that I meant to suggest was that a Greek poem celebrating a dynastic marriage and the completion of military operations against a threat arising in Syria might have had resonance in Rome around 58 BC, when Catullus was likely to have sent the poem as a gift to Hortensius (see below). I proposed too that Hortensius was a suitable recipient of the translation, since he had vehemently opposed the Lex Gabinia in 67, by which Pompey was granted almost limitless powers to rid the Mediterranean of piracy; with this poem, Catullus might have sought to reconcile Hortensius to the alliance between Pompey and Caesar, comparing it to an earlier and felicitous union. What is more, I argued that Catullus' version perhaps contained a specific allusion to Julia. For the word that Catullus employs to describe the lock – *caesaries* (v. 8) – ordinarily refers to an entire head of hair, not to a tress. The slight catachresis would have put readers on alert, and made it more probable that they would have seen a reference to the name Caesar. The pun did not die with Catullus; it recurs in the *Einsiedeln Eclogues* (1.43–47), probably dating to the reign of Nero: «His thick beard and white hair [*caesaries*] shone with full dignity ... and he duly covered his Caesarian head [*Caesareumque caput*] with his cloak». ¹²

Recently, however, Ian Du Quesnay has objected to my interpretation on chronological grounds: «The suggestion of Konstan (2007) 82–3 that in Poem 66 Catullus is alluding to the marriage of Julia and Pompey is not persuasive: apart from anything else, the marriage took place in April 59 (Cic. *Att.* 2.17.1), and that dislocates the chronology assumed by Konstan». ¹³ Instead, Du Quesnay connects the poem with Pompey's efforts to restore the Egyptian king Ptolemy XII (Auletes) to the throne, after he had been expelled by a rebellion in his own country in 58 BC. Ptolemy travelled to Rome to secure Pompey's patronage, but the aristocratic party in the Senate, which included Hortensius, did not wish Pompey to have a major role in the action; they came round, however, to the idea of Ptolemy's restoration when he secured a loan from them at high interest, and they realized that to pay it off he would need to exploit the resources of his kingdom. Du Quesnay suggests that Catullus' translation of a poem praising the ancestors of Ptolemy XII may have been designed both to endorse, at least implicitly, the legitimacy of the exiled king and to show that Hortensius and his crowd appreciated the achievements of the Ptolemaic dynasty. ¹⁴

There is much to be said for Du Quesnay's interpretation, but it is, I think, compatible with my own, which takes better account of the content of Callimachus' poem. Let

12 The connection was first suggested to me by Regina Höschle. The term *caesaries* was thought to derive from *caedere*, 'cut' (Serv. ad *Aen.* 1.590, 8.659), and hence was appropriate for a shorn lock. For the connection between *caesaries* and Caesar, cf. Fest. *DVS* p. 50 Lindsay. Nadeau 1982 detects the same pun in Ov. *Met.* 1.180 and, indirectly, in Vergil by way of Catullus; see also Nadeau 2008, ch. 24, and Lucan 1.183–9 for a possible association of *caesaries* with Caesar.

13 Du Quesnay 2012, 161 n. 49.

14 Du Quesnay 2012, 161.

us take a closer look at the matter of chronology, which involves two distinct issues: first, when Catullus composed his cover letter (c. 65), and second, when he translated the 'Lock'. Catullus' brother presumably died before Catullus' voyage to Bithynia in the cohort of Memmius, which is the likely occasion of Catullus' visit to his brother's tomb (c. 101; cf. Du Quesnay p. 160); thus, c. 65 was written before the spring of 57, since that is when Catullus departed for Bithynia. Late 58, then, is a plausible moment, or something over a year after the marriage of Julia and Pompey and coinciding with Ptolemy's stay in Rome (Ptolemy arrived there in the autumn of 58).

As for the translation, it may have been done sometime earlier, although Du Quesnay argues that it was freshly composed for Hortensius: «Catullus makes it clear that this is a translation which he has done especially for Hortalus: *haec expressa tibi carmina*. The pronoun *tibi* is enclosed within the intricately patterned pentameter and is primarily to be taken with *expressa*, secondarily with *mitto* (15), to which it adds little».¹⁵ Writing in the same volume, Tony Woodman agrees; although he notes that «*mitto* is the only main verb in the whole of the poem», he continues: «Yet the position of *tibi* between *expressa* and *carmina* gives the very strong impression that Catullus is saying that the translation of Callimachus has been done “specially for you, Hortalus”». ¹⁶ The argument, nevertheless, is not airtight. Woodman observes that a poem by Catullus' intimate friend, Cinna, also seems to promise a translation of a work by an eminent Greek poet, in this case Aratus, which he announces with an expression similar to that of Catullus: *haec tibi Arateis multum invigilata lucernis carmina ... Prusiaca vexi munera navicula* (fr. 11 Courtney): «these verses, composed in many a wakeful night under Aratean lamps ..., I have brought you as a gift on a Bithynian ship» (my translation). Although commentators have assumed that Cinna is bearing a copy of Aratus' poem, Woodman affirms that «there is no reason why Cinna should not be referring to a Latin translation of Aratus, a translation executed by Cinna himself» (p. 145). As Woodman points out, the expression *haec tibi ... carmina* is «the very same as used by Catullus to refer to the poetry which he is sending to Hortalus (16): *haec ... tibi carmina*», and he adds that the expression is unparalleled until Martial (14.192), where again it is used of a gift of poetry (in this case, a copy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*). Du Quesnay too acknowledges the similarity between Cinna's and Catullus' poems, and concedes that in Cinna, «*tibi* (1) belongs unambiguously with *vexi* (4) ... and not with *invigilata*» (154 n. 4); he disagrees with Woodman, however, about the nature of the poem Cinna is carrying: «It is sometimes suggested that Cinna is also referring to a translation (rather than to a copy of the original).¹⁷ An argument from silence is always vulnerable but, given

15 Du Quesnay 2012, 154.

16 Woodman 2012, 146.

17 Du Quesnay does not mention Woodman, whose paper precedes his own in the volume edited by both these scholars.

the number of surviving translations of Aratus and commentary on them, it would be surprising if a translation by a poet of Cinna's reputation had left no trace». Whatever the truth may be, the similarity between Cinna's and Catullus' expressions suggests that *tibi* in c. 65 might be thought to go principally with *mitto*, and that its proximity to *expressa* was meant to indicate that the gift was intended specially for Hortalus, even if it had been composed sometime earlier – conceivably before Catullus received the news of his brother's death.

It is worth recalling that just four or five years before Catullus penned his letter to Hortensius, Catiline's army was defeated in open combat. Now, Pompey was back, and potential conflict with Caesar was forestalled by what was evidently a powerful sentimental bond between Pompey and Julia. Whether Catullus elected to translate Callimachus' 'Lock' near to the time of the wedding, or a year and a half later, when the question of Egypt was high on the Roman Senate's agenda, he may well have thought to flatter the couple by comparing them to Ptolemy III and Berenice, who had a joint cult and were worshipped as gods.¹⁸ If so, then Catullus may have been among the first poets to import to Rome the conception of its highest political figures as divinities, and it may be no coincidence that he drew inspiration from a predecessor who was a native of Cyrene. Did Catullus have hopes that he might «constrain elites within communitarian norms»? If so, he must have been deeply disappointed, for soon afterwards he recoiled from what he saw as the ruinous tyranny of Caesar and Pompey over Rome. But the genie was out of the bottle, and the subtle influence of Cyrene and Egypt upon Roman ideas of rulership may have found an early expression in Catullus' implicit eulogy.

18 Cf. Du Quesnay 2012, 164: «From at least early 243, Berenice herself was recognized, in her own lifetime, as divine and the cult of Berenice and Ptolemy III as the Θεοὶ Εὐεργέται was instituted.»

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