# MARCUS AGRIPPA: CO-EMPEROR OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis re-evaluates the political career of Marcus Agrippa (c. 63-12 BCE), arguing that he was not a subordinate agent of Augustus, but a constitutional co-ruler whose authority was publicly acknowledged and proved foundational to the creation of the Roman Principate. It challenges the traditional emperor or 'great man' centred narrative by demonstrating that Agrippa's power—military, civic, legal, and symbolic—was deliberately constructed in parallel with Augustus' own. By surveying fully Agrippa's presence within the constitutional, visual, and ritual frameworks of early Empire, this thesis reframes the Principate as a shared construct, co-authored by a statesman whose influence was once visible across the Roman world—and whose legacy was later de-emphasized to serve the needs of dynastic continuity and imperial myth.

This thesis considers a full array of ancient evidence: ancient texts, inscriptions, coinage, architecture, and the ideological performance of power in public ritual. In addition, this study presents the Principate as a constitutional partnership shaped by co-ordinated authority and mutual dependence, rather than by the unilateral supremacy of Augustus. One particular facet of this study is that it proposes a re-examination of ancient Roman sources (often shaped by imperial ideology) alongside Eastern and non-Roman primary sources that have only more recently begun to receive sustained scholarly attention. The former are invaluable in that they testify more openly to Agrippa's greater role in the construction of the Principate, and therefore their inclusion allows for a more historically accurate picture of Agrippa's position in the Augustan regime.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

*AE – L'Année epigraphique* (Paris, 1888–).

*ASAA – Annuario Della Scuola Archeologica* (1941–).

*BMC – Catalogue of the Greek Coins in the British Museum* (London, 1873–1927).

*BMCRE - Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*. (London, 1923–1962).

*CGL – Corpus Grammaticorum Latinorum.*

*CIG – Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum* (Berlin, 1828–77).

*CIJ – Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum.*

*CIL – Corpus Inscriptionem Latinarum* (1863–).

*CIRB – Corpus Inscriptionum Regni Bosporani*.

*EE – Ephemeris Epigraphica* (Rome, 1872–1913).

*EJ – Documents Illustrating the Reigns of Augustus and Tiberius* (Oxford, 1976).

*F.Xanthos – Fouilles de Xanthos VII. Inscriptions d'époque impériale du Létôon* (Paris 1981).

*IG – Inscriptiones Graecae* (1873–).

*IGR – Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas pertinentes* (1906–).

*ILS – Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* (1892 – 1916).

*I.Mus. Leyden – The Greek Inscriptions in the «Rijksmuseum van Oudheden» at Leyden* (Leiden 1958).

*Inscr. Ital. – Inscriptiones Italiae XIII.1: Fasti Consulares et Triumphales* (Rome, 1947).

*IOSPE – Inscriptiones Antiquae Orae Septentrionalis Ponti Euxini. 4 volumes (Petersburg, 1885–1901).*

*IRC – Inscriptions Romaines de Catalogne* (Paris, 1984–).

*JIWE – Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe.*
*Volume I: Italy (Exc. Rome), Spain and Gaul; Volume II: The City of Rome.*

*OGIS – Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae: Supplementum Sylloges Inscriptionum Graecarum* (Leipzig, 1903–5).

*P. Köln – Kölner Papyri* (1976–).

*RAA – Rome: The Augustan Age: A Sourcebook* (1981).

*RCV – Roman Coins and their Values* (D. R. Sear; London, 1964–).

*RDGE – Roman Documents from the Greek East: Senatus Consulta and Epistulae to the Age of Augustus* (Baltimore, 1969).

*RIC – Roman Imperial Coinage* (C. H. V. Sutherland; 1984–).

*RPC – Roman Provincial Coinage* (London, 1992–).

*RRC – Roman Republican Coinage* (M. H. Crawford; 1974).

*RSC – Roman Silver Coins* (1952–).

*SCPP – Senatus Consultum de Cn. Pisone Patre.*

*SEG – Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* (Leiden, 1923–70., Amsterdam, 1976–).

*SIG – Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum* (1915–1924).

*Syll.*$^{3}$ *– Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*, 3rd edition. (Leipzig, 1915–24).

*Vives – La moneda hispánica* (Antonio Vives y Escudero; 1926).

All primary (ancient) authors will have their names and their works' full titles in the first instance, with an abbreviated title in English thereafter (e.g., Tacitus' *Annals*, Suetonius' *Augustus* and *Tiberius*, and Livy's *History of Rome*) except where only one work exists or only one work is cited within the thesis: for instance, Cassius Dio's *Roman History*, Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*, Frontinus' *On Aqueducts*, Appian's *Civil* War, Velleius Paterculus' *Roman History*, Aulus Gellius' *Attic Nights*, and Strabo's *Geography*. The title of Augustus' *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* follows scholarly practice of keeping the Latin title (that is, Augustus' *Res Gestae*).

## INTRODUCTION

Few episodes more vividly illuminate the early power dynamic between Augustus Caesar (Octavian) and Marcus Agrippa—a partnership defined by shared ambition and strategic loyalty—than the encounter with the astrologer Theogenes in Apollonia.[1] Although frequently dismissed as a trivial anecdote, it offers a glimpse into how each man assessed the other's potential and suggests that their relationship was characterized from the outset by reciprocal recognition, rather than a fixed hierarchy with Augustus as the superior. The main source for this episode is Suetonius, who recounts in his *Vita Divi Augusti* or *Life of the Divine Augustus* (henceforth *Aug.*) that Agrippa first presented his birth details to Theogenes, who declared that he was destined for immense glory (94.12). The impact of this prophecy was so striking that Octavian, upon hearing it, became visibly anxious and refused to reveal his own birth data—fearful that his horoscope might pale in comparison. This hesitation is especially revealing. If Octavian viewed Agrippa as a subordinate, there would have been no reason for trepidation. His reluctance was not merely an expression of modesty or superstition, but a revealing moment of self-awareness—an implicit recognition that Agrippa's potential rivalled, and perhaps even surpassed, his own. Only after some coaxing did Octavian provide his birth details, at which point Theogenes reportedly threw himself at his feet and proclaimed a destiny of unprecedented magnitude.[2]

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[1] I use 'Octavian' to designate Caesar's heir prior to 27 BCE, at which point the Senate formally conferred upon him the title 'Augustus.' Although this renaming is often treated as a constitutional rupture—the moment the Republic gave way to Empire—I interpret it instead as the culmination of a co-authored settlement shaped jointly by Octavian and Agrippa. I occasionally retain Octavian after 27 BCE where it sharpens analytical focus—particularly in contexts that emphasize his Republican origins or evolving *auctoritas*. Conversely, Augustus is used where the symbolic weight of the name is the point of emphasis—especially when it reflects how the regime co-constructed by Octavian and Agrippa came to be retrospectively identified with a new imperial order, as Tacitus later suggests (*Histories* 1.1).

[2] This dramatic display was later interpreted as confirmation of a separate prophecy, also preserved in Suetonius (*Aug.* 94.1–3), which he attributes to the astrologer Publius Nigidius Figulus, who proclaimed—on the very day of Octavian's birth—that a future ruler of the world had been born. Although both the Figulus prophecy and the Theogenes horoscope appear within the same chapter, they are part of a much later, retrospective narrative composed over half a century after Augustus' death. Crucially, only the former—the Figulus prediction—could have theoretically been known to Octavian in the moment. If Octavian had truly believed in or been aware of the prophecy attributed to him by Figulus, it is difficult to explain the insecurity Suetonius ascribes to him upon hearing Agrippa's horoscope. This inconsistency suggests that the Figulus

This anecdote takes on greater significance when viewed against the backdrop of the Republic's most notorious political failure: the conflict between Gaius Julius Caesar and Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus (Pompey). Their alliance, forged in wartime and undone by ambition and mistrust, set a precedent that Augustus and Agrippa would pointedly desire to avoid. While Octavian emerged as Caesar's legal heir and ideological successor, Agrippa—though himself a loyal Caesarian—embodied many elements of the Pompeian legacy: his independent military command, his maritime dominance, and the perception of his loyalty to the Republic above personal ambition. Both men had led armies in times of internal conflict, both achieved remarkable victories in their twenties, and both rose to prominence while still outside the traditional *cursus honorum*. Whereas Pompey embraced the honours of the Republic and eventually became complicit in its unraveling, Agrippa declined triumphs, assumed lower magistracies after higher ones, and consistently subordinated personal acclaim to the cohesion of the new regime.

This deliberate inversion of precedent invites a deeper reflection upon Agrippa's political and symbolic function within the Principate. His rejection of conventional honours and embrace of irregular rewards marked not just modesty, but a strategic recalibration of how status and merit were expressed in the post-Republican order. By declining triumphs, serving as Aedile after holding the Consulship, and redefining public service through monumental urban revitalization, Agrippa exposed the inadequacy of traditional Republican values in legitimating authority. His actions amounted to a critique of aristocratic entitlement and an affirmation of functional, rather than symbolic, power. Augustus' granting him *imperium maius* and allowing his marriage to Julia were not simply acts of dynastic generosity, but a public recognition of Agrippa's authoritative indispensability. As James Tan has observed, their alliance may be seen as a conscious reimagining

prophecy was likely a later invention, anachronistically assigned to Octavian's origin story to lend further legitimacy to the Julio-Claudian dynasty.

of the Caesarian-Pompeian partnership: a renewed coalition between a new Caesar and a new Pompey, in which harmony replaced rivalry and shared rule stabilized what personal ambition had once destroyed.[3]

Despite playing an indispensable role in Octavian's reinvention as Augustus, as well as Rome's transformation from Republic to Empire, Marcus Agrippa remains a peripheral figure in both ancient and modern historiography. Although Agrippa wrote an autobiography, it has not survived, and there is no record of an Agrippan biography composed by another in antiquity. In contrast to Augustus—whose image was carefully cultivated through autobiographic and dynastic propaganda—Agrippa's legacy has been moulded entirely through the writings of others. In the absence of an independent biographical tradition, the historical Agrippa has been mediated through literary and ideological filters that canonized Augustus' imperial persona, enabling subsequent historiography to obscure the extent of Agrippa's political and symbolic authority. Modern scholarship, for its part, has frequently perpetuated this marginalization by prioritizing emperor-centric narratives shaped by the enduring influence of the 'great man' theory of history.[4] As a result, Agrippa's critical contributions to military victories, institutional innovations, and the consolidation of Augustan authority have been frequently diminished or framed in inferior terms.

That Suetonius, writing more than a century after Augustus' death, preserved the Theogenes anecdote at all indicates a residual awareness of their early power-sharing enduring in imperial historical memory. The episode, though brief, subtly preserves a once-acknowledged co-regency that later historiography systematically effaced. Much like the anecdote itself, this study

[3] Tan (2019: 197).

[4] The 'great man' theory, popularized in the nineteenth century by Thomas Carlyle's *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic in History* (1840), asserts that history is largely shaped by the actions of extraordinary individuals. Although long critiqued by social historians and political theorists, its influence persists in Roman historical scholarship, where complex systems of governance and collaboration are often distilled into the achievements of singular, heroic figures—typically emperors, generals, or founders. In the context of Augustan Rome, this approach has contributed to the marginalization of figures like Agrippa, whose contributions were indispensable but less easily mythologized.

will show that when Roman sources—often shaped by imperial ideology—are re-examined alongside Eastern and non-Roman primary sources that have only more recently begun to receive sustained scholarly attention, a fuller and more accurate picture of Agrippa emerges: he is not a subordinate, but a principal architect of Rome's first imperial government.

Yet this critical reassessment has long been resisted, and his erasure reflects a broader historiographical problem. Prior to the seventeenth century, ancient Roman history was treated as a closed corpus of authoritative texts, insulated from reinterpretation or critical revision: for example, Livy, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio (henceforth Dio). The long-standing reverence for these writers, compounded by the institutional dominance of the methodologies of antiquarianism—which treated ancient texts as fixed repositories of fact rather than as historically contingent narratives shaped by the selective priorities and contemporary concerns of their authors—delayed critical engagement with figures like Agrippa. The result is a persistently reductive portrayal of Augustan authority as monolithic and autonomous, one that obfuscates the collaborative foundations of early imperial rule.[5]

As a result, the dominant historiographical tradition has long portrayed Augustus as the sole architect of the Roman Principate—a narrative established by countless sources steeped in dynastic propaganda. Although Agrippa consistently stood at the forefront of Augustus' political and military ascent, modern scholarship rarely affords him equal consideration. Even when his influence is acknowledged, he is seldom treated as a co-ruler or equal partner in the Principate's formation. This thesis challenges that legacy by applying a twofold methodology: historical survey

[5] Momigliano (1966: 1–39). Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, ancient history was primarily taught through the lens of historical and linguistic commentary on ancient authors, and modern academia published Roman 'antiquities' rather than histories. This idealization of the ancient historians meant that until the seventeenth century there were no new historians of the classical world, only *antiquarians*; the ancient history sections (for Greece and Rome) of universal histories were merely chronological summaries of the most dominant primary sources. The veracity of the ancient sources was seldom questioned, and the abolishment of 'antiquarian studies' did not occur until the nineteenth century for fear of political and religious repercussions and the disruption of the established chronological narrative.

and critical analysis of primary evidence. The historical survey traces the representation of Agrippa across literary, epigraphic, numismatic, and architectural sources, identifying shifts and inconsistencies in his portrayal across time and geography. The critical analysis interrogates both ancient and modern interpretations, exposing embedded ideological biases and interpretive assumptions that have allowed the exclusion of Agrippa from the dominant narrative. This approach allows for the beginning of a reassessment of early imperial power as a collaborative structure and contend that Agrippa's role was not merely functional, but in fact deliberately structured to project a model of dual leadership—both symbolically and substantively. His involvement in public ceremonies, military command, constitutional arrangements, and monumental construction was integral to the performance and stability of Augustan authority.

## Contextual Background

Agrippa's historical trajectory begins at a decisive juncture in Roman history: the Ides of March (15 March 44 BCE), a moment after which his career became inextricably intertwined with that of Octavian. The precise details of his early life remain elusive, with neither the date nor the location of his birth definitively attested in the sources.[6] His birth is dated to between 64 and 62 BCE in either central or southern Italy, based on primary sources regarding his death (Dio, *Roman History* 54.28; Pliny, *Natural History* 7.45–46). Nevertheless, the sources consistently emphasize Agrippa's plebeian background: Tacitus refers to Agrippa as being of humble origin (*Annals* 1.3: *ignobilem loco*), while Velleius Paterculus celebrates his rise, noting that Agrippa ennobled his obscurity through countless achievements, and that his family's *novitas* was no obstacle to multiple

[6] Powell (2015: 2). See also Wiseman (1987: 25), who proposes that his familial origins belonged to the Sergia tribe, one of the original sixteen rural tribes designated by Servius Tullius, the sixth king of Rome. According to the *Capitoline Fasti*, Agrippa's family only acquired Roman citizenship in his father's generation, meaning that if the family was part of the Sergia tribe, they had to have been Marsian or Asisian in origin.

consulships, triumphs, and priesthoods (*Roman History* 2.96.1; 2.127.1).[7] His earliest appearance in extant literature is found in the fragmentary *Life of Augustus* by Nicolaus of Damascus, who describes Agrippa as εἰς τὰ μάλιστα συνήθης καὶ φίλος Καίσαρι (*having been educated alongside him* [Octavian]) where they established a lifelong friendship bound by a camaraderie deeper than any other (τινα ἔχων ὑπερβολὴν ἑταιρείας; *FGrHist* 90 *F* 127).

Given the emphasis on Agrippa's modest background, his early education alongside Octavian has generated considerable scholarly debate. Meyer Reinhold suggests Agrippa may have joined military service unusually early—around age fourteen or fifteen—where he attracted Julius Caesar's notice, leading to his placement alongside Octavian.[8] Frederick Wright expands this theory, proposing Agrippa may have been Caesar's illegitimate son. He cites Caesar's unusual patronage of Agrippa, his presence in Caesar's Spanish campaigns of 45 BCE, and the Julian features of Agrippa's son Gaius. Wright also highlights Herod the Great's naming of his grandson Marcus Julius Agrippa—an homage suggesting dynastic significance independent of Augustus—as well as the people of Troy's claim of kinship with Agrippa, implying descent from mythological Iulus. Finally, he draws attention to the Nemausus coinage, which depicts Agrippa and Augustus

[7] Velleius (2.127.1–2) further contends that "great tasks require great helpers, and it is important to the state that those who are necessary to her service should be given prominence in rank, and that their usefulness should be fortified by official authority." By linking public utility to official rank, Velleius implies that Agrippa's ascent reflected not an exception to aristocratic norms, but a recalibration of them—where merit could rival lineage as a basis for elite status.

[8] Reinhold (1933: 12–13). Agrippa was the first distinguished 'Vipsanius' known to Roman history. Notably, Agrippa will drop the *gentilicium* Vipsanius and adopt the more symbolic form 'M. Agrippa,' allegedly to distance himself from plebeian connotations (Seneca the Elder, *Controversies* 2.4.12–13). This nominal modification aligned with a broader rhetorical strategy that reflected and advanced Augustan imperial ideology. Around the same time, while serving as governor of Gaul, Agrippa inaugurated the use of the praenomen *Imperator* by striking coins that bore this newly adopted title on behalf of Octavian (Sydenham: 1331; *RRC* 534.1). Though Octavian had used *imperator* as a military salutation after the Battle of Mutina, it was Agrippa who institutionalized it as a formal, permanent part of imperial nomenclature. In so doing, Agrippa both bolstered Octavian's military image—which had been damaged following his defeat by Sextus Pompey—and laid the symbolic foundation for a new regime of triumphal authority reserved to the imperial family (Beard 2007: 288). The significance of Agrippa's invention of the *praenomen imperatoris* cannot be overstated. At a time when the title *imperator* had become diluted through political overuse, Agrippa transformed it from an ephemeral military honour into a lasting component of personal identity. This redirection of triumphal prestige away from the senatorial elite and toward Octavian helped establish the Augustan monopoly on military glory (Barnes 1974: 21). As Grant (1969: IV.416) notes, Agrippa's coinage and strategy of titles not only secured Octavian's supremacy but influenced the retrospective application of the title to Julius Caesar's nomenclature on official *fasti*—further legitimizing the new order.

as equals beneath the inscription IMP: P.P.: DIVI F (*RIC* 1.158)—conventionally read as "*Imperator; Pater Patriae; Divi Filius*" (son of the deified [one]). However, the abbreviated *DIVI F* also permits a plural interpretation (*Filii*—sons of the deified [one]), thus subtly extending the claim of divine descent to include Agrippa and accommodating his early symbolic inclusion in the Julian divine lineage.[9] By placing this formulation beneath their paired portraits, the coinage conveys both a sense of parity between the two figures and a shared ideological claim to legitimacy through descent from the *Divus Iulius*, visually affirming their joint authority as commanders and "fathers of the fatherland." Even if such theories remain speculative, they highlight how little separated Octavian and Agrippa in social terms. Octavian's background, like that of Agrippa, was relatively modest, with his adoption by Caesar serving as his sole claim to distinction.[10] Their shared attendance at the same rhetorical school suggests that the perceived divide between them was likely a later construct, exaggerated by imperial sources seeking to retroactively elevate Augustus' status.[11]

Even the etymology of Agrippa's name has not escaped attempts to impose negative or dishonourable connotations. Pliny the Elder famously suggested that the name derived from an

[9] Wright (1937: 10–11). Given Julius Caesar's well-attested promiscuity and his known illegitimate child with Cleopatra, the claim that Agrippa may have been another of his offspring, though unprovable, remains plausible. See Suetonius, *Caesar* 50–53, on the known sexual promiscuity of Julius Caesar.

[10] Suetonius records that Augustus himself admitted only to equestrian origins, noting that his father was the first in the family to attain senatorial rank (*Aug.* 2.3). This version, though modest, still dignifies the family's status—yet contemporaries like Mark Antony circulated far more damaging claims, mocking Augustus' great-grandfather as a freedman and rope-maker from Thurii and his grandfather as a moneychanger (*Aug.* 2.3). Antony further undermined Augustus' authority by referring to him derisively as Thurinus, a name evoking his provincial childhood and social vulnerability (*Aug.* 7.1). These insults highlight the contested nature of Augustus' early identity (as well as the apparent unease with the limits of his patrilineal respectability) and suggest that the later emphasis on ancestral revival, mythic continuity, and divine descent was not merely celebratory, but compensatory—an effort to obscure the ordinariness of his origins beneath a carefully constructed aura of dynastic inevitability.

[11] Tariverdieva (2024: 120). See also *ibid* (2013: 133–140), where it is convincingly argued that Octavian and Agrippa were not separated by class or status during their formative years, but rather shared an educational environment and cultivated an intimate friendship as equals. While the article suggests both were integrated into elite networks early on, its broader implication—that neither youth held a significantly superior social position—supports the view that their bond was grounded in parity from the outset.

unnatural, feet-first birth (7.45), an interpretation later repeated by Servius (*ad Aeneid* 8.682) and consistent with the broader tradition of etymological speculation seen in Aulus Gellius (*Attic Nights* 16.16).[12] Yet, this interpretation originates long after Agrippa's lifetime and lacks philological rigour. Rather, the name 'Agrippa' carried long-standing associations with prestige and nobility. It appears in Rome's earliest legendary history, shared by the descendant of Aeneas and ancestor of Romulus and Remus, one of the kings of Alba Longa, Agrippa Silvius; and was used as a praenomen by two of the Republic's most illustrious patrician families, the Furii Agrippae, and the Menenii Agrippae (Livy, *History of Rome* 1.3.9; Ovid, *Fasti* 4.49–50).[13] On linguistic grounds, it is more plausible that 'Agrippa' derives from a Greek compound of ἀγρός and ἵππος—meaning 'wild horseman' or 'ferocious cavalryman.'[14] The form Ἄγῤ-ἵππος suggests that the name entered Roman Italy via the Hellenic colonies of Magna Graecia or Sicily, where Italic speakers adapted it into an *-a* stem and employed it freely as either a praenomen or cognomen.[15] Thus, the name 'Agrippa' may be interpreted as a rhetorical counterpoint to elite efforts to diminish his status—implicitly affirming, rather than undermining, his status within Rome's mythological-historical and aristocratic traditions.

[12] Cairns (1995: 212). Given that there are no primary sources that attest to this definition prior to Pliny, his attribution appears to be a folk etymology thought to be a corruption of the phrase "*aegre partus*" (difficult birth): "*In pedes procidere nascentem contra naturam est, quo argumento eos appellavere Agrippas ut aegri partus, qualiter et M. Agrippam ferunt genitum, unico prope felicitatis exemplo in omnibus ad hunc modum genitis*" (7.45). Cf. Gellius 16.16; Servius *Ad Aeneid* 8.682. Synchronically, 'feet-first' does not correspond because 'Agrippa' cannot be easily broken down into the parallel recognizable Latin terms (i.e., *pēs*, *pedēs*; *partus*, *partī*).

[13] See also Reinhold (1933: 7, note 38). Speculation has been made that the name Agrippa was dishonestly added to the list of mythical kings of Alba Longa by Augustan authors to glorify Marcus Agrippa. However, this does not account for the many noble patrician families who used the name prior to the Augustan era: Agrippa Menenius, Consul in 503 BCE (Livy, *Hist.* 2.16.7, 2.32.6); Agrippa Menenius Lanatus, Consul in 439 BCE (Livy, *Hist.* 4.11); and Agrippa Furius, Consul in 446 BCE (Livy, *Hist.* 5.32.1; Diodorus Siculus, *Historical Library* 12.30). The name 'Agrippa' also appears on the Fasti Capitolini as *Consulares* after Marcus Agrippa in the following years: 22 CE (D. Haterius Agrippa); 25 CE (M. Asinius Agrippa); 58 CE (C. Fonteius Agrippa); and 130 CE (Cassius Agrippa).

[14] Chase (1897: 147).

[15] Chase (1897: 147) notes that the modification to an *-a* stem was a parallel of some of their own names, e.g., Oscan: Maras, Tanas; Latin: Catilina, Seneca.

This Hellenizing interpretation aligns with Horace's *Odes* (1.6), where the poet describes Agrippa as *ferox navibus aut equis,* and challenges the longstanding tendency to treat Horace's *recusatio* as literal—an approach that has often contributed to a negative portrayal of Agrippa by taking the poet's refusal to praise him at face value.[16] Reconsidered in context, the passage is better understood as laudatory rather than dismissive.[17] This reading contests entrenched portrayals of Agrippa in Roman historiography and instead situates him within a broader tradition of Republican and mytho-historical ancestry—where he stands as an exemplar of *virtus* and martial excellence. Such a characterization frequently clashes with representations found in Roman primary sources—a dissonance that, as this thesis will demonstrate, recurs throughout the broader evidentiary record.

While interpretations of Agrippa's genealogical and etymological origins continue to vary, the more historically salient point is that he and Octavian were raised and educated as equal peers. Octavian was rapidly elevated to the pinnacle of Roman society through his adoption by Caesar immediately following the Ides. Agrippa, by contrast, ascended on merit and achieved the rare distinction of *novus homo* on his own. As Dio records, Agrippa's death marked the loss of a figure distinguished by both integrity and a sustained dedication to civic responsibility. He is remembered as having used his close relationship with Augustus to advance not only the emperor's position but also the welfare of the *res publica*: "Such was the end of Agrippa, who had in every way clearly shown himself the noblest of the men of his day and had used the friendship of Augustus with a view to the greatest advantage both of the emperor himself and of the commonwealth" (54.29.1–

[16] This sentiment is partially reiterated by Nisbet and Hubbard (1970: 81–83): "Horace politely declines to write about Agrippa […] A professed inability to handle pompous themes" and "He may have admired Agrippa as a tremendous public figure, but relations between the grim general and the aesthetic circle of Maecenas can hardly have been close."

[17] Cairns (1995: 213–215). The phrase "*ferox navibus aut equis*" (ferocious with ships or horses) establishes Agrippa's military prowess (*miles*) and would thus represent the Latin parallels of the two components of the Greek name 'Agrippa', as *ferox* is also glossed alongside ἄγριος as a synonym. The etymological allusion within the *Odes* (1.6.13, 15, 16) refutes the antagonistic insinuations against Agrippa purported throughout history, when Diomedes—a hero in Greek mythology—emerges as a central figure. After the Trojan war, one cannot help being reminded of the city he founded in his exile named Argyrip[p]a—later Arpi (Virgil, *Aeneid* 11.246–247).

2).[18] The evidence examined throughout this study will show that even after Octavian became Augustus, the fundamental sense of partnership between the two endured—and that only together, were they able to consolidate control over the ancient world.

Even these preliminary examples—the Theogenes anecdote and the reassessment of Agrippa's background and nomenclature—expose the extent to which his role has been systematically diminished. That such explicit and unequivocal indicators of his proximity to power have been treated as incidental, rather than integral, reveals a consistent pattern of marginalization in both ancient and modern narratives. Despite his repeated consulships, tribunician powers, architectural initiatives, and decisive military leadership, Agrippa continues to be framed as an auxiliary individual in the larger narrative of the Augustan age.

**Outline of the Thesis**

This thesis challenges that portrayal directly, contending that Agrippa was neither a subordinate executor of Augustus' vision nor a passive instrument of imperial will, but a co-architect and co-ruler of the Principate whose influence was central to its consolidation. Agrippa's strategic presence at every major stage of Augustus' ascent, combined with his independent constitutional authority and sustained public prominence, warrants a thorough re-evaluation. To address this interpretive gap, this study investigates how Agrippa's authority operated in parallel with Augustus' and was equally instrumental in reshaping the Republic into an Empire; how his

[18] "Ἀγρίππας μὲν οὖν οὕτω μετήλλαξε, τά τε ἄλλα ἄριστος τῶν καθ᾽ ἑαυτὸν ἀνθρώπων διαφανῶς γενόμενος, καὶ τῇ τοῦ Αὐγούστου φιλίᾳ πρός τε τὸ αὐτῷ ἐκείνῳ καὶ πρὸς τὸ τῷ κοινῷ συμφορώτατον χρησάμενος." This passage presents Agrippa not as a subsidiary figure, but as a central and publicly acknowledged partner in power. The phrase "τῶν καθ᾽ ἑαυτὸν ἀνθρώπων διαφανῶς γενόμενος ~ having clearly become the noblest of the men in his own right," indicates that Agrippa's excellence was prominently evident—a recognition of intrinsic merit rather than derivative status. The participle χρησάμενος (having made use of) conveys intentionality: Agrippa actively leveraged his relationship with Augustus in ways that advanced both imperial aims and the common good (τῷ κοινῷ). Rather than portraying him as a passive recipient of imperial favour, Dio showcases Agrippa as a figure of independent judgement and civic commitment—an architect of the early Principate alongside Augustus, whose agency and effectiveness were visible to his contemporaries.

position was codified—through titles, iconography, and constitutional arrangements—as an independent locus of power; and how their shared authority structured the ideological and administrative structure of the Augustan Principate. This enquiry adopts a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on literary texts, inscriptions, coinage, and political theory, with particular emphasis on symbolic language, performative governance, and the politics of memory. In so doing, this study demonstrates that Agrippa was not a secondary supportive figure, but an indispensable co-ruler in the formation of Rome's first imperial administration.

This thesis is structured in four chapters. **Chapter One** examines Agrippa's decisive role in the Sicilian and Actian campaigns, highlighting his transformation of Roman naval warfare and centrality to Octavian's victory over Sextus Pompey. In Sicily, Agrippa not only constructed a new fleet and introduced advanced tactics, but also appropriated Pompeian maritime symbolism—repurposing titles, emblems, and honours once associated with Pompey the Great to reinforce Caesarian legitimacy and undermine Sextus' claim to Republican inheritance. At Actium, his command secured Octavian's supremacy while simultaneously affirming Agrippa's equal stake in the regime's foundation. The chapter demonstrates that Agrippa's strategic autonomy, irregular rewards, and rejection of traditional honours constituted a redefinition of Roman political prestige. His career trajectory subverted aristocratic norms and challenged Republican assumptions about office and status. The chapter also considers the debate between Agrippa and Maecenas in Dio, revealing Agrippa as a serious constitutional thinker engaged in shaping imperial power. It concludes by framing the alliance between Augustus and Agrippa as a deliberate inversion of the failed Caesarian–Pompeian model: a partnership grounded in mutual trust and *concordia,* rather than rivalry and competition.

**Chapter Two** repositions Agrippa as a civic architect whose interventions in urban planning and water infrastructure extended his authority beyond military command into the ideological and administrative fabric of Augustan Rome. Through close analysis of his contributions to the city, the chapter shows how Agrippa's projects combined technical innovation with ideological intent, reinforcing Augustan values while visibly projecting his own *auctoritas*. His unprecedented decision to undertake the Aedileship after serving as Consul, his management of Rome's water system, and his posthumous commemoration in the Campus Agrippae together exemplify a model of co-regency grounded in visibility, modesty, and constitutional balance. These public benefactions were carefully designed to complement Augustus while preserving Agrippa's independent authority—advancing a Principate built on collaboration rather than sole domination.

**Chapter Three** investigates Agrippa's authority in the Roman East, focusing on his formal status as co-regent from 23 to 12 BCE. Building on the pivotal co-consulships of 28 and 27 BCE, during which he co-authored the First Constitutional Settlement, the chapter demonstrates how Agrippa shaped the legal and ideological foundations of the Principate. It challenges the traditional view of his 'exile' in 23 BCE, reframing it as a strategic deployment of imperial authority that culminated in the recovery of the Parthian standards and the consolidation of Roman hegemony abroad. His elevation and integration into the *domus Caesaris* through marriage to Julia, and the birth of their children—particularly Gaius and Lucius, intended heirs to the Principate, and Agrippina the Elder, mother of Caligula and great-grandmother of Nero—ensured that the biological continuity of the Julio-Claudian dynasty derived as much from Agrippa's lineage as from Augustus'.[19] The renewal of his tribunician power and his role in the *Ludi Saeculares* further

[19] This thesis uses *domus Caesaris* (House of Caesar) to refer to the Caesarian household before Actium and *domus Augusta* (House of Augustus) thereafter, reflecting the shift in dynastic identity following Octavian's assumption of the name

emphasize his parity with Augustus within a deliberately structured co-regency. Agrippa's representation in coinage and epigraphy across the Eastern provinces confirms that his image and authority were integral to imperial rule, not derivative of it. The retrospective reduction of this period to a narrative of Augustan supremacy reflects not the actual dynamics of early imperial governance, but rather the gradual historiographical erasure of Agrippa's distinct authority and role.

Finally, **Chapter Four** examines the political implications of Agrippa's death and funeral in 12 BCE, arguing that the ceremonial elements introduced during his obsequies provided a prototype for the imperial funerary model later seen in Augustus' own rites. By foregrounding Agrippa's civic contributions, co-regency, and integration into Rome's collective memory, the chapter shows how Augustus used the occasion—particularly the *laudatio funebris*—to reaffirm Agrippa's position as a legitimate and foundational partner in power. Drawing on the surviving papyrus fragment of the *laudatio* from Egypt, the analysis demonstrates how Augustus legally and rhetorically positioned Agrippa's authority as equivalent in both scope and legitimacy to his own.

Augustus in 27 BCE. The distinction mirrors contemporary ideological developments in how the regime framed its authority and succession.

# CHAPTER ONE

## CIVIL WAR AND CONSTITUTIONAL SETTLEMENTS

The widely acknowledged attributes of Agrippa and his career derive from the considerable respect he commands as a distinguished military commander and strategist. In part, this esteem results from favourable comparisons with Caesar—for example, Agrippa's recognition as the first Roman general since Caesar to carry Roman standards across the Rhine.[20] The apparent parallels between Agrippa's career and that of Caesar help to explain the deliberate de-emphasis of Agrippa's achievements, likely encouraged by Augustus himself. This pattern mirrors Augustus' tendency to downplay—or even critique—Caesar's accomplishments, as part of a broader effort by Augustus and his successors to position him as the sole legitimate heir to Caesar's legacy for reasons of dynastic continuity.[21] Such motives may also explain both Augustus' eagerness to claim credit for Agrippa's accomplishments and the later fabrication of Agrippa's 'subservient right-hand' persona—mirroring how Caesar's legacy was ultimately collapsed into his deification, a move designed to reinforce Augustus' own divine authority.[22]

### I. Agrippa and the Roman Civil Wars

This section examines the volatile political landscape that followed Caesar's assassination, with particular emphasis on the formative campaigns in which Agrippa played a critical role, culminating in the victory at Actium. It highlights both his strategic contributions to Roman military success and his adept handling of the political consequences that accompany any transition

[20] Reinhold (1933: 26).
[21] Astutely summarized by Sir Ronald Syme (1979: 1.213). See also Ramage (1985) for analysis of how Augustus strategically distanced himself from aspects of Caesar's legacy to consolidate his own position as heir and founder.
[22] Syme (1979: 1.214) contends that it was politically expedient for Augustus to distance himself from Julius Caesar, framing himself not as the destroyer of the Republic, but as its restorer—and accomplishing this repositioning with apparent ease. See also White (1988: 354–56).

of power. Between 44 and 31 BCE, Agrippa participated in nearly every major conflict of the civil wars: he urged Octavian to mobilize Caesarian support in the wake of the Ides of March—even before his formal adoption;[23] fought in the Liberators' war against Brutus and Cassius;[24] assisted in raising forces and intercepting Antony's legions during the Mutina campaign;[25] and led the siege that forced the surrender of Perusia in 40 BCE.[26] However, his leadership in the Sicilian and Actian campaigns showcase his military expertise and affirm his status as Octavian's closest partner in the reconstitution of Roman authority.

### i. Sicily

Following the surrender at Perusia and the consolidation of Octavian's position in Italy, Agrippa returned to Rome (c. March 40 BCE) and was appointed to the office of Praetor Urbanus at the age of twenty-three—well below the minimum legal age required for Praetorship.[27] With Octavian soon departing for Transalpine Gaul, Agrippa was entrusted with the defence of Italy against the

[23] Caesar's assassination triggered widespread instability. While still in Apollonia, Agrippa received news of the murder and advised Octavian—then unaware of his adoption—to rally support from Caesarian veterans and Macedonian legions (Nicolaus of Damascus *FGrHist* 90 F 130.16–19; Suetonius, *Aug.* 8.2–3). Though Octavian initially rejected the idea, Agrippa's strategic instincts proved prescient. Upon returning to Rome, Octavian was met with popular support but resisted engaging Antony until provoked. Agrippa likely adapted his counsel, accordingly, helping position Octavian as a reluctant actor responding to political aggression (Nicolaus of Damascus *FGrHist* 90 F 128.14; Velleius Paterculus 2.59.5).

[24] In 44 BCE, Agrippa was tasked with prosecuting Cassius in absentia and began rising politically in Rome (Plutarch, *Brutus* 27.4). He later fought at Philippi alongside Octavian and Antony, enduring harsh campaign conditions noted by Pliny (7.147–148). The victory over Brutus and Cassius cemented Octavian's claim as Caesar's heir. Antony's sidelining of Octavian after the battle led to Octavian placing military command in Agrippa's hands (Eck, 2007: 19), a crucial move in light of Fulvia and Lucius Antonius' imminent revolt.

[25] Agrippa helped recruit Caesarian veterans in Campania and may have intercepted Antony's legions at Brundisium (Cicero, *Ad Atticus* 16.8; Appian 3.40–43). His presence at Mutina is attested in the *Scholia Bernensia* by Hermann Usener (1869: 14) on Lucan (*Pharsalia* 1.41), which refers to Augustus liberating the city "through Agrippa and Decimus Brutus." Although not a primary source, it reflects a tradition crediting Agrippa with a key role. Following Mutina, Octavian, Antony, and Lepidus formed the Second Triumvirate under extraordinary consular powers (Appian 4.2–3, 4.8; Dio 47.2).

[26] During the Perusine War (41–40 BCE), Agrippa commanded forces alongside Octavian against Lucius Antonius and Fulvia, who opposed Octavian's veteran settlements. After initial engagements at Nursia and Sentinum, Agrippa pursued Lucius toward Rome and subsequently forced a retreat to Perusia (Appian 5.30–32; Dio 48.13–14). Despite Dio's silence on Agrippa, Appian implies his established status by introducing him without explanation. Agrippa conducted operations at Sutrium and helped impose a siege on Perusia, which surrendered in early 40 BCE (Appian 5.30–45; Velleius Paterculus 2.74). He later persuaded Plancus' abandoned legions to defect at Cameria (Appian 5.50).

[27] Reinhold (1933: 21, note 2). This was not Agrippa's first political post; he is thought to have entered the equestrian order in 44 BCE, thereby reversing the traditional progression through the *cursus honorum*—an extraordinary trajectory that would define the course of his public career.

imminent threat posed by Sextus Pompey. During Octavian's absence, Sextus exploited Agrippa's preoccupation with the Ludi Apollinares to launch raids along the Italian coast, which Agrippa ultimately repelled.[28] Following Antony's unsuccessful attempt to form an alliance with Sextus and the death of Fulvia, Agrippa succeeded in preventing further incursions and stabilized the region. His role in mediating the subsequent reconciliation between Octavian and Antony further highlights his emerging position as a central architect of the regime's political and military cohesion.[29]

By 39 BCE, Agrippa was appointed governor of the province of Gaul; although the sources remain silent on his activities there initially, he secured a notable military victory over the Aquitani and the Ubii by 38 BCE.[30] The following year, Octavian recalled him to Rome to assume the Consulship. To commemorate both events, coins were struck in Gaul bearing the portraits of Octavian and the deified Caesar on one side, and the inscription M. AGRIPPA COS. DESIG. on the other (*RRC* 534.2 = *RSC* 129 = *Sydenham* 1330). The iconography of these coins reinforces the perception that all three figures—Octavian, Caesar, and Agrippa—were inextricably linked, whether through bloodline or demonstrated merit.[31]

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[28] Reinhold (1933: 22).

[29] Reinhold (1933: 23). The so-called 'Peace of Misenum,' concluded between Octavian, Antony, and Sextus Pompey in the spring of 39 BCE, also highlights Agrippa's significance in high-level negotiations. His participation in these discussions reveals his value to Octavian not only as a military strategist but also as a trusted diplomatic agent capable of managing critical reconciliations.

[30] Reinhold (1933: 25); Sydenham (1952: xxxix). See Verdin and Chataigneau (2013: 69–104), who present archaeological evidence from L'Ermitage (near Agen) that confirms the historicity and scale of Agrippa's 38 BCE campaign in Aquitaine. Among the finds are six inscribed lead sling bullets—currently without parallel in the Roman world—bearing the name *M. Agrippa imperator*. These provide not only the first material corroboration of Appian's brief reference to the campaign (5.92), but also definitive evidence that Agrippa was regarded as *imperator* by his troops on the battlefield, a title whose constitutional weight marked sovereign military command and independent prestige.

[31] These coin issues represent the earliest extant physical evidence for the use of the *praenomen imperatoris* (*RRC* 534.1, 534.3= *Sydenham* 1330, struck by Agrippa during his governorship in Gaul in 38 BCE. Notably, Agrippa abandoned the conventional *tria nomina*, omitting the *gentilicium* Vipsanius and styling himself simply as M. Agrippa—a formulation that emphasized his personal alignment with Octavian over any inherited lineage. In this context, the coins served not only as commemorative artifacts but also as ideological instruments: by inscribing *Imperator Caesar*, Agrippa formally inaugurated a naming convention that recast Octavian's identity around his military authority and filial loyalty to Julius Caesar. This articulation of *pietas* served to position Octavian as both avenger and legitimate successor, while simultaneously asserting a permanent association with *imperium maius*. Grant argues that the adoption of *Imperator* as a praenomen functioned as a constitutional safeguard, insulating Octavian from the constraints of time-bound magistracies (Grant 1969: IV.416 note 11;

Following the Pact of Misenum in 39 BCE, Octavian urgently required a secure naval base to counter Sextus Pompey, whose persistent attacks along Italy's coastlines had severely disrupted Rome's grain supply routes. With his fellow *triumvirs* refusing to assist, Octavian suffered a decisive defeat against Sextus. In desperate need of a dependable fleet—and despite Agrippa's limited experience in naval warfare—Octavian recalled him from Gaul to organize a new and more resilient maritime force.[32] Agrippa's objective extended beyond merely replacing lost ships and crews; he sought to construct a fleet capable of withstanding harsh conditions and to train rowers exclusively for naval combat. By late 38 BCE, shipyards had been established along the Italian coast, possibly reaching as far as Fréjus, and Octavian had gathered approximately twenty thousand enslaved people as oarsmen, many of whom were manumitted by loyal Julian supporters (Appian, *Civil Wars* 5.92–98; Suetonius, *Aug.* 16; Velleius Paterculus 2.59.5; Dio 48.49). Italy's coastline, however, posed considerable logistical challenges for port construction, owing to the scarcity of deep-water harbours and the persistent problem of silting. Agrippa required a secure anchorage near enough to Sicily to reduce the risks of navigating open waters, while also allowing for efficient naval training and logistical preparation.

Agrippa identified Lacus Avernus as an ideal site for a naval base along Italy's southern coast near Puteoli, Cumae, and Baiae—a region already steeped in cultural resonance due to its mythological associations with the underworld and its connections to Julius Caesar, who had once owned a villa on the Bay of Baiae (Seneca the Younger, *Epistles* 51.11). Avernus, a deep lake encircled by steep hills, offered natural protection due to its inland position, affording a strategic advantage for concealing the fleet until it was fully operational. Near Avernus lay the larger Lacus

cf. Sprey 1935). Mommsen (1877: 744, note 2) similarly viewed the nomenclature as a calculated departure from precedent, attributing its conception to Agrippa's influence: "*Wahrscheinlich erfolgte diese Umnennung eben unter dem Einfluss des Agrippa*." See also Tariverdieva (2016: 642–661).

[32] Reinhold (1933: 29).

Lucrinus, a shallow lagoon separated from the sea by the Via Herculanea, an ancient causeway of earth and loose stone connecting Baiae, Puteoli, and Misenum. Agrippa reinforced this road with concrete, transforming it into a durable stone barrier capable of withstanding storms. Strabo describes these lakes as extensions of the Tyrrhenian Sea (*Geography* 5.4.1–6).

Agrippa dredged Lacus Lucrinus to accommodate warships, but due to extreme silting, the lagoon was rendered unsuitable for heavy vessels, remaining viable only for the training of oarsmen (Florus, *Epitome* 2.18). He subsequently excavated a channel linking Lucrinus to Avernus, along with another channel that provided two separate sea entrances—located near Baiae and Puteoli, respectively (Strabo 5.4.5). Redirecting the bulk of construction efforts to Lake Avernus, Agrippa built a ramp for hauling ships and installed sluice gates to regulate its freshwater outflow, thereby generating a current to prevent canal silting.[33] In honour of his friend—or father—he dedicated Rome's first formal war harbour for the imperial fleet (*Classis Misenensis*) to Julius Caesar, naming it the *Portus Iulius* (Suetonius, *Aug.* 16).

Further recognizing that the existing overland routes connecting Misenum and Puteoli to key naval locations were inadequate—owing to both their exposure to sea attacks and the region's challenging geography—Agrippa initiated an ambitious infrastructure programme centred at Cumae. The tunnel known as the Grotta di Cocceio was excavated from Avernus to Cumae, continuing beneath the acropolis toward the coast to provide access to an additional harbour under construction; these tunnels circumvented hazardous maritime routes around Ischia and Procida, thereby ensuring the secure and clandestine movement of goods (Strabo 5.4.5; Seneca the Younger, *Epistles* 57.1–2).[34] In transforming what was initially an overgrown ditch into a functional port, Agrippa implemented a sophisticated de-silting system. A tunnel excavated

[33] Paget (1968a: 13).
[34] Paget (1968b: 166).

beneath the hill at Torregaveta, at the southern end of Lake Fusaro, allowed seawater to flow into the basin, flushing it clean and helping to prevent future silting. He then linked the lake to the new harbour via a canal regulated by sluice gates and constructed a long seawall to close off the original entrance, thereby creating a new, controlled channel. The harbour itself consisted of a central inner basin, enclosed by protective seawalls and flanked by docks, alongside an open beach that served as a construction yard for new vessels. A *Pharos* (a monumental lighthouse modelled on an Alexandrian prototype) marked the maritime entrance, positioned atop a natural rock outcrop along the northern shore.[35] These feats of engineering, achieved within a highly complex topography, were so impressive that both Virgil and Pliny celebrated the harbour as one of Italy's marvels (Virgil, *Aeneid* 3.356, 5.779, 6.236; Pliny 36.24).

Agrippa's ingenuity extended beyond harbour construction to encompass innovations in naval warfare. In 37 BCE, operating from his newly established harbours, Agrippa initiated the construction of a new warship, reinforced with thick timber designed to withstand direct ramming by enemy vessels. Simultaneously, he oversaw intensive naval training, incorporating his technological advancements into the operational fabric of the fleet. However, the enhanced durability of these ships came at the cost of speed and manoeuvrability. To mitigate this drawback, Agrippa invented a grapnel device known as the *harpax*, intended to facilitate boarding manoeuvres. The *harpax* consisted of a wooden beam approximately five cubits in length (c. 7.25 feet), bound in iron and fitted with rings at each end: one connected to an iron claw, the other to a series of ropes. When launched by catapult, the claw would fasten onto an enemy vessel; the ropes, drawn in by a winch, would then pull the opposing ship closer (Appian 5.118). The device proved

[35] Paget (1968b: 166). The engineering sophistication of the *Portus Iulius* project is evident in its meticulous integration with the local geography, as confirmed by both aerial and terrestrial remains which preserve the layout of this advanced Roman naval base. Agrippa's construction echoed the strategic design of other contemporary lagoon ports, including *Forum Iulii* and Ravenna, thereby establishing Portus Iulius as a foundational model in Roman maritime military infrastructure.

highly effective. Its iron reinforcement made it difficult to sever, and the length of the ropes rendered them unreachable to defenders. As the weapon was unique to Agrippa's fleet, enemy forces were unprepared to counter it (Appian 5.119). Once ships were secured in close proximity, Agrippa's forces could deploy an improved, lighter version of the *corvus*—a movable boarding bridge suspended from a pole—lowered by rope and fixed to the enemy deck using a metal spike.

Another key apparatus was the *turris* (tower), which served as a raised platform for archers or a mount for catapults, allowing projectiles to be launched from an elevated position and enabling the selective targeting of enemy personnel or fortified stations. However, under adverse weather conditions, the weight and height of such towers could compromise the stability of the vessel. To circumvent this issue, Agrippa devised a collapsible version that could be rapidly disassembled and reassembled, thereby preventing obstruction during transport and allowing for swift deployment—including surprise engagements (Servius, *Ad. Aen*. 8.693). By incorporating such innovative mechanisms, Agrippa aimed to recalibrate naval engagements toward the dynamics of land warfare, thereby leveraging Rome's proven military strengths and securing an edge over adversaries lacking comparable discipline or equipment.[36]

Agrippa's strategy proved highly effective: construction of the fleet remained concealed from Sextus Pompey, and by the summer of 36 BCE, the Roman navy—now outfitted with advanced technology and manned by rigorously trained crews—was ready to commence its final campaign against piracy. Agrippa had revolutionized the nature of Roman naval warfare in less than a year. So substantial was this transformation that, when Antony eventually arrived at

[36] Powell (2015: 101). At the outset of the engagement with Sextus Pompey's fleet, both sides reportedly fielded approximately three hundred vessels. Agrippa's force, however, was composed of heavier warships outfitted with the newly developed *harpax*, a mechanical device that proved especially effective in neutralizing the manoeuvrability of Sextus' lighter ships. The ensuing battle was prolonged and fiercely contested. Agrippa sustained the loss of three ships, while twenty-eight of Sextus' were destroyed, seventeen retreated, and the remainder were either burned or captured (Appian 5.116–122; Velleius Paterculus 2.79).

Tarentum in 37 BCE with reinforcements, Octavian declined to meet him. Confident in the fleet personally assembled and trained by Agrippa, he no longer required Antony's support.[37] Plutarch, however, recounts that Octavia—Antony's new wife, married under the terms of the triumvirate—intervened and arranged a meeting after Antony threatened to turn against her brother, Octavian, once more (Plutarch, *Antony* 35). A reconciliation followed, and the triumvirate was renewed for a further five years. Under the revised terms, the Treaty of Misenum was annulled and Sextus was stripped of both his priesthood and future consulship. The new agreement enabled Antony to pursue his Parthian campaign and Octavian to wage war against Sextus, with both leaders maintaining the appearance of collegiality (Dio 48.36–37).

In the summer of 36 BCE, Agrippa and Octavian advanced toward Sicily to bring an end to Sextus' malfeasance.[38] However, an unexpected storm undermined Octavian's confidence in the expedition; he withdrew to the mainland, leaving Agrippa solely in command of the campaign (Dio 49.1.3–6). Drawing on his well-trained marines and heavily reinforced ships, Agrippa secured decisive victories at Mylae and Naulochus, effectively dismantling Sextus' naval supremacy and reducing his fleet to only seventeen surviving vessels.[39] In recognition of these achievements, Octavian conferred multiple honours upon Agrippa: he received confiscated estates in Sicily and was permitted to enter Rome in triumph, wearing the *corona navalis*—a golden naval crown adorned with ship beaks—an honour given to nobody before or since (Dio 49.14.3).[40] A rare

[37] Ferrero (1908: 294).

[38] This so-called 'malfeasance' was, in reality, a matter of perspective: many staunch Republican senators who had denounced Julius Caesar as a tyrant aligned themselves with Sextus Pompey following the Ides of March. From one vantage point, Pompey's naval blockade—intended to sever the grain supply to Rome—was an act of aggression; from another, it constituted a principled stand against Octavian, akin to the justification offered for Caesar's assassination. As Kathryn Welch (2012: 276) observes, nearly every ancient and modern account of the Battle of Naulochus stresses the pivotal role played by Agrippa's deployment of the *harpax*.

[39] Reinhold (1933: 35, 41). See also Yavetz (1969: 89), who notes that following the Battle of Naulochus, Octavian declined several honours offered to him, cancelled state debts owed by citizens from the pre-war period, and abolished a significant portion of taxation (Dio 49.15.3).

[40] Both Virgil and Ovid reference the *corona navalis* in connection with Agrippa's honours. In *Aeneid* 8.682, Virgil describes a figure whose temples gleam with a rostrated naval crown (*cui, belli insigne superbum, tempora navali* […] *fulgent rostrata*

contemporary coin issue also attests to Agrippa's extraordinary status and honours, uniquely depicting him alone—without Octavian—with the naval title *praefectus orae maritimae et classis,* a striking reflection of his singular authority within the regime.[41] Over the next two years, Agrippa conducted successful military campaigns in Illyria, Pannonia, and Dalmatia, subjugating nearly all of the indigenous tribes in those regions (Dio 49.38.3–4). Upon his return to Rome by 34, he voluntarily assumed the Aedileship in 33 BCE, acting as an intermediary between Octavian and the Roman people to consolidate public support as the formal term of the Triumvirate approached its conclusion.[42]

### ii. Actium (31 BCE)

The modern sources on Actium rank among the most overtly biased in favour of Octavian. By this point, Agrippa had already more than compensated for Octavian's lack of military aptitude, establishing himself as the most capable and steadfast general imaginable.[43] Nonetheless, even the titles of modern scholarly works on Actium often attribute the victory exclusively to Augustus,

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*corona*), while Ovid, *Ars Amatoria* 3.392, refers to a son-in-law "crowned with naval honour" (*navalique gener cinctus honore caput*), linking Agrippa's military achievements to his later dynastic status as Julia's husband. A decree later permitted Agrippa to wear this crown in all future triumphal processions. This honour was explicitly tied to Agrippa's decisive role—not Octavian's—in clearing the seas of piracy. See Vervaet and Dart (2011) for a comprehensive analysis of the distinctive naval honours conferred upon both Octavian and Agrippa from the Sicilian War through Actium.

[41] Mattingly (1934: 48–50). The obverse of this rare issue reads M. AGRIPPA ORAE - - - CLAS. PRAE. C., depicting Agrippa's bare head alone; the reverse bears CAESAR IIIVIR R.P.C. flanked by the triskeles and gorgoneion, emblems strongly linked to the Sicilian campaign. Mattingly restores the abbreviated legend as '*Prefect of the Sea and Fleet*' and affirms the coin's authenticity, emphasizing its deviation from standard numismatic practice in granting Agrippa independent visual prominence. Grant (1969: 46) compares this formula to the *praefectus classis et orae maritimae* found on *denarii* of Sextus Pompey (*RRC* 511.1–4; *RCV* 329; *RSC* 2–3), suggesting that Agrippa's use of the title intentionally appropriated Pompeian naval symbolism. See also Vervaet and Dart (2016; 2018; esp. 2018: 317–329, note 41) for further analysis of the unprecedented honours awarded to Agrippa for his naval victories and their implications.

[42] Suetonius (*Aug*. 42.1) records an anecdote where Augustus sought to portray himself as a ruler motivated by public welfare, rather than popularity, by invoking Agrippa's accomplishments as Aedile—particularly his construction of aqueducts—as evidence of his own personal commitment to public welfare. This rhetorical move reinforces Agrippa's position as a conduit between Augustus and the Roman populace, affirming that his works of public benefaction were instrumental in securing popular support for the Augustan regime.

[43] Everitt (2006: 205).

conveniently overlooking the fact that these outcomes were not achieved through his efforts alone—despite the availability of ample evidence attesting to Agrippa's pivotal role.

Before the decisive confrontation at Actium, Agrippa's fleet launched a series of successful operations along the western Greek coast, capturing key strongholds held by Antony, including Methone, Leucas, Patrae, and Corinth.[44] These early victories enabled Agrippa to establish a strategic naval base at Corcyra, to implement an effective blockade by securing Leucas and Cape Ducato, and to seize the ships of Antony's fleet stationed at those sites.[45] After temporarily returning to Actium, Agrippa swiftly responded to an assault on the remaining fleet, defeating another of Antony's squadrons and once again preserving Octavian's naval forces (Dio 50.14). When Octavian, to minimize further bloodshed, proposed allowing Antony and Cleopatra to breach the blockade so they could be intercepted on land, Agrippa strongly objected. He rightly anticipated that Antony's forces would not defect willingly and that his larger ships would be difficult to pursue effectively (Dio 50.31).[46]

On 2 September 31 BCE, the Battle of Actium commenced. Agrippa commanded the critical left wing, positioned opposite Antony, while Octavian held the right. Several hours passed before the enemy initiated an advance toward Agrippa—prompted only by the threat of being outflanked—at which point Octavian ordered his squadron to retract slightly in order to draw out the enemy and encircle them (Plutarch, *Antony* 65.2–5). Agrippa quickly began to expand his flank to achieve the same manoeuvre. Although the opposing forces remained evenly matched, Cleopatra abruptly withdrew from her position behind the centre of the line, escaping through a gap created as the enemy extended their formation (Plutarch, *Antony* 66.3–5). While still engaged

[44] Lange (2011: 611).
[45] Reinhold (1933: 54). See also Dio 50.11–12 for the full account of military preparations leading up to Actium.
[46] Antony had imitated Agrippa's use of heavy warships—those which had proven decisive in the defeat of Sextus Pompey—but Agrippa, adapting to new tactical needs, had since turned to lighter vessels designed for greater speed and manoeuvrability.

with Agrippa at the apex of the inverted 'V' fleet configuration, Antony observed her retreat, and—using two deserted ships as cover—hoisted his sails, abandoned the remainder of his fleet, and followed in pursuit of his Queen.[47]

Phyllis Culham highlights the transformative impact of Agrippa's innovations on Roman naval power, arguing that the foundational changes he introduced in ship design and maritime strategy prior to Actium were instrumental in securing Rome's long-term dominance at sea. Following the battle, Roman naval innovation effectively ceased—a testament to the enduring efficacy of Agrippa's designs and the lasting framework they established for Roman naval supremacy. Despite this, naval accomplishments were often devalued by Roman elites, who associated seafaring expertise with the East and regarded it as culturally inferior. This bias may help explain the relative underappreciation of Agrippa's naval honours within Roman society. Paradoxically, however, it also reinforces Agrippa's symbolic and strategic connection to the Eastern provinces and illuminates his broader role in consolidating Rome's military and political supremacy following the defeats of Sextus Pompey and Antony at sea.[48]

Before returning to Italy, Agrippa secured Corinth for Octavian, as it was the only Greek city to deny him entry (Dio 50.13.5). With no funds to distribute to the troops, Octavian entrusted Agrippa with supreme authority and his official seal—demonstrating both his confidence in Agrippa's capacity to govern independently in his absence and his dependence on the troops' direct loyalty to Agrippa as the means of maintaining order (Dio 51.3.5–6). This delegation affirms that Octavian regarded Agrippa as a co-administrator in state affairs—one whose authority rested not only on office, but on the singular loyalty he commanded from the troops, which Octavian could not assume solely for himself. Nevertheless, the ongoing lack of compensation, combined with the

[47] Tarn (1938: 166).
[48] Culham (2017: 283–293).

fact that Antony remained at liberty and had not yet been formally defeated, contributed to mounting tension in Rome. In response, Agrippa requested Octavian's return to Italy to appease the veterans and address their expectations for land and payment (Dio 51.4.2–8). Although Agrippa had by this time achieved considerable advancement in social and political rank, many members of the senatorial elite remained resistant, continuing to frame him in terms of his humble origins. Within this context, the veterans' appeals are better understood not as a critique of Agrippa's leadership, but as a reflection of their confidence in his ability to influence Octavian and expedite the fulfilment of their demands.[49] This dynamic positions Agrippa as a reliable intermediary whose personal integrity and operational authority held more immediate political currency than traditional aristocratic pedigree.

This political interlude crystallizes the foundational logic of the early Principate: a dual leadership in which Octavian and Agrippa functioned as interdependent agents of imperial power. Octavian, as *Divi Filius*, embodied the sacral and ideological continuity of Caesar's legacy, while Agrippa, as Rome's foremost military commander and Octavian's closest collaborator, enacted and perpetuated that legacy through decisive action and executive authority—rendering Octavian's position viable in both practical and symbolic terms. Their division of responsibility was not simply strategic but constitutionally significant, reflecting a calculated effort to consolidate power within a structure that continued to evoke Republican legality. Agrippa's urgent appeals for Octavian's return to Italy emphasize the fragility of that equilibrium and demonstrate that his role extended well beyond that of a loyal lieutenant. At a moment of considerable instability, their partnership prevented Octavian's absence from resulting in a collapse of control and authority:

[49] The veterans' confidence in Agrippa proved well placed. In response to Agrippa's appeal, Octavian returned to Italy in early 30 BCE, where he was received at Brundisium by members of the Senate, the equestrian order, and a large gathering of citizens. He promptly addressed the grievances of the veterans through financial distributions and land grants, thereby alleviating the unrest that had emerged during his absence (Dio 51.4.2–8; Suetonius, *Aug.* 17.3).

Agrippa's command of the legions ensured military loyalty, while his visible leadership maintained civilian trust and confidence. The initial coherence of the Principate, thus, did not stem from a singular source of power, but from a deliberately coordinated diarchy—one in which Agrippa's presence was indispensable to both the performance and the substance of imperial governance. The duality of their roles, therefore, was not an abstract principle but a tangible necessity in managing Rome's immediate crises.

Within the following month, Octavian returned east and consolidated his sovereignty through the annexation of Egypt after the suicides of Antony and Cleopatra.[50] Actium, followed by the absorption of Egypt into Roman dominion, represented the culmination of Octavian's military and political ascendancy—an achievement he himself regarded as his most decisive success and the symbolic beginning of a new era in Roman history.[51] Sir Ronald Syme argues that Actium served as the foundational myth for a new world order, evolving into the personification of a civilizational contest between East and West, anchoring the mythology of the Principate.[52] Yet despite the ideological legacy later attached to the battle, it is indisputable that the naval victory at Actium—and the majority of the military successes leading up to it—must be credited to Agrippa. Over the span of just over a decade, Agrippa remained Octavian's most indispensable asset: as he systematically removed all opposition to their ascent and established himself as the foremost military commander of his generation, undefeated on land or at sea.[53]

[50] Reinhold (1933: 59).
[51] Gurval (1995: 3–4).
[52] Syme (1939: 297, 335).
[53] Reinhold (1933: 63).

## II. Political Honours in the Aftermath of Actium

In August of 29 BCE, Octavian returned to Italy to celebrate an extravagant triple triumph for the victories at Actium, Illyria, and the annexation of Egypt following the Alexandrian War (Dio 51.21.5–9; Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.12.35; Livy, *Periocha* 133). More significant than the triumphal processions was Octavian's receiving of *tribunicia potestas* for life, paired with the ceremonial closure of the Temple of Janus—an act rarely performed, and one that signalled to the Roman people both the formal restoration of peace and the end of active warfare (Suetonius, *Aug.* 22). To commemorate the Actian victory, coins were struck at Brundisium and Rome, complete with images of a naval war trophy or winged Victory standing upon the prow of a ship on the reverse, and portraits of Octavian on the obverse (*RIC* 263, 264).

Agrippa, notably, was absent from these coin issues. Instead, his honours took symbolic and material forms that, while rooted in Republican precedent, were reconfigured within the imperial framework he helped shape alongside Octavian. Among the most distinctive was the awarding of a *caeruleum vexillum* (sea-blue flag) to be flown whenever Agrippa travelled by ship (Dio 51.21.3). While traditional *vexilla donatica* were typically red and associated with land-based campaigns, this flag's striking blue colouring deliberately evoked the maritime sphere of Agrippa's victories. The choice of *caeruleus*—a term commonly used as a poetic metonym for the sea—not only reinforced his naval authority but also set his award apart from earlier and later *vexilla*.[54] The innovation appears to have drawn on a symbolic gesture attributed to Sextus Pompey, who, during the Sicilian War, exchanged his red general's cloak for a sea-blue one to signal his dominion over

[54] Scheuble-Reiter (2020: 99). The poetic use of '*caeruleus*' as a metonym for the sea is well attested in Latin literature and lends symbolic depth to Agrippa's *caeruleum vexillum*. In *Aeneid* 5.64, Virgil describes the river god Tiber as "*caeruleus Thybris*," signaling his divine and aquatic identity. Ovid similarly employs the term in *Metamorphoses* 2.508 ("*gurgite caeruleo*"), portraying the sea as a vast, whirling expanse, and in *Heroides* 7.52 ("*caeruleis Triton…equis*"), linking the colour directly to maritime divinity.

the seas as the son of Neptune (Appian 5.100; Dio 48.48.5). In Agrippa's case, however, the *caeruleum vexillum* constituted a formal, state-sanctioned recognition of naval supremacy.

Dio alludes to further honours awarded to Agrippa at this time. Among them was a dedication of four columns adorned with the bronze beaks of captured warships (*navali surgentes aere columnae*)—a commemorative monument which, according to Servius (*ad Georg*. 3.29), celebrated both Octavian and Agrippa as a reinterpretation of the traditional *columna rostrata* (51.21.3). Agrippa was also formally elevated to the rank of Patrician under the provisions of the *Lex Saenia* in 29 BCE (Dio 52.42.5; Augustus, *Res Gestae* 8.1), received joint ownership of Antony's former estate on the Palatine, and a portion of the spoils from the treasury of Egypt (Dio 53.27.5). Moreover, Octavian's newly granted right to appoint priests without limit (Dio 51.20.3) likely facilitated Agrippa's entry into several priestly colleges, such as the *Quindecimviri* (Velleius Paterculus 2.127.1).

### i. The Constitutional Settlements

In January 28 BCE, during Agrippa's second consulship and Octavian's sixth, a pivotal shift occurred in the evolving dynamics of Roman governance. By explicitly granting Agrippa half of the twenty-four *fasces*—symbols of *consular imperium* that Octavian had previously retained exclusively (Dio 53.1.1)—Octavian not only acknowledged their political partnership but also recalibrated the framework of leadership in a state grounded in military hegemony.[55] In Rome, where political legitimacy was virtually inseparable from martial authority, the public division of the fasces—a sacred emblem of both civil and military authority (*imperium*)—visibly marked Agrippa's elevation to an equal constitutional role. Further reinforcing this parity, Agrippa was

[55] On the symbolic and constitutional significance of the number of *fasces* as visual markers of *imperium*, see Brennan (2023) and Staveley (1963).

granted a tent equal in size to Octavian's for use on campaign, and from that point forward, the imperial watchword was to be issued jointly by both men (Dio 53.1.1–3).[56]

The resonance of this military symbolism lies in its capacity to confirm Agrippa's exceptional standing. In an empire built on military domination, sharing such distinctions with Agrippa constituted a clear recognition of his co-regency—enhancing his authority not only among the legions and the broader populace, but also within Rome's institutional hierarchy, most notably, the Senate. The visual symmetry of their campaign tents served as a material expression of parity, emphasizing their joint command and mutual indispensability. Likewise, the decree that both men should issue the imperial watchword made explicit that Rome's military apparatus—the foundation of its political order—rested equally on Agrippa's leadership. This was not merely a matter of administrative efficiency, but a deliberate act of ideological expression and constitutional innovation. By publicly affirming Agrippa's position, Octavian advanced a model of power-sharing that was critical for sustaining military loyalty and reducing dissent among the elite. Their alliance dissolved the fiction of singular rule, presenting co-leadership as the stabilizing principle of a newly conceived imperial government.

Further affirming his integration into the regime, Agrippa's marriage to Claudia Marcella, the daughter of Octavia, publicly incorporated him into the *domus Augusta* as a member of the imperial family (Dio 53.1.2; Suetonius, *Aug.* 63.1). He was also inducted into the priestly college of the *Fratres Arvales*—a lifelong appointment tasked with offering annual sacrifices to the gods to ensure the fertility of Rome's agricultural fields (Velleius Paterculus 2.127; Aulus Gellius 6.7).

[56] Powell (2015: 233). See also Eaton (2011: 48–63), who argues that the daily issuance of the watchword (*signum* or *tessera*) carried far greater ideological weight than previously acknowledged. Within the Roman military, the watchword functioned not merely as a means of distinguishing friend from foe, but as a powerful emblem of imperial sovereignty—highlighting the emperor's supreme command and authority over the legions.

### ii. The Debate between Agrippa and Maecenas in Dio

Subtly but surely, various branches of government were being subsumed into Octavian's expanding political authority. With Agrippa serving as his co-consul, the two men could now initiate a comprehensive restructuring of Roman governance to align with their shared vision. This phase of institutional reorganization provided the narrative setting for a pivotal *oratio recta* on constitutional matters, as presented by Dio, who devotes nearly the entire book (52) to a fictionalized debate between Agrippa and Maecenas—figures he portrays as Augustus' most trusted confidants (52.1.2: "τούτοις γὰρ πάντα τὰ ἀπόρρητα ἀνεκοίνου ~ for to these men he communicated all confidential matters")—on the ideal form of government. Though widely recognized as a literary construction, the dialogue remains valuable for interpreting the historical Agrippa, insofar as it reflects Dio's perception of his political persona: namely, as a plausible Republican interlocutor endowed with coherent and consistent ideological convictions. While it cannot attest directly to Agrippa's personal beliefs, the choice to cast him as a reasoned and principled proponent of Republican ideals—rather than as a caricature or straw man—suggests Dio's acknowledgment of his historical stature and political credibility within the larger Augustan narrative. As such, the debate illuminates how Agrippa's role was conceptualized within later historiographical traditions, even if refracted through rhetorical artifice.[57]

The debate has attracted considerable attention from modern scholars; however, much of the resulting commentary remains superficial, shaped by a series of *a priori* assumptions that disproportionately privilege one side of the dialogue. Consequently, scholarly focus has gravitated toward Maecenas' speech, while Agrippa's has been routinely marginalized—despite the fact that,

[57] Dio's portrayal of Agrippa may reflect the influence of earlier Roman historians and biographers, including Nicolaus of Damascus, Livy, and Plutarch (whose *Life of Augustus* is lost). Although these sources were shaped to varying degrees by their proximity to the regime and by pro-Augustan ideological commitments, they likely established narrative frameworks that informed later imperial historiography, including Dio's.

to examine only Maecenas is to appreciate only half of Dio's political vision.[58] The rhetorical character of the dialogue has often been accepted at face value, leading to an uncritical identification of Maecenas' monarchical advocacy with Dio's own convictions. Such a reductive reading reduces the exchange into a simplistic dichotomy: Agrippa as the voice of Republicanism, Maecenas as the champion of monarchy, and Dio's sympathies presumed to align wholly with the latter—largely based on his favourable treatment of monarchy elsewhere in the *Roman History*.[59]

Yet Dio's reliance on persuasive rhetorical form—entrusted to the authoritative voices of Agrippa and Maecenas—invites a more cautious interpretive approach. The dialogue is replete with details and inflections that lend it a tone of historical verisimilitude, but these may serve to obscure, rather than reveal, the historian's true position. The assumption that Maecenas functions as a straightforward proxy for Dio overlooks the potential for irony, exposition, or dialectical complexity. It is equally plausible that Dio's own stance diverges from the monarchical defence presented in Maecenas' speech. This possibility should also prompt a re-evaluation of Agrippa's role in the exchange—not as a foil, but as a figure whose Republican argumentation may carry interpretive weight.

Agrippa speaks first in Dio's account (52.2–13; though the final chapters are unfortunately lost) and delivers his case in a markedly more succinct fashion than Maecenas (52.14–40). His oration serves as an exemplary illustration of rhetorical composition, built around an expository

[58] This extensive discourse, dated to 29 BCE, has attracted more scholarly attention than perhaps any other aspect of Dio's historiography. Academic interest has overwhelmingly focused on Maecenas' speech—particularly its proposals for political reform—at the expense of Agrippa's counterpart. Schwartz (1899: 1719), for instance, famously asserted that Maecenas' oration is the "only speech in Dio's entire history worthy of serious scholarly attention." For studies concentrating almost exclusively on Maecenas, see Meyer (1891); Hammond (1932); Bleicken (1962); Fishwick (1990); and Kuhlmann (2010). For a rare exception, see McKechnie (1981), who interprets Agrippa's speech as a deliberately Hellenizing construct, designed to appear impractical to discredit outdated Greek political ideals in favour of Maecenas' Roman model.

[59] Fergus Millar (1964: 102–103) aptly observes that the debate between Agrippa and Maecenas has always "attracted attention" but has never been "satisfactorily interpreted." The dominant interpretive framework, first proposed by Meyer (1891), contends that the latter portion of Maecenas' speech directly opposes the 'senatorial policy' of the Severan dynasty and was likely appended later to what had originally been a formal dialogue on monarchy. See also Adler (2012: 478), who notes the persistence of Meyer's analysis in modern studies.

strategy of structured contrast. Agrippa systematically addresses multiple domains of public life, juxtaposing the benefits expected under democratic governance with the harms anticipated under monarchy. This technique of antithesis—frequently employed in Roman historiography—reaches its fullest elaboration in moments of political tension or in the narration of tragic historical figures.[60]

The fundamental concept Dio attributes to Agrippa is that individuals living under tyranny (τυραννίς) remain in a state of constant oppression and may be driven to conspire against their ruler, whereas democratic systems—where authority is determined by term-limited elections—enable citizens to live freely and autonomously (52.12.6: "ελεύθεροι καὶ αὐτόνομοι διατελοῦσιν ὄντες").[61] Agrippa reinforces this argument by asserting that the opposite of democracy (δημοκρατία) is enslavement, urging Octavian to reflect seriously on these points and, while still able, to relinquish the army, provinces, magistracies, and treasury to the people (52.13.1–3); a recommendation consistent with Agrippa's broader association with Republican ideals. In hindsight, this can be interpreted as a veiled allusion to the staged abdication before the Senate in January 27 BCE. Crucially, however, Dio's Agrippa does not advocate he simply abdicates power ("τὴν ἀρχὴν ἀφεῖναι"). Instead, he insists that Octavian must first restore order through laws and institutions, invoking Sulla as precedent—not as a despot—but as a legislator whose reforms had enduring constitutional effects (52.13.5).

[60] See Millar (1964: 38–55) for an analysis of the composition and stylistic features of Dio's *Roman History*. He cites Agrippa's speech as a representative example of Dio's rhetorical craft (105).

[61] Espinosa-Ruiz (1982: 93–94) draws attention to a nuanced terminological distinction in Dio's account: while τυραννίς (tyranny), δυναστεία (dynasty), and μοναρχία (monarchy) appear interchangeably in Agrippa's speech to denote defective governance, the gradual avoidance of μοναρχία is significant. In this context, τυραννίς is not synonymous with monarchy but rather its degraded or corrupted form. Dio's usage suggests that tyranny emerges when monarchy forsakes ἐλευθερία (freedom), a fundamental element of δημοκρατία. Maecenas likewise distinguishes between the two, asserting that a true monarch does not oppress the Senate or the people. Elsewhere, Dio contrasts tyranny with Augustus' mixed model of governance, which harmonized monarchic and democratic principles to safeguard both liberty and order (56.43.4).

Dio presents Agrippa as invoking historical exempla to reinforce his case, arguing that figures such as Marius, Sulla, and Pompey thrived when they refrained from pursuing absolute power (δυναστεύω), whereas those who sought it—Cinna, Sertorius, and Pompey, in his final years—met violent ends (κακῶς ἀπώλοντο: 52.13.2–5). Agrippa asserts that democracy safeguards freedom through legal equality (νομός), equitable distribution of responsibilities (ἰσομοιρία), and impartial justice (δίκη). Such conditions, he contends, allow citizens to govern both their private lives and collective affairs without coercive interference. Tyranny, by contrast, centralizes authority in a single ruler, reducing the citizenry to a condition of servitude (δουλεία) and depriving them of agency over both present and future (52.9.3).

The constructed dialogue also serves to dramatize conflicting views on δημοκρατία (democracy). Whereas Agrippa invokes the term through a Roman lens—redefining Greek political terminology in accordance with Roman republican values—Maecenas rejects δημοκρατία outright, portraying it as inherently unstable and unsuitable for an empire as vast as Rome. He equates it with mob rule and blames it for the chaos of the late Republic (52.14.5; 52.16.1–2). In its place, he advocates μοναρχία (monarchy) as the optimal system of governance, framing it not as autocracy but as a participatory model in which the monarch rules in consultation with a patrician elite (52.15.1–2)—a rhetorical strategy that subtly aligns it with the democratic ideals Agrippa is made to defend. Through this constructed exchange, Dio advances a nuanced portrayal of Roman Republicanism, illustrating how its principles were rhetorically preserved and ideologically reconfigured under the Augustan settlement.[62]

[62] Dio offers several pointed reflections on the eclipse of the Republic. At 56.44.3, he notes that by the time of Augustus' death, no one remained who had lived under the δημοκρατία or remembered its political structures. In Tiberius' funeral oration, Dio has him claim that the complexity of public affairs rendered the survival of the Republic (Δημοκρατία) impossible (56.39.5). Elsewhere, Dio observes that many of the institutions and magistracies of the Principate retained the nomenclature of the δημοκρατία, despite their altered functions (53.17.11).

Urbano Espinosa Ruiz astutely observes that Dio aligns himself with Agrippa's conception of δημοκρατία by reframing it as a variant of μοναρχία—one in which a singular ruler governs in collaboration with an aristocratic elite. Agrippa's vision, grounded in the senatorial traditions of the Republic, consciously distances itself from the popularist dimensions of Greek democracy, even as it strategically invokes Hellenic language and precedent. Maecenas likewise redefines 'true democracy' as a form of participatory monarchy that preserves order while averting tyranny (52.14.4; 52.15.1). Dio's framing reflects a Roman ideological preference for hierarchical government under elite leadership; his deployment of both Agrippa and Maecenas to articulate converging principles under different names serves to illustrate the adaptive continuity of senatorial ideals within an emergent imperial context.[63] The distinction between the monarchy that Maecenas promotes and the one Agrippa repudiates, like the difference between their respective views of democracy, lies less in the substance of their ideals and more in the rhetorical structure of Dio's composition.

### iii. The Inauguration of the Principate

The first order of business undertaken by Octavian and Agrippa during their joint consulship in 28 BCE was the *lectio senatus*— a revision or 'purge' of the Senate, framed as a moral and political purification (Suetonius, *Aug.* 35; Dio 52.42).[64] Following years of civil war, the Senate had swollen to nearly one thousand members. Acting with *censoria potestas*, they initiated a gradual reduction

[63] Espinosa-Ruiz (1982: 102, 103–111). Dio distinguishes between democracy, as an abstract political ideal, and its practical implementation, which aligns with the structured, aristocracy-led governance of Rome. The author notes how Dio employs the terms μοναρχία, τυραννίς, and δυναστείαις to delineate different modes of rule, though their semantic boundaries occasionally blur. Notably, δυναστείαις is used to describe the Republic's final phase, characterized by factionalism, personal ambition, and the erosion of civic ideals. In this context, public institutions became tools of private interest, and magistracies were manipulated for individual gain.

[64] I have enclosed the term 'purge' in quotation marks to acknowledge its potentially sinister connotation. See Evans (1997) for a detailed breakdown of senatorial expulsion rates throughout the late Republic and early Principate, which reinforces the interpretation that Agrippa and Augustus acted within established precedent and reasonable bounds.

in its bloated membership in order to restore its dignity and function. Their first target was the *Orcivi*—freedmen whom Antony had adlected after Caesar's death. Next, they called upon those who knew themselves to be unworthy to resign voluntarily, leading to the quiet removal of fifty senators. A further one hundred and forty were reportedly demoted, though allowed to retain the outward privileges of senatorial status. While senatorial purges had precedent, Agrippa and Octavian notably exercised their powers with rhetorical tact rather than coercion, distancing their approach from the harsh removals of earlier censors.[65]

Upon completion of the census in the same year—which counted 4,063,000 Roman citizens—Octavian was awarded the title *Princeps Senatus*, traditionally reserved for the senator deemed most worthy (Suetonius, *Aug.* 27.5; Dio 53.1.3). It was reportedly Agrippa who advised him to accept the honour—a gesture that prefigured his eventual assumption of the name Augustus.[66] This moment of elevation, though disguised in Republican language, also marked a departure from Republican norms. Shortly thereafter, Octavian introduced a measure forbidding the publication of senatorial proceedings (Suetonius, *Aug.* 36.1)—a reversal of Julius Caesar's policy, which had mandated their daily dissemination for public scrutiny (Suetonius, *Caesar* 20.1). The contrast is revealing; whereas Caesar aligned himself with popular transparency, Octavian's reform signalled a shift toward executive opacity, reinforcing a consolidation of authority behind a veneer of open governance. That this reform followed a census jointly administered with Agrippa further reflects their coordinated project of institutional reconfiguration—one that balanced the symbolic restoration of Republican order with the structural consolidation of imperial control.

[65] Evans (1997: 84). See Russell (2019) for an analysis of how Agrippa and Augustus guided the Senate's transformation from a competitive elite into a cooperative corporate body aligned with imperial objectives and shaped by senatorial pragmatism.
[66] Wright (1937: 156–157).

In 27 BCE, the next phase of Agrippa and Octavian's constitutional reformation was implemented. Agrippa assumed the Consulship for the third time alongside Octavian, who entered his seventh.[67] On 13 January of that year, Octavian executed what is often regarded as one of the most carefully staged political performances in Roman history: he relinquished his *censoria potestas* and formally declared his intention to restore the Republic to the *auctoritas* of the Senate and Roman people (Augustus, *RG* 34.1; Dio 53.3–11). Although no ancient source explicitly records Agrippa's role in this display of political theatre, it is reasonable to infer that, as Octavian's co-consul and closest collaborator, Agrippa was not merely aware of the proceedings but likely played a formative role in orchestrating them.

The ostentatious gesture—carefully staged as a voluntary abdication of power—was designed to signal the fulfilment of the triumviral mandate: the restoration of the Republic to the *auctoritas* of the Senate and Roman people. At the same time, it served to retroactively justify the arbitrary and often violent consolidation of power that had defined the Triumviral years—an exercise of authority that far exceeded the mandate to avenge Caesar (cf. Suetonius, *Aug.* 27.3). If successful, this manoeuvre would not only secure but also legitimize Augustus' unprecedented position in the eyes of the Senate, whose ratification would in turn cement his status as *princeps* of the restored Republic in the eyes of the Roman people.[68]

[67] Powell (2015: 295).

[68] Millar (1973: 51–52). See *idem* 61–67 on the 'Restoration' of the Republic. See Rich (2012) for an extended argument that Augustus' so-called 'restoration' of the Republic in 27 BCE was framed as a temporary emergency measure, rhetorically justified through the language of *auctoritas* rather than *potestas*, and gradually transformed into a permanent structure. Rich notes that Augustus himself avoided the phrase *res publica restituta*, and that neither Suetonius (*Aug.* 28.1) nor Tacitus (*Ann.* 1.3.7) were under any illusions about the regime's continuity with Republican norms—Tacitus, in particular, stresses that by Augustus' death, the Republic had become a distant memory.

## III. Agrippa and the Pietās of the Principate

Following the 28 BCE census, Augustus and Agrippa conducted a solemn *lustratio*—a ritual purification of the Roman people—symbolizing the re-establishment of civic order. That same year, they presided over the first quinquennial games, initially voted by the Senate in 30 BCE to honour their leadership (Augustus, *RG* 22.2; Suetonius, *Aug.* 27.5; Dio 53.1.4; *CIL* 9.422). Alongside the Ludus Troiae, the festivities included gymnastic contests in the Campus Martius and gladiatorial games (Virgil, *Aeneid* 5.545–576). When Augustus fell ill during the celebrations, Agrippa assumed supervisory responsibility—an episode that further affirmed his capacity and authority as co-regent (Dio 53.1.4–6). The absence of public disapproval in this moment of *de facto* leadership suggests that Agrippa's role as Augustus' partner was not only sanctioned from above but also accepted by the broader populace. His involvement in priestly functions during this period further reveals how religious observance was strategically intertwined with the consolidation of Augustan political power.[69]

In accepting religious offices, Agrippa demonstrated a willingness to uphold the traditions of Roman priesthoods, despite his well-attested scepticism toward astrology and related forms of divination (Dio 49.43.5). His participation in these roles signalled not only political adaptability but also a conscious alignment with Roman religious orthopraxy. Alongside Augustus, he strategically employed the emotional resonance of sacred ritual to reinforce the image of shared governance—strengthening their appeal to both divine sanction and popular sentiment. In Rome, where reverence for the gods was closely tied to political legitimacy, a magistrate's display of piety could significantly enhance public approval.[70]

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[69] See Frandsen (1836: 256–257) for an analysis of the decline of Roman religious practice in the late Republic and Agrippa's role in its revival under Augustus.

[70] Agrippa demonstrably maintained a respect for traditional religious observance, as attested by epigraphic evidence: *IG* IV 1363: "Ἀγρίππας τῷ θεῷ τὸν Ἀσκληπιὸν εὐχαριστῶν ~ Agrippa [dedicated this] giving thanks to the god Asclepius"; *CIG* 3609: "Μᾶρκον Ἀγρίππαν τὸν συνγενῆ καὶ πάτρωνα τῆς πόλεως καὶ εὐεργέτην, ἐπὶ τῇ πρὸς τὴν θεὸν εὐσεβείᾳ καὶ ἐπὶ τῇ

Agrippa's first priestly appointment came in 39 BCE, when he joined the *Quindecemviri sacris faciundis*, the collegium charged with overseeing public sacrifices and interpreting the Sibylline Books (Suetonius, *Aug.* 31; Livy, *Hist.* 7.27). In 28 BCE, he was inducted into the *Fratres Arvales*—a lifelong priesthood devoted to performing annual rites for the fertility of Rome's agricultural fields (Velleius Paterculus 2.127; Aulus Gellius 6.7). As an Arval brother, Agrippa participated in the three-day festival of *Dea Dia*, held each May in honour of the goddess of growth and fertility (identified variously with Ceres or Demeter) (Varro, *On the Latin Language* 5.85).

In 17 BCE, Augustus and Agrippa reintroduced the Ludi Saeculares (Secular Games), a significantly restructured version of their Republican predecessors, the Ludi Tarentini (Tarentine Games). Originally associated with the worship of chthonic deities in times of crisis, the Ludi Tarentini were transformed into a grand celebration dedicated to the Moerae (Fates), Ilithyiae (goddesses of childbirth), Terra Mater (Earth Mother), and Sol (the Sun).[71] This ideological shift—from death to renewal—reinforced the message of a *saeculum aureum*, a 'Golden Age' inaugurated under Augustus: one in which civil wars had ended, the Republic was ostensibly restored, and a new era had dawned. The co-rulers promoted the Games as a once-in-a-lifetime spectacle, with heralds dispatched throughout the city to announce the festival, distribute ritual purification items, and summon citizens to participate (Zosimus, *New History* 2.5). On the appointed days, citizens assembled on the Capitoline, Palatine, and Aventine Hills to offer grain and maintain nocturnal vigils for divine favour.[72] The festivities included theatrical performances, in which Agrippa's freedman, M. Vipsanius Narcissus, may have served as a stage manager (*CIL*

πρὸς τὸν δῆμον εὐνοίᾳ ~ Marcus Agrippa, kinsman and patron of the city, and benefactor, for his piety towards the goddess and for his benevolence towards the people." At the same time, he enacted administrative reforms aimed at curbing the influence of superstition and foreign cults on Roman religious life. He prohibited the performance of Egyptian rites within a thousand paces of the city (Dio 54.6.6) and took steps to expel astrologers and travelling mystics, whom he viewed as corrosive to public order and civic integrity (Dio 49.43.5).

[71] Bernstein (2007: 225).

[72] Galinsky (2007: 77).

VI.10094), as well as a ceremonial banquet hosted by over one hundred matrons in honour of Juno and Diana (*CIL* VI.32323.90–102), with offerings of wheat, barley, and beans presented to performers.

In consultation with Ateius Capito—the foremost authority on human and divine law—and members of the patrician Valerii Messallae, who preserved a strong attachment to ancestral traditions, including the sacrificial rites at the Tarentum, the games were redefined by associating them with the transition of a *saeculum* (Zosimus 2.4).[73] This collaboration facilitated the integration of archaic ritual practices with Republican religious conventions, resulting in a deliberately complex ceremonial sequence through which Augustus and Agrippa could emphasize both continuity with Republican precedent and the *princeps*' role as restorer of the Republic. In keeping with their broader strategy of historical recalibration, an altered chronology of the Ludi Tarentini, together with the strategic deployment of Valerian mythos concerning the origins of the Tarentum sacrifices, enabled these rites to be directly appropriated within the ideological architecture of the Principate—linking the prosperity of the *domus Augusta* to Rome's divine favour and collective wellbeing.[74]

This deliberate reconfiguration of the Ludi Saeculares exemplifies the delicate balance between reverence for tradition and the imperatives of political innovation that characterized the joint rulership of Agrippa and Augustus. By integrating the rites of the Ludi Tarentini into a broader narrative of imperial renewal, Augustus presented himself as both guardian of ancestral tradition and architect of Rome's future. This dual posture enabled the Principate to appeal to the conservative instincts of Roman society while simultaneously establishing the *domus Augusta* as

[73] M. Valerius Potitus, a relative of M. Valerius Messalla Corvinus—who, along with Agrippa, received a portion of Antony's Palatine estate—and Messalla Messallinus, Corvinus' son, are both listed as priests in the Augustan *Acta*. Potitus appears third in the order, immediately following Agrippa and Lepidus (*CIL* 6.32323), highlighting his prominence in the celebrations commemorating the new era inaugurated by Augustus and Agrippa.
[74] Taylor (1934: 101).

the exemplar of a new era—offering a template for imperial cult practice that later emperors would emulate. Firmly embedded at the centre of Roman religious life, the boundary between civic ritual and dynastic devotion became increasingly permeable, ensuring that the fortunes of the imperial household were perceived as inseparable from those of the Roman state.

Following the Ludi Saeculares, Agrippa's authority extended beyond Rome as he departed for the eastern provinces, vested with enhanced imperium. Throughout his career, Agrippa's collaboration with Augustus in orchestrating sacred ceremonies and public games not only reinforced veneration for Rome's religious divinities but also cultivated civic solidarity. His ability to combine political authority with religious responsibility offered a model of leadership that merged piety with governance—nurturing loyalty across the empire. Nevertheless, as Viktor Gardthausen perceptively observes, Agrippa's secular accomplishments also reflect the realism of a *novus homo* who owed his eminence not to divine favour, but to his own extraordinary capabilities: "Agrippa's secular buildings characterize the realism of the 'self-made' man who owed his successes and his high position to himself and not to the favour of the gods."[75]

[75] Gardthausen (1.746; cf. 1.495): "*die Profanbauten Agrippa's charakterisiren den Realismus des 'selbstgemachten' Mannes, der seine Erfolge und seine hohe Stellung sich selbst und nicht etwa der Gunst der Gotter verdankte*."

## CHAPTER TWO

## AGRIPPA AND THE CITY OF ROME

In 1964, Mary Ann Burns published a brief, but perceptive article titled *Pliny's Ideal Roman*, in which she meticulously collated scattered references to Marcus Agrippa across Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*.[76] While many modern commentators have too often been content to portray Agrippa merely as Augustus' general or assistant, Burns recovered a more layered portrait: Agrippa was an *exemplum* of Roman civic virtue—*vir militaris, civis publicus, et studiosus litterarum*—that is, a soldier, statesman, and scholar. Her article remains one of the few modern attempts to reposition Agrippa as a multidimensional figure, whose intellectual, infrastructural, and administrative achievements earned him not only Pliny's admiration but recognition as the most ideal Roman of his age. Crucially, Burns did not merely echo Pliny's assessments; rather, she extracted meaning from elliptical, fragmentary, and incidental references to reconstruct a more comprehensive account of Agrippa's legacy, both within Pliny's worldview and the shared symbolic language of Roman culture. Her method stands as a compelling example of how close, critical readings of ancient texts—particularly those not conventionally treated as biographical—can illuminate aspects of Agrippa's legacy that have otherwise been ostracized or forgotten.

This chapter proceeds in a similar manner. While the previous chapter established Agrippa's military stature and indispensable role in the civil wars, this chapter shifts focus to the second pillar of his career: his contributions as a civic leader and urban planner. Agrippa's transformation of Rome's water infrastructure, together with his broader architectural initiatives, especially his transformation of the Campus Martius as a dynamic urban space, should be understood not merely as technical achievements, but as part of an ideological project to

[76] Burns (1964: 253–258).

reconceptualize Rome as a proud global capital. Agrippa's vision was not to glorify himself, but to enhance the quality of public life in a rapidly expanding metropolis. Moreover, his programme of civic benefaction constitutes a subtle but potent form of co-authorship in the formulation of Augustan ideology.[77]

That Augustus would later claim to have transformed Rome from a "city of brick" to one of marble (Suetonius, *Aug.* 28.3) reflects a rhetorical consolidation of credit—one that quietly absorbs Agrippa's foundational contributions into a singular narrative of imperial authorship. Suetonius also remarks that the city had not yet been adorned to match the dignity of empire, framing its transformation as a necessary assertion of imperial identity. Agrippa's omission from such formulations is not merely accidental, but a deliberate act of appropriation. This rhetorical elision exemplifies the broader Augustan strategy of subsuming collective achievement under the singular authority of the *princeps*. Yet it was Agrippa who played a central role in elevating Rome's civic and architectural landscape to meet that standard. In this context, Agrippa emerges not merely as an administrator or general, but as a co-architect of the Augustan world order—shaping not only how Rome was built, but how it was conceptualized.

From 44 until his death in 12 BCE, Agrippa demonstrated unwavering dedication to Rome and her citizens. He held the Praetorship in 40 and the Consulship in 37, before subverting the

[77] While this chapter focuses on Agrippa's transformation of Rome's water infrastructure and the civic topography of the Campus Martius, his contributions to the spatial and ideological architecture of empire extended far beyond the city. Two undertakings are especially significant. First, the *orbis terrarum*—a monumental map of the known world—was posthumously displayed in the Porticus Vipsania, completed by Agrippa's sister. Though Julius Caesar had envisioned such a project (Suetonius, *Caesar.* 44; Pliny 3.17), Agrippa was the first to complete it: his map constitutes the earliest known Latin cartographic work to include annotations and commentary, standing as a defining intellectual achievement of the early Principate. More than a technical feat, it was a political act of world-ordering that articulated the territorial scope and ideological structure of Roman dominion. Second, the *Via Agrippa*—an expansive road network radiating from Lugdunum—was among Agrippa's most consequential contributions to the early empire. Linking territories in modern France, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands (Strabo 4.6.11), the system laid the earliest physical groundwork for Roman control beyond organized Gaul. It improved military mobility, administrative cohesion, and economic integration across the western provinces. On these monumental projects of Agrippa, see Klotz (1931); Schnabel (1935); Tierney (1962); Frézouls (1988); Trousset (1993); and Arnaud (2009).

conventional trajectory of a Roman senator's progression through the *cursus honorum* by assuming the Aedileship in 33 BCE.[78] Euergetism—an element of Rome's civic patronage system in which wealthy elites acted as benefactors and sponsors to their less fortunate clients—had long been a defining feature of Roman society. However, this tradition declined rapidly amidst prolonged civil strife and the harsh proscriptions initiated by Sulla and later revisited by the triumvirs, which significantly diminished the number of affluent Roman patrons and curtailed the pool of citizens eligible to serve in magistracies such as the Aedileship.[79] The proscriptions not only depleted the ranks of the elite but also disrupted the traditional distribution of civic patronage, concentrating acts of euergetism in the hands of an increasingly narrow aristocratic class. With fewer individuals available to assume such roles, each benefactor became more politically conspicuous. Civic projects that had once embodied collective aristocratic engagement increasingly became instruments of personal political capital, setting the stage for the strategic consolidation of public goodwill by figures like Agrippa.

The motivation behind Agrippa's decision to accept a lower office after his Praetorship and Consulship had already become the subject of salacious speculation among the Roman elite, though it was in fact a calculated gesture intended to signal that both he and Octavian—like Caesar before them—were genuinely concerned with the welfare of the common people.[80] While Caesar had initiated a number of civic improvements, his assassination abruptly curtailed these efforts,

[78] Reinhold (1933: 45-46). On Agrippa's consulships, see Chapter Three (pp. 73–83).
[79] Powell (2015: 124). See also Gygax (2016) for a nuanced account of the Greek origin of euergetism and its development into a civic ideology structuring elite-public reciprocity in both Hellenic and Roman contexts.
[80] Beyond the revitalization of architecture and infrastructure that benefited the city's broader populace, Agrippa also introduced specific measures to improve daily life and leisure for the plebeian order such as the distribution of essential goods—oil, olives, and salt—to all citizens without restriction; free access to public baths for both men and women; subsidies for public barbers to improve access to personal grooming; and the provision of redeemable theatre tickets (*tesserae*), which could be exchanged for money or clothing depending on individual need (Dio 49.43.1–4).

leaving much of the city's infrastructure in a state of disrepair.[81] Rome's public buildings, streets, and sanitation systems were in urgent need of renewal after prolonged neglect and the cumulative strain of a rising population over the previous century.[82]

Agrippa's approach to public construction was firmly grounded in the Republican manubial tradition, in which generals financed civic works through the spoils of war. Yet unlike his Republican predecessors, who typically limited their benefactions to temples or commemorative monuments, Agrippa expanded the tradition's remit to encompass vital urban necessities: sewers, aqueducts, fountains, and bathhouses.[83] In doing so, he redefined the deployment of *manubiae* by redirecting them toward civic infrastructure and public welfare. This shift marked a significant evolution in Roman euergetism: one that departed from aristocratic self-advertisement and instead emphasized enduring public service. While *manubiae* had long symbolized *virtus* and military prowess, Agrippa's reconfiguration of the practice aligned those values with Augustan civic ideology—anchoring imperial legitimacy in urban renewal and mass accessibility rather than conquest alone.[84] His self-financed building campaign thus met the practical needs of an expanding population while simultaneously casting Agrippa as a *conditor urbis* in his own right—a benefactor whose public generosity evoked the foundational ethos of Rome itself.

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[81] The Triumviral period saw a surge in monumental construction in Rome, reflecting the profound social and political transformations that followed the assassination of Julius Caesar. Maschek (2020: 334–35) outlines how Agrippa—alongside Octavian as Caesar's designated heir—capitalized on this position to take the lead in public construction initiatives.

[82] Cicero refers to Aediles as "curators of the city" (*On Laws* 3.3.7: *aediles curatores urbis*), whose responsibilities included maintaining public order, overseeing public games, and managing the city's grain and provisions. In the later Republic, Aediles increasingly prioritized popular entertainments over the upkeep and improvement of essential infrastructure.

[83] Dumser (2013: 136).

[84] Shipley (1933: 12). Given Agrippa's 'obscure' origins and probable lack of personal wealth in the early years of his career, Shipley believes the substantial funds he directed toward public infrastructure likely derived from *manubiae* (spoils of war). Although Agrippa famously declined the honour of a triumph, Augustus appears to have ensured he received generous allocations of *manubiae* to support these extensive building operations.

Agrippa also recognized that the construction of monumental infrastructure—though essential to accommodate Rome's burgeoning population—was not in itself sufficient; such projects required institutionalized oversight and systematic maintenance to ensure their continued functionality and long-term viability. By the first century BCE, Rome was burdened with deteriorating public works, and Agrippa understood that meaningful urban renewal depended not only on new construction but on the sustained management of civic resources.[85] As Frontinus later attests, Agrippa was posthumously appointed Curator Aquarum for life (*Aqueducts* 2.98; "*velut perpetuus curator*"), a recognition that affirmed his legacy as Rome's foremost benefactor and symbolically elevated the diplomatic stature of his co-rule with Augustus.[86] By undertaking this endeavour, Agrippa began to emancipate the Roman populace from dependence on aristocratic patronage, redirecting their gratitude and loyalty toward the Principate.[87] Agrippa became an unofficial conduit between the plebeians of Rome and the senatorial elites who had long overlooked them. This political strategy—intended to align their leadership with the populist governance style associated with Caesar—was carefully coordinated with Octavian's public commitment to restoring the old Republic. The rhetoric of traditional political virtue, particularly the ideal of a unified *populus Romanus* in *concordia*, was deliberately revived to secure popular loyalty and consolidate domestic authority. This garnered overwhelming support from the urban masses and ensured that Antony—absent in the East and visibly detached from the needs of the

[85] While victorious commanders frequently commissioned temples or monuments, they often neglected to provide for the long-term maintenance of these structures. In this context, the restoration of deteriorating temples was a meaningful expression of religious piety: for example, Augustus restored the Temple of Jupiter Feretrius (Livy, Hist. 4.20.7), and Tiberius restored the Temple of Castor and Pollux (Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings* 5.5.3).
[86] See Rodgers (2004: 15–16), who argues that, for Frontinus, a collaborative personal relationship between the emperor and his curator was not idealistic, but an inherent feature of the curatorial office as established by Augustus in 11 BCE.
[87] Yavetz (1969: 96–97) argues that this broader ideological programme helps explain several key social measures such as relief granted in rent payments, concern for indebted citizens, reduction of interest rates, and provision of substantial funds for low-interest loans (Dio 51.21.4–5, 53.2.2–3, 55.12.3).

city—could no longer rival the prominence that Octavian and Agrippa now held in the eyes of both the Senate and the Roman people.[88]

## I. Agrippa and Rome's Water Supply

Agrippa's contributions to Rome's water infrastructure were foundational to the city's transformation under the Augustan regime. His water programme, initiated during his Aedileship and expanded thereafter, fundamentally reshaped Rome's hydraulic systems through a combination of construction, restoration, and long-term maintenance planning. According to Pliny (36.24), Agrippa oversaw the creation of 130 distribution reservoirs (*castella*), 700 cisterns (*lacus*), and 500 fountains (*salientes*), many adorned with statuary and marble columns, as well as 170 public bathhouses, improving access to hygiene and leisure across all social strata. These were not isolated accomplishments, but part of a broader, systematic strategy. New aqueducts were constructed in tandem with the restoration of older systems—including major interventions on the *Cloaca Maxima* (Pliny 36.24; Dio 49.43). Several features of Agrippa's hydraulic programme—particularly its scale, durability, and city-wide coordination—remained functional for centuries and continue to impact the water infrastructure of modern Rome. The most enduring example is the Aqua Virgo, completed in 19 BCE, which still supplies fountains such as the Trevi—an extraordinary testament to Agrippa's engineering and administrative foresight.[89] These achievements were not merely technical: they were also ideological, drawing on Hellenistic models from Alexandria and Antioch that emphasized monumental civic amenities and mass accessibility (Dio 49.43, 53.27).

[88] Shipley (1933: 19).
[89] Evans (1982: 411). On the enduring use of Agrippa's Aqua Virgo, see Bruun (1991: 23–25). The Aqua Virgo remains partially operational today, supplying water to several Roman fountains—most famously, the Trevi Fountain. Although modern piping and filtration systems have been added, the source and much of the ancient underground route continue to follow Agrippa's original design.

Crucially, Agrippa's vision for Rome's water infrastructure predated his Aedileship, and can be traced back to his Praetorship in 40 BCE, when he began laying the groundwork for a comprehensive urban overhaul.[90] His programme integrated long-overdue repairs with ambitious new construction, including the clearance of swamplands, the expansion of drainage systems, and the increase of access to clean water—measures that dramatically improved urban sanitation. Dio offers the most detailed ancient account of Agrippa's tenure as Aedile, noting that he "agreed to be made Aedile, and without taking anything from the public treasury repaired all the public buildings and all the streets, cleaned out the sewers, and sailed through them underground into the Tiber" (49.43). At that time, only four aqueducts remained operational—the Appia (c. 312 BCE), Anio Vetus (c. 272), Marcia (c. 144), and Tepula (c. 125)—none of which had received meaningful maintenance in over a century (Frontinus 1.9). Agrippa not only restored these ancient systems but also implemented a coordinated plan for their upkeep, including the creation of a dedicated maintenance corps to ensure their continued operation.

To institutionalize these improvements, Agrippa personally financed repairs and employed a *familia* of enslaved labourers to maintain the water system. Upon his death in 12 BCE, this workforce—and the responsibilities associated with it—passed to Augustus. Augustus retained aspects of the role of the position—such as granting private access to public water and funding major undertakings—while delegating day-to-day management to a senatorial appointee whose remit resembled that of a Republican Censor. Although not especially burdensome in practical terms, the office carried significant prestige and served as an institutional tribute to Agrippa's legacy. Though granted *ex post facto*, the formalization of this office affirmed Agrippa's role as

[90] Evans (1982: 410); Roddaz (1984: 81).

Rome's inaugural water commissioner and as a civic architect whose infrastructural vision permanently reshaped both the material and ideological landscape of the imperial capital.[91]

Of the major aqueducts, Agrippa made significant improvements to the Tepula, enhancing both water quality and temperature; he also restored the three other surviving but long-neglected aqueducts—the Appia, Anio Vetus, and Marcia (Frontinus 1.9)—and initiated the construction of two new ones, the Julia and the Virgo (1.10), ultimately increasing Rome's water supply by at least twenty-five percent.[92] In addition, Agrippa organized the restoration of the Cloaca Maxima, the ancient sewer system, which had long been essential for draining marshland and managing the city's waste. His renovation significantly expanded its capacity and ensured its continued effectiveness (Pliny 36.24).

The explosive population growth of the Augustan period rendered the provisioning of clean, potable water a matter of public health, civic order, and political stability. According to Saskia Hin, Italy's Roman citizen population grew from approximately 4.95 million in 225 BCE to 6.7 million by 28 BCE—or 8.2 million including slaves—an increase of 35.6 percent over two centuries. While her figures pertain to Italy as a whole, Hin suggests that Augustus' census reforms—by including women and *sui iuris* children—further inflated the totals.[93] She argues that under Augustus, the census became an ideological tool, projecting Rome as the *caput mundi* and demographic centre of empire. While she avoids estimating the capital's population directly, her position implies that Rome experienced similarly substantial growth.[94] Neville Morley, however,

[91] Rodgers (2004: 15–16).
[92] Shipley (1933: 24). Rodgers (2004: 53, 169) notes that in 1649, Lucas Holste (an often-overlooked scholar of Frontinus) was the first to identify the source of the Aqua Tepula as the Sorgente Preziosa, located at the foot of the Alban Hills. Owing to residual volcanic activity in the area, the water was approximately five degrees warmer than that of the nearby Aqua Julia. Frontinus explicitly refers to its springs as *venae* rather than *fontes*—an indication of the sparse and tepid flow of the Tepula prior to Agrippa's renovations (Frontinus 2.68).
[93] Hin (2013: 295). For a broader discussion of the Roman census and its interpretive challenges, see Chapter 7, "Counting Romans" (261–297). See also Morley (1996) on patterns of urban population growth in Rome under Augustus.
[94] Hin (2013: 261–297, esp. 295).

estimates that Rome's population reached 850,000 to one million under Augustus, a rise that paralleled the doubling of aqueduct capacity between 125 and 2 BCE.[95] This expansion placed immense strain on the city's infrastructure, and would have been impossible without Agrippa's sustained investment in scalable, inclusive public works. His vision was civic in nature, focused not on personal gain or dynastic commemoration—though these were ancillary benefits for the *domus Caesaris*—but on providing the essential utilities of a functional imperial capital.

The gradual implementation of these projects over the following decades enabled Agrippa to adapt his water distribution programme to meet the demands of a rapidly expanding urban population. Agrippa remained the *de facto* Curator Aquarum after his Aedileship, carefully managing supply across public, private, and monumental uses (Frontinus 2.98). Emphasizing Agrippa's systematic approach, Frontinus also details the technical limitations imposed by earlier aqueducts: the Aqua Appia was constructed at too low an elevation to allow for broad dispersal (1.18.7); the Anio Vetus, vulnerable to runoff and contamination after storms, was unsuitable for drinking (2.90–91); and although the Aqua Marcia was prized for its clarity and volume, efforts to increase its capacity risked diminishing its quality (2.91.5).

Agrippa's approach marked a significant departure from earlier fragmentary planning. While undertaking the restoration of existing infrastructure, he concurrently developed specialized aqueducts tailored to the needs of specific districts: the Aqua Virgo served the Campus Martius, while the Tepula and Julia supplied Rome's Eastern regions, particularly the Esquiline Hill (Frontinus 2.82–84).[96] Unlike earlier Republican aqueducts, the Aqua Julia was designed not as a standalone source but as a supplement to the Tepula, increasing water volume to serve designated public buildings and complexes. Twelve years later, Agrippa added the Aqua Virgo—a highly

[95] Morley (1996: 39).
[96] Evans (1982: 86).

specialized line designed to reach areas still under-served by the existing network and to supply water for his building projects, including the Baths of Agrippa, which evolved from a modest *laconium* (sweat bath) into fully operational *thermae* following the completion of the Virgo (Dio 53.27.1).

The combined output of Agrippa's enhanced Tepula, together with the newly constructed Julia and Virgo aqueducts, more than doubled the volume of water brought to the city.[97] Agrippa's meticulous planning—documented in his lost *commentarii* later cited by Frontinus (2.99.3)—established a distribution system that was not only efficient but also durable. His rigorous regulation of flow rates, supply allocation, and system upkeep laid the foundations for what would become the Cura Aquarum office. This administrative model outlived him and became the standard framework for urban water management. A *senatus consultum* issued in 11 BCE—also recorded by Frontinus (2.104)—declared that the number of *salientes* (public fountains) in Rome should remain constant, a decision that implicitly acknowledged the system's optimal calibration under Agrippa. His waterworks thus became the benchmark for later administrators, confirming his achievement as both technically sound and politically sufficient at the time of his death.

In light of this, Augustus' claim in the *Res Gestae* (20.2) that he had "restored the channels of all the aqueducts" demands careful scrutiny. While broadly accurate in describing repairs undertaken after 12 BCE, the assertion is historiographically reductive, since it omits any reference to Agrippa's far more comprehensive role in developing, regulating, and expanding the aqueduct network. This silence was unlikely accidental. It reflects a broader pattern in Augustan political communication: the systematic subsumption of collaborators' achievements—particularly those of Agrippa—beneath the singular authority of the *princeps*. Though Augustus cast his restorations

[97] Frontinus records a total of 2908 *quinariae* for the Appia (2.79), Anio Vetus (2.80), and Marcia (2.81); and 3232 *quinariae* for the Agrippan Tepula (2.82), Julia (2.83), and Virgo (2.84).

as acts of public generosity, archaeological and textual evidence reveals a more exclusive agenda. His restorations—especially in the Transtiberim—primarily served elite villas, private gardens, and properties tied to his patronage.[98] By rhetorically subsuming Agrippa's inclusive, city-wide infrastructure programme into his own narrative of imperial beneficence, Augustus not only claimed credit for a civic system originally conceived by Agrippa for the benefit of the many, but also obfuscated the narrow, elite-oriented scope of his actual contributions.

The timing of these interventions further illuminates their political and rhetorical dimensions. Augustus initiated his programme just as the Senate enacted a *senatus consultum* prohibiting any increase in the number of public fountains (Frontinus 2.104)—a policy that sharply diverged from Agrippa's ethos of open access and public utility. In this context, Augustus' rhetorical silence regarding Agrippa in the *Res Gestae* functions not as a mere oversight, but as a deliberate act of appropriation. By halting further public expansion while continuing to benefit from Agrippa's infrastructure, Augustus was able to recast a collaborative civic legacy as the outcome of his own initiative. His ability to redirect water away from the public sphere and into private hands was not only a material shift but a narrative one: it enabled him to transform Agrippa's civic-minded achievements into symbols of imperial benevolence. What had once been a wide-reaching programme of public utility was reframed as the legacy of a singular ruler—an appropriation enabled by policy and sustained by silence.

Though Augustus publicly assumed credit, the transformation of Rome's water system was fundamentally shaped by Agrippa's vision. Roman authors consistently emphasized both the scale and civic purpose of these works, contrasting their rational grandeur with the ostentation of foreign

[98] Taylor (2000: 153). Even Frontinus remarks on the questionable utility of Augustus' own Aqueduct (Aqua Augusta), noting its poor quality and limited public use (1.11). His puzzlement highlights how Augustus' interventions served selective, often elite-focused aims, in stark contrast to Agrippa's broader and more civic-minded water policy—one whose legacy the *Res Gestae* strategically obscures.

architecture. Frontinus dismisses the "idle Pyramids" and "useless, though renowned" Greek monuments (1.16), while Pliny (36.75, 36.123) praises aqueducts as the world's greatest marvels precisely because they served public needs—baths, fountains, villas, and parks—and derides the Pyramids as "foolish royal wealth." Such comparisons reflect the broader Roman disdain for Eastern extravagance and frame water infrastructure as a distinctly Roman embodiment of civic virtue. Both authors explicitly credit Agrippa, emphasizing that his public works were not only feats of engineering but emblems of order and imperial legitimacy. Later expansions under Claudius and Trajan built upon, rather than replaced, Agrippa's system (Frontinus 1.13–15, 1.18, 2.72–73). Whether they solved the pressures of urban growth or merely eased them, his network provided the technical and ideological foundation for an imperial capital whose monumental utility rivalled its temples and forums.

## II. Agrippa and the Campus Martius

Agrippa's building program in the Campus Martius played a pivotal role in redefining the cultural, religious, and political topography of Rome, both in terms of its scale and overall impact. Originally a site of military training dedicated to Mars, the god of war and protector of Rome (Livy, *Hist.* 2.5, 3.63), the Campus Martius gradually evolved under Agrippa and Augustus into a civic and cultural centre. While its martial symbolism endured, the area became increasingly defined by assemblies, elections, religious observances, and public entertainments. Agrippa's ambitious redevelopment played a central role in this evolution, reshaping the space into a hub of urban cohesion and civic benefaction (Strabo 5.3.8).

Around 26 BCE, Agrippa began developing a new sector of the Campus Martius, later named the Campus Agrippae by Augustus in 7 BCE (Dio 55.8.3). This quadrant featured revised

Caesarian plans with Agrippa's own commissions, including the Pantheon, Basilica of Neptune, Baths of Agrippa, Saepta Julia, and Diribitorium. The Saepta, conceived by Julius Caesar as a voting enclosure, was completed under Agrippa and used for elections and public gatherings (Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 4.16.4; Suetonius, *Aug.* 43, *Caligula* 18). Adjacent stood the Diribitorium, a massive hall for vote tabulation—emblematic of the administrative scope of the early Principate.[99] Collectively, these monuments signal an ideological shift: from martial preparedness to civic participation, from elite performance to public inclusion. Agrippa's urban vision redefined imperium in terms of harmony, functionality, and shared identity, rather than conquest alone.

### i. The Pantheon

Agrippa was a pioneer in employing art and architecture as instruments of political and social influence, constructing monumental edifices that embodied his and Augustus' shared vision for Rome. These projects conveyed symbolic narratives that honoured the gods while reinforcing the stability and prosperity attributed to the Principate. Agrippa's architectural programme aligned closely with the broader Augustan propaganda strategy, while still permitting the expression of his personal agency—framed, however, as loyalty to Augustus.

The Pantheon—one of Rome's most iconic and enduring monuments—epitomizes this collaborative vision. Although the original structure was completed by Agrippa, it was twice damaged by fire and later rebuilt by Hadrian in 126 CE.[100] While Hadrian's Hellenizing influence is often noted, the structural continuity of the portico suggests that Agrippa's architectural and

[99] Platner and Ashby (1929: 151).
[100] Castex (2008: 107).

mathematical framework profoundly shaped the later design.[101] Significantly, Hadrian chose not to inscribe his own name on the new temple, but instead preserved the original dedicatory inscription from Agrippa's frieze: M·AGRIPPA·L·COS·TERTIVM·FECIT (M. Agrippa, son of Lucius, Consul three times, made [this]: *CIL* VI 896). By anchoring the rebuilt temple to its historical roots via Agrippa's name, Hadrian endorsed him as a foundational figure in Rome's Golden Age: not simply as an architect, but as co-author of the Augustan order. In doing so, Hadrian not only aligned himself with the legacy of Augustus but affirmed that Agrippa's contributions were inseparable from it.[102] The decision to preserve Agrippa's name was thus both commemorative and constitutional—it acknowledged that the values of divine favour, civic renewal, and imperial *concordia* were not the legacy of Augustus alone, but the product of a political partnership that defined the early empire.

A passage from Dio suggests that the original Pantheon was conceived to commemorate the foundation of the new regime and to associate Augustus with the Olympian gods by placing his statue on the portico and naming the structure after him (53.27). This plan reflects Hellenistic precedent, wherein rulers were honoured in proximity to the divine without formal deification. However, Augustus declined both honours, deeming it politically unwise to invite divine association so early in his reign. Instead, the structure was named the *Pantheum*—a title derived from the Greek Πάνθειον, combining πᾶν (all) and θεῖον (god[s])—a formulation that points to the building's Hellenic conceptual roots and defines it as a sanctuary for all the gods, with the domed

[101] Tortorici (1990: 34–42); Simpson (1997: 170, 175). On the mathematical framework of the Hadrianic Pantheon and its associated formal and theoretical implications, see Wilson-Jones (1989: 108, 118, 127, Fig. 5, table 1; 2000: 184–87, Fig. 9.11). Although Hadrian's Pantheon introduced variations in elevation, its fundamental layout likely preserved the proportions of Agrippa's original design. Hadrian acquired the childhood nickname *Graeculus* (little Greek) due to his early and frequent study of the language, which he pursued as vigorously as he did Latin (SHA, *Hadrian* 1.5; Dio 69.3.1).

[102] See Boatwright (2014: 260–262), who argues that the extraordinary scale of the Pantheon inscription—70-cm metal letters that far exceed other examples of Augustan epigraphy—reflect Hadrian's deliberate decision to monumentalize Agrippa's legacy. By preserving and amplifying Agrippa's name on the rebuilt Pantheon, Hadrian reaffirmed Agrippa's status as a primary architect of Rome's imperial order and visually inscribed him into the canonical memory of the Augustan Golden Age.

ceiling symbolizing the heavens above. Inside the building stood statues of various divinities—including Mars, Venus (adorned with earrings made from Cleopatra's pearls), and the deified Caesar—alongside figures of Agrippa and Augustus positioned at either side of the entrance (Pliny 9.121; Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 3.17.17).[103]

Dio carefully distinguishes the honorary statues of Augustus and Agrippa (ανδριάντες)—not designed for worship—from the cult statues (αγαλματα and θεῶν εἰκόνας) housed within. Caesar's image, enshrined among the gods inside, affirmed his divine status and visually articulated Augustus' filial connection to him—legitimizing the *princeps*'s own sacral authority as *Divi Filius*. The placement of Augustus and Agrippa's statues outside the temple hinted at potential deification and future inclusion, while also affirming their joint role as guardians of the sacred space.[104] Their statues, placed on either side of the temple's threshold, stood together as co-rulers—equally responsible for safeguarding the sacred space within and emphasizing their shared commitment to serving and protecting Roman culture, her citizens, and all that the Romans deemed sacred. Situated on the *palus caprae*, the traditional site of Romulus' apotheosis, the Pantheon further evoked Rome's mythic foundation and divine destiny (Livy, *Hist.* 1.16; Plutarch, *Romulus* 27).

Agrippa's construction of the Pantheon in the Campus Martius forged a powerful link between Rome's martial identity and its sacred topography. The building embodied the fusion of political authority and divine sanction, reinforcing the *pietas* of their joint administration. By dedicating the temple 'to all the gods,' Agrippa broadened the scope of divine endorsement beyond Augustus alone, presenting imperial rule as upheld by the collective will of the Roman deities. This universality emphasized the shared foundations of their authority, positioning Agrippa not

[103] Fishwick (1992: 329).
[104] La Rocca (2015: 76–77). Fishwick (1992: 331–335).

merely as the architect, but as a political and religious partner. The Pantheon thus functioned as both a religious monument and a statement of imperial unity—aligning civic prosperity, military success, and divine favour under the joint aegis of Augustus and Agrippa.

### ii. Basilica of Neptune (Porticus Argonautarum)

The Basilica of Neptune, constructed in 25 BCE, commemorated Rome's decisive naval victories at Naulochus (36 BCE) and Actium (31 BCE) (Pliny 36.4). The building was adorned with artistic representations of the mythological voyage of the Argonauts—a paradoxical choice, given Jason's ultimate failure, which contrasts sharply with the triumphant narrative of Rome's naval conquests. Yet this mythological allusion may have been intended to evoke themes of heroic exploration, leadership, and divine favour, aligning Rome's recent maritime supremacy with legendary voyages and the divine protection they implied. The Porticus Argonautarum and Basilica Neptuni are sometimes treated as distinct but adjoining structures; however, as Samuel Platner and Thomas Ashby suggest, the portico was likely an integral part of the basilica itself.[105] Dio refers to the structure as the στοὰ τοῦ Ποσειδῶνος (Stoa of Poseidon) and Ποσειδώνιον (Poseidonium) in his accounts (53.27; 66.24), reinforcing its association with divine maritime favour.

Situated adjacent to the Pantheon, the Basilica served as a visual reminder of Agrippa's pivotal role in securing Rome's dominance over the seas. His naval strategies and innovations were decisive in the Sicilian War and at Actium, where the defeat of Sextus Pompey, and later Antony and Cleopatra, ensured Augustan supremacy. As Dio notes, the Basilica's intricate naval decorations, including depictions of ships and nautical motifs, symbolized this dominance (53.27). Its dedication to Neptune, the God of the sea, further emphasized Rome's maritime supremacy and

[105] Platner and Ashby (1929: 81, 420).

celebrated the divine support that both Augustus and Agrippa seemingly possessed in their military and political achievements.

### iii. Laconicum and the Thermae Agrippae

South of the Pantheon, Agrippa initially constructed a small *laconicum* (sweat bath), which later expanded into the Thermae Agrippae (Baths of Agrippa) following the completion of the Aqua Virgo in 19 BCE (Frontinus 1.10). As the first large-scale public bathing complex in Rome, the baths offered luxurious facilities—such as heated pools and relaxation areas—to the general populace, amenities that had previously been reserved for the elite.[106] The complex was adorned with elaborate frescoes, paintings, and the renowned statue of the *Apoxyomenos* by Lysippos, one of antiquity's most acclaimed sculptors (Pliny 34.62, 35.26, 36.189).

Agrippa's design choices conveyed more than architectural ingenuity; they reflected a deliberate ideological statement. By uniting accessibility with luxury, he cultivated a sense of civic harmony and public welfare—values central to the Augustan regime. His sponsorship of this unprecedented public amenity bolstered his image as a benefactor of the Roman people, while simultaneously reinforcing his alignment with the broader vision of a city defined by prosperity and shared cultural identity. The artistic features, embedded within a utilitarian structure, revealed Agrippa's intent to integrate an aesthetic quality into the everyday experience and lives of Roman citizens. This synthesis of form and function was emblematic of his wider strategy: to harness monumental architecture as a vehicle for glorifying both the city and its leadership. In this respect, the Baths of Agrippa stood as a testament to his innovative approach to governance, ensuring that his legacy was both practical and admirable.

[106] Roddaz (1984: 279).

### iv. The Saepta Julia and Diribitorium

East of the baths, Agrippa undertook the reconstruction of the Saepta Julia. The structure was first envisioned by Julius Caesar as a replacement for the older Ovile, the traditional meeting place of the Comitia Tributa (Tribal Assembly). Although it is unclear whether construction had begun under Caesar, Lepidus is credited with initiating some activity. However, because he never formally dedicated the structure—despite remaining triumvir until 36—it was likely abandoned following his rupture with Octavian. In 26 BCE, Agrippa assumed responsibility for completing the project. He dedicated the renovated Saepta to Augustus, retained Caesar's original name, and embellished the structure with marble revetments and decorative paintings (Dio 53.23).

The prioritization of this project in the wake of the 27 BCE constitutional settlement signalled the regime's commitment to preserving Republican forms. The Saepta facilitated large public gatherings, particularly during elections, when citizens convened to cast their votes—cementing the Campus Martius as a site of civic engagement. Immediately to the south, the Diribitorium performed a complementary administrative role, housing the *diribitores* (election officials) tasked with counting ballots.[107] Initiated by Agrippa and completed by Augustus in 7 BCE (Dio 55.8.4), the Diribitorium had no Republican precedent, which suggests an increasing administrative demand under their regime to accommodate Rome's growing and more centralized electoral procedures.

These two structures together highlight a key dynamic in Augustan governance. While outwardly preserving traditional Republican practices, they subtly transformed electoral procedures into staged affirmations of consensus. Their monumental form and incorporation into

[107] Platner and Ashby (1929: 151).

the Principate's urban renewal programme reflect a shift from participatory decision-making to symbolic ratification—consolidating a vision of civic order in which public engagement and imperial control operated in tandem. Agrippa's role in realizing this vision demonstrates his importance not only as an administrator but as a principal agent in shaping the ideological architecture of the Augustan state.

### v. The Sepulcrum Agrippae

Although Agrippa commissioned a personal mausoleum—the Sepulcrum Agrippae—it ultimately served as a cenotaph, since Augustus chose to inter him in his own Mausoleum Augusti following Agrippa's death in 12 BCE (Dio 54.28.5).[108] Also located in the Campus Martius, within the northern sector between the Via Flaminia and the Tiber, the Mausoleum Augusti had already been erected by 28 BCE—not as a personal memorial, but as a dynastic monument for Augustus, his family, and his successors (Suetonius, *Aug.* 100). At the time, burial within the Campus Martius required a formal decree from the Senate, granted only to individuals of extraordinary distinction.[109] As such, the very act of constructing a mausoleum of his own, within the topography of the Campus Martius—which would have required explicit permission from the Senate—reinforces Agrippa's exceptional status within the Principate and his unparalleled, singular position within Augustus' inner circle.

The placement of the Sepulcrum Agrippae in the Campus Martius—a district already synonymous with his transformative building projects—symbolically anchored his legacy in the

[108] Augustus' decision to bury Agrippa in the Mausoleum Augusti, rather than in the Sepulcrum Agrippae that he had built for himself, was both an act of personal reverence and a deliberate political gesture, elevating Agrippa's dynastic status and advertising him as Augustus' constitutional equal. As Zanker (1988: 75–77) observes, the Mausoleum Augusti—with its vast scale, archaizing form, and allusions to triumphal monuments and royal burial mounds—was designed to project heroic stature and dynastic permanence. For a fuller discussion of Augustus' *laudatio* and its implications for Agrippa's public image and commemoration, see Chapter Four (pp. 130–140).
[109] Platner and Ashby (1929: 332).

civic and cultural revitalization of Rome. By embedding his monument within the same region as the Pantheon, the Thermae Agrippae, the Saepta Julia, and other significant structures that he commissioned, Agrippa ensured that his contributions to the Roman state were etched into the physical and social fabric of the city. This strategic placement linked his memory not only to the achievements of the Principate but also to the broader Augustan project of urban and political renewal.

Viewed in this light, the Sepulcrum Agrippae serves as a deliberate testament to Agrippa's ambition to secure his place within the city's commemorative and architectural landscape. Even if he had not married into the *domus Augusta*, Agrippa's contemporaries would have recognized his vital role as an equal partner in establishing the Principate and shaping the early Roman Empire. By leaving behind such a structure, Agrippa affirmed his enduring presence in the civic memory of Rome, asserting his status as Augustus' co-ruler and indispensable ally in the Republic's transformation into Empire.

### vi. The Stagnum Agrippae, the Horti (Porticus) Agrippae, and the Euripus Virginis

In tandem with his architectural and infrastructural efforts, Agrippa undertook the development of public gardens that embodied his commitment to beautifying the city while serving the needs of its citizens. The gardens provided a serene sanctuary for the citizens of Rome, exemplifying Agrippa's vision of integrating natural beauty with urban planning by creating recreational spaces for the public while enhancing the city's water supply. He emphasized the preservation and embellishment of the Campus' natural landscape, most notably through the construction of the Stagnum—an artificial lake designed for swimming and open-air bathing—fed by the Euripus Virginis, a manufactured canal lined with trees and supplied with water from the Aqua Virgo

(Strabo 13.1.19; Frontinus 2.84). Surrounding the Stagnum were the Horti Agrippae (Gardens of Agrippa), a sprawling expanse of public gardens extending westward to the Tiber River. After its incorporation into Agrippa's gardens, the Euripus became a hallmark of Hellenistic elegance and urban opulence (Cicero, *On Laws* 2.1.2; *Q.Fr.* 3.9.7).[110]

Following the precedent established by Caesar, Agrippa recognized the political and cultural value of urban garden space and developed an even more ambitious complex than those of Caesar or Pompey.[111] The Horti Agrippae also departed from traditional aristocratic garden design by becoming public property after Agrippa's death in 12 BCE; emulating Caesar, Agrippa bequeathed the gardens to the Roman people in his will (Dio 54.29; Frontinus 2.98). This gesture not only continued Agrippa's tradition of civic generosity but also represented a further evolution in his urban vision: the Horti Agrippae fused recreational space with deliberate urban planning, integrating art, nature, and accessibility in a manner that reflected his aspiration for a unified and aesthetically transformed city.

While Agrippa was not the first Roman elite to bequeath land to the people—Caesar had previously left his gardens across the Tiber to the *populus* in his will (Suetonius, *Caesar* 83; Dio 44.35)—Agrippa's Horti represented a significant expansion of this practice in both form and function. Caesar's gardens, though symbolically potent, constituted a posthumous transfer of pre-existing private property. Agrippa's bequest, by contrast, encompassed a purpose-built civic landscape: his gardens were conceived from the outset as multifunctional public spaces that integrated natural beauty, monumental art, engineered infrastructure, and ornamental water features (Dio 54.29; Horace, *Epistles* 1.6). These aquatic elements served as a living tribute to

[110] von Stackelberg (2009: 40). See Austen (2023: 12–18) for an overview of the nuanced terminology used to describe Roman gardens, as well as a critical analysis of the 'practical' versus 'aesthetic' binary in modern scholarship.
[111] Agrippa's situation was far more precarious. Under Augustus, public access to gardens increased, diminishing the role of Horti as exclusive sites of elite influence. Following Caesar's assassination, the instability of the Second Triumvirate and the early Principate rendered extravagant gardens a liability, as their owners often became targets of political proscription.

Agrippa himself—the man responsible for supplying water to the city of Rome and, through his dominance in naval warfare, for securing Rome's mastery over the seas.

Agrippa's inclusion of hundreds of sculptures—many imported from Greek cities such as Lampsacus—demonstrated both a commitment to enhancing the aesthetic character of Rome and a deliberate effort to democratize access to elite art, transforming the city's public spaces into venues of cultural enrichment (Strabo 13.1.19; Pliny 36.24). In this respect, the Horti Agrippae may be considered one of the earliest examples of a true public park in Rome. It is important to recognize that the primary precedents for such public leisure complexes had been established by Hellenistic monarchs of Asia Minor and Egypt, whose garden and portico spaces blended luxury, nature, and royal ideology into urban design. Agrippa's donation, therefore, was not simply an act of generosity—it reflected a deliberate, ideologically charged reimagining of elite benefaction. By embedding his name, values, and architectural vision into the physical and cultural life of Rome, Agrippa's position evolved from benefactor to one of the principal agents behind the construction of the Principate's public identity.[112]

The dual spatiality of the once private garden as a public space is thoroughly documented within the higher strata of Roman society, for whom visibility and accessibility were essential components of aristocratic self-representation. The Horti Agrippae—later known as the Porticus Agrippae once they were opened to the public—were developed in part through the renovation of the Horti Pompeiani, repurposed to highlight Agrippa's achievements in water management while diminishing the enduring commemorative presence of Pompey.[113] Initially marked by boundary

[112] von Stackelberg (2009: 78). The primary precedents for public parks in the ancient world were established by the monarchs of Asia Minor and Egypt. Over time, the association between gardens and imperial power evolved into a symbol of Romanization, as evidenced by the gardens at the palace in Fishbourne (Sussex) and those created by Herod the Great at his palace near Jericho.

[113] von Stackelberg (2009: 82). While the specific associations of the Horti Pompeiani as a monument may have changed over time, Agrippa's redevelopment of the site into a comparable 'memory theatre' highlights its function as a medium of

stones inscribed *privatum* (sc. *iter*), the Horti Agrippae became renowned for their public amenities, particularly their extensive art displays. These included more than three hundred marble and bronze statues—among them the renowned *Dying Lion* by Lysippus—imported by Agrippa from Lampsacus (Strabo 13.1.19; Pliny 36.24).

Bridging the tension between traditional Roman values and the influence of Hellenistic civilization, the Horti Agrippae functioned as a cultural tableau, integrating architecture, movement, and symbolism to align with Augustan societal reforms. While aristocratic Romans were accustomed to gardens designed to express intellectual and moral ideals, unobstructed access to such elite spaces was unprecedented for the average citizen.[114] These gardens invited active engagement, especially through the practice of walking (*ambulatio*), which encouraged visitors to interact with the symbolic elements and narratives embedded in the landscape.[115]

Agrippa's decision to bequeath both his baths and gardens to the Roman people in his will was not only a practical gesture, but a symbolic act of profound political and social significance (Dio 54.29.4). As a man of modest origins, Agrippa's commitment to fostering public engagement across all classes within the cultural milieu of their city resonated deeply with the Principate's broader goals of civic renewal and unity. By rendering these spaces accessible to the entire populace, Agrippa championed the idea that every Roman citizen, regardless of status, had a rightful place within the civic and cultural life of their city. This aligns with his public declaration, recorded by Pliny, that art should be displayed openly for the benefit of all, rather than banished to the country homes of elite peoples (35.26).

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self-representation; cf. numismatics and honours discussed in Chapter 1 (p. 21: note 31; pp. 26–27: note 40 and 41; pp. 31–33: note 54), especially those associated with Sextus Pompey.

[114] Cicero's Tusculan garden, for instance, reflected his literary prominence through its statuary (Cicero, *Att.* 1.6.2), while Marcus Junius Brutus' incorporation of Spartan topography signalled his admiration for virtues such as conservatism, military honour, and fiscal integrity—qualities associated with the early Republic (Cicero, *Att.* 15.9.1).

[115] von Stackelberg (2009: 65).

Through his Horti Agrippae and related projects, Agrippa not only transformed the Campus Martius into a sanctuary of leisure and culture, but he also articulated a vision of Rome as a shared civic domain. This vision reinforced the ideals of the Principate by blending urban functionality with public engagement and cultural enrichment, establishing his legacy as a pioneer in integrating art, architecture, and nature into the lived experience of Roman civic life.

### vii. Pons Agrippae

Agrippa also designed the Pons Agrippae (Bridge of Agrippa), which spanned the Tiber River and significantly enhanced transportation and water management in Rome. At the time, the city possessed only a few permanent bridges—specifically, the Pons Sublicius, Pons Fabricius, and Pons Cestius—and growing urban congestion had begun to strain their capacity.[116] These crossings, clustered near the Forum and Trastevere, had grown increasingly inadequate to accommodate the demands of a rising population, escalating commercial exchange, and expanding administrative mobility.[117] By constructing a new bridge further north, near the Campus Agrippae, Agrippa not only alleviated pressure on older routes but also facilitated the movement of goods, water, and people between key districts, supporting the city's spatial reorganization under Augustus.[118]

Although the Pons Agrippae is known only through fragmentary evidence, its location has been convincingly established by the discovery of four concrete piers approximately 160 metres

[116] Taylor (2000: 141–145).
[117] Platner and Ashby (1929: 399–401).
[118] Taylor (2000: 144–45) hypothesizes that Agrippa—whose plan to redistribute the city's water may have been in development as early as his Praetorship in 40 BCE—could have enlisted either Gaius or Lucius Cestius to complete the island crossing known as the Pons Cestius, in preparation for his transformative aedileship in 33 BCE. Both Cestii were politically aligned with Agrippa and Messala Corvinus—the latter of whom would become the first living *Curator Aquarum* after Agrippa's death (Frontinus 2.99)—and both were named among the distinguished beneficiaries in Gaius Cestius' will, indicating their integration into the imperial inner circle.

upstream of the modern Ponte Sisto, near the Trigarium. These remains correspond to a Claudian *cippus* marking the boundary of public land (*CIL* VI 31545 = *ILS* 5926: AD PONTEM AGRIPPA[E]), and the *selce* concrete used in their construction closely matches the foundations of the Thermae Agrippae and an Augustan vault of the Cloaca Maxima—further linking the bridge to Agrippa's known projects.[119] A later reference in the *Fasti Ostienses* (*Inscr. Ital*. 13.1: 207, 673) records the bridge's restoration under Antoninus Pius in 147 CE, attesting to both its structural resilience and enduring importance within the city's infrastructure.

Archaeological and epigraphic evidence together suggest that the bridge was privately funded, primarily to connect Agrippa's villa in the Transtiberim with his civic works in the Campus Martius.[120] One inscription (*CIL* VI 29781) refers to a *privatum iter M. Agrippae*—a private road attributed to Agrippa—situated within the Campus Martius. A second, more contested inscription (*CIL* VI 39087) delineates a tract of land extending from an unspecified point to the Tiber, then running along the Euripus and back toward a *piscina*. Although the precise dimensions remain uncertain, the inscription is generally understood to define the boundaries of property associated with Agrippa in the western Campus Martius—most likely the Horti Agrippae—and the *piscina* is best identified as the Stagnum Agrippae, situated near the northeastern end of the Euripus.[121]

As such, the Pons Agrippae appears to have stood at or near the outer edge of this bounded territory, carrying both pedestrian and cart traffic, and was functionally integrated into the Aqua Virgo aqueduct system, which crossed the Tiber to supply major buildings such as the Thermae Agrippae, the Stagnum, and the Horti (Frontinus 1.18). The approach route—believed to correspond with the modern Via della Catena—was likely extended or repurposed by Agrippa

[119] Harmanşah (2002: 191–192).
[120] Taylor (2000: 148–149).
[121] Taylor (2000: 147); Roddaz (1984: 238–241).

himself. This path curved around the Theatre of Pompey before descending toward the river, enabling uninterrupted aqueduct flow and providing direct access from Agrippa's estate across the Tiber, the ancient Villa Farnesina.[122] Notably, the project did not require a major re-planning of the right bank; its selective routing, combined with its generous water distribution to the Transtiberim—a region that would not receive another major aqueduct for over seventy years—suggests a deliberate act of political patronage. Agrippa's infrastructure projects regularly exceeded immediate public need, functioning as enduring instruments of imperial benevolence and personal legacy.

Beyond its function as a crossing, the bridge served as a vital extension of Agrippa's coordinated water infrastructure—physically uniting Rome's urban districts while advancing the ideological aims of Augustan renewal. It affirmed Agrippa's central role in reshaping both the spatial organization and civic identity of the imperial capital. Whether Agrippa himself named the installations associated with him, or whether these designations emerged posthumously, remains uncertain. Ancient authors such as Dio and Frontinus routinely attribute public works to their patrons, often retrospectively. The name 'Pons Agrippae,' like that of the Thermae and Stagnum, likely reflects this commemorative tradition rather than an act of self-aggrandizement—consistent with Agrippa's documented tendency to defer personal credit in favour of promoting Augustus.

[122] von Blanckenhagen (1962: 59–60); Beyen (1948: 3–21). The Villa Farnesina was likely the Roman residence of Agrippa and Julia, and it functioned as a major artistic centre at the close of the first century BCE. Its decorative programme appears to have been initiated after Agrippa's return to Rome in 19 BCE and may have been completed shortly thereafter.

## CHAPTER THREE

## PERCEPTION VERSUS REALITY: AGRIPPA IN THE EAST

The Roman elite frequently cast the East as a site of moral and cultural contrast—characterized by luxury, excess, and aesthetic refinement, all of which conflicted with traditional Roman ideals of austerity and *disciplina* (cf. Tacitus, *Ann.* 6.43, 11.16, 14.20, 15.31; *Histories* 4.17; Horace, *Epistles* 2.1.156–157).[123] Agrippa's command in the Eastern provinces and his urban interventions—particularly those evocative of Hellenistic royal patronage—may have elicited elite ambivalence, sharpened by suspicion and coloured by ideological bias. His administrative and infrastructural projects—such as aqueduct construction, naval development, and civic planning—were instrumental not only in consolidating Roman hegemony across the East and West, but also in enhancing Agrippa's reputation as a proficient and imaginative statesman. Yet the perceived alignment of his activities with 'Easternising' modes of rulership likely shaped how Roman authors evaluated, and at times minimized, his contributions. This chapter re-examines Agrippa's sustained prominence in the East not as peripheral or preparatory, but as part of a broader constitutional strategy: a deliberate exercise of co-regency, institutionalized between 23 and 12 BCE, that placed him at the very centre of imperial governance.[124]

### I. Agrippa's Consulships

Agrippa's third and final consulship in 27 BCE marked the academically accepted start of the Roman Principate. Augustus himself recounts this in the *Res Gestae* (34.1), noting the Senate's

[123] See Toner (2019: 15–29, esp. 17–20), which discusses Roman attitudes towards luxury and moral concerns associated with Eastern influences. See also Shushma Malik (2019: 30–46) for further analysis on how ancient authors like Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus firmly fixed the relationship between decadence and historical decline for the transition of the Roman Republic to the Principate.
[124] See Culham (2017: 283–293) for details on Rome's naval dominance post-Actium.

conferral of the title 'Augustus' in recognition of his consolidation of power during this period. Agrippa's three consulships (37, 28, and 27 BCE, the latter two shared with Augustus), each occurred during critical moments in Rome's transformation. These joint terms emphasized their partnership, further signifying how Augustus valued (and treated) Agrippa as an equal in governance. Their combined leadership permitted the inauguration of major public works, military campaigns, and political reforms that reshaped Rome's future—balancing Augustus' political authority with Agrippa's military and administrative expertise in a symbiosis more reflective of co-rulership than the subordinate role to which Agrippa is typically confined.[125]

### i. Agrippa's First Consulship (37 BCE)

In 37 BCE, the first *quinquennium* (five-year term) of the Second Triumvirate had elapsed and was not formally renewed until the end of that same year. Nevertheless, both Octavian and Antony continued to exercise their *summum imperium auspiciumque* (supreme authority over all public affairs) that had been temporarily granted to them under the *Lex Titia*, the law which had formalized the establishment of the Triumvirate (Dio 48.54.6; *RAA* B21).[126] Although no ancient source explicitly attests to it, scholars (see note 125) argue that Agrippa had been positioned for the consulship in 38, but his appointment was deliberately postponed to 37 BCE to stage his elevation as a visible and politically significant act. The relative obscurity of the consuls in 38 BCE—Appius Claudius Pulcher and C. Norbanus Flaccus—lends further plausibility to the view that Agrippa's promotion was carefully timed to affirm his indispensability to Octavian's regime.

[125] Augustus (Octavian) consistently held seniority in his prior consular pairings, reflecting his *auctoritas*, prominence in the triumviral regime, and constitutional privileges. Similarly, Agrippa's first consulship in 37 BCE demonstrates his position as senior consul, marking a promotion grounded in merit and strategic consideration. As Syme (1939: 187) notes, "Agrippa had done much in 38, and now he was given the consulship," suggesting a promotion rooted in merit and political calculus. See also Roddaz (1984: 145–146), who argues that Agrippa's consulship was long in preparation and deferred from 38 BCE.
[126] Vervaet (2010: 89).

During the Second Triumvirate (43–33 BCE), Octavian, Antony, and Lepidus exercised full control over the consulship, pre-selecting candidates—often themselves or loyal supporters—years in advance (Dio 46.55.1–4, 48.35.1–3; Appian 4.2, 4.7). While many of the planned consulships came to fruition, others were disrupted due to death, political reversals, or strategic withdrawals. For example, Agrippa shared the 37 consulship initially with L. Caninius Gallus, who was replaced by the suffect consul T. Statilius Taurus; Octavian was elected suffect consul in 43 BCE following the deaths of Hirtius and Pansa at Mutina (Dio 46.29–49); and Sextus Pompey was promised the consulship for 35 BCE in the Peace of Misenum (39 BCE) but never entered office due to renewed hostilities (Appian 5.73).

Consequently, Agrippa's first consulship in 37 BCE was not a retrospective reward for his achievements in Gaul the years prior, but a deliberately timed assertion of his strategic partnership with Octavian, integral to a broader effort to stabilize and consolidate the emergent regime. Although the formal collegiality of the consulship remained intact in theory, the realities of the triumviral period had transformed the office into an instrument for rewarding loyal allies and signalling political alignment. The decision to pair Agrippa with Lucius Caninius Gallus and Titus Statilius Taurus (suffect)—relatively obscure partisans of Antony—was calculated.[127] It coincided with the expiration of the first *quinquennium* of triumviral authority and the negotiations at Tarentum, where the triumvirs secured a renewal of their extraordinary powers for another five years (Dio 48.54; Appian 5.93–95; *RAA* B21). As both Sir Ronald Syme and Jean-Michel Roddaz suggest, Agrippa's elevation may have been planned as early as 38 BCE but was deliberately postponed to coincide with this pivotal moment. By deferring his appointment, Octavian and

[127] Fields (2008: 75), Bleicken (2015: 270). Gallus was connected to Antony by family ties, as his grandfather, Gaius Antonius Hybrida, was both Antony's uncle and father-in-law; Taurus, by contrast, had initially supported Antony but shifted his allegiance to Octavian after the Sicilian War.

Antony ensured that they each had a loyal representative—Agrippa for Octavian, Gallus, and later Taurus, for Antony—holding the consulship of 37 BCE. This arrangement facilitated the renewal of triumviral powers under a veneer of constitutional propriety, mitigating the risk of public backlash or accusations of tyranny by ensuring neither triumvir appeared to extend his own power directly.[128]

The timing of Agrippa's elevation made it both politically advantageous and symbolically potent. In the aftermath of Philippi, Octavian's position in Italy had been precarious (Appian 5.12–14), while Antony's eastern command carried greater military prestige (Plutarch, *Antony* 35.3–36.1).[129] In this context, Agrippa's consulship projected unity and control during a potentially unstable transition; his ever-expanding record of military and civic leadership—particularly in suppressing domestic unrest and managing critical infrastructure in the West (Dio 48.20.1–2, 49.1–2; Pliny 36.121)—positioned him not merely as an auxiliary or temporary administrator, but as the founding partner of the evolving order. At just twenty-six or twenty-seven—almost two decades younger than the standard minimum age for the consulship—his promotion, orchestrated by Octavian, signalled their unwavering political alliance.

In functional terms, Agrippa's consulship proved foundational for the next phase of regime-building. Already positioned as Octavian's most trusted collaborator at a politically sensitive juncture, he was tasked with the most urgent strategic challenge facing Rome:

[128] Syme (1939: 187); Roddaz (1984: 145–146). See note 125.

[129] Following the Battle of Philippi in 42 BCE, Octavian's standing in Italy suffered due to widespread perceptions of his weakness, illness, and lack of experience (Pliny 7.147–148). Dio (53.25.5–7) reports that Octavian was frequently ill and even contemplated abandoning political life, while Appian (5.132–136) highlights Antony's superior reputation and dominance within the triumvirate. Suetonius (*Aug.* 10–12) also emphasizes Octavian's fragile health and youthful inexperience. By contrast, Antony's successful eastern campaigns and royal alliances (Plutarch, *Antony* 35–36) enhanced his prestige, especially during Octavian's prolonged absence from public view. It is in this context that the decision to stage Agrippa's elevation to the consulship in 37 BCE, aligned with the renewal of the Triumvirate, takes on added significance. As early as the aftermath of Philippi, Agrippa and Octavian likely recognized that a single five-year term would be insufficient to reconstitute the Republic on their terms. The second *quinquennium*, secured at Tarentum in 37 BCE, gave them the time needed to entrench their authority—an effort that depended fundamentally on Agrippa's logistical and military capabilities (Dio 48.54).

neutralizing Sextus Pompey, whose control of Sicily and blockade of Rome's grain supply posed an existential threat (Appian, 4.82–83; cf. Chapter One, pp. 20 – 27, on the Sicilian campaign). Agrippa oversaw the reconstruction of the fleet, established the Portus Julius near Naples, and introduced the *harpax*—a ballista-propelled grappling hook inspired by the *corvus*—which revolutionized Roman naval warfare. His preparations and subsequent victories broke Pompey's blockade and secured the capital's food supply, sustaining his indispensability to Octavian's administration (Dio 48.20, 48.49–51; 49.2–8).

Agrippa's military and administrative leadership during this period ensured the implementation of the broader programme of renewal and martial coordination agreed upon at Tarentum earlier that year (*RAA* B21). While Antony reorganized Asia Minor and installed Herod in Judaea—ending the Hasmonean dynasty—projecting the outward continuity of triumviral governance (Appian 5.92–94), the victories in Sicily and the urban revitalization of Rome, directed jointly by Agrippa and Octavian, gave the renewal concrete expression. The appearance of unity between the triumvirs at Tarentum, reflected in the reciprocal exchange of ships and troops, depended in no small part on the domestic stability and strategic readiness that Agrippa helped secure.

The Triumvirate's original mandate had long since been eclipsed by a more ambitious, if unspoken, objective: not the restoration of the Republic, but the emergence of Octavian as the uncontested head of the Roman state. In this light, Agrippa's consulship was not a reward, but a precondition—laying the institutional groundwork necessary to legitimize the extension of Octavian's absolute power and long-term authority. Even before Actium, the foundations of lasting supremacy were being laid—not through unilateral dominance by Octavian, but through a deliberate political enterprise in which Agrippa was an imperative feature. Augustus' later

statement that his authority rested on the *consensus universorum* (*RG* 34.1) obscures this early dynamic. The imperial regime that emerged was not solely the product of public consent, but rather the outcome of mutual loyalty, deliberate long-term planning, and the calculated institutionalization of power. The Consulship of 37 BCE, therefore, was not a retrospective honour, but the first formal articulation of a political order that Agrippa and Octavian jointly engineered—an order designed to secure Octavian's unassailable supremacy through a carefully constructed partnership that would gradually redefine the constitutional architecture of Roman rule.

### ii. The Co-Consulships of 28 and 27 BCE and the First Constitutional Settlement

During their co-Consulships of 28 and 27, Octavian (who, in 27 BCE, formally receives the title of Augustus from the Senate) and Agrippa restructured the government and laid a political foundation that endured for centuries (Dio 53.16.8). In 28 BCE, they reformed the Senate, removing unqualified or inactive members to streamline decision-making and restore the Senate's authority, strengthening Rome's civic life and supporting its growing population. They also conducted Rome's first census since 69 BCE, essential for governance and long-term planning (Augustus, *RG* 8.2). The *Fasti of Venusia* (*ILS* 1623) states that the census of 28 BCE was performed by Augustus and Agrippa through the power of *censorial potestas* (*RAA* B31).

In the First Constitutional Settlement that marked the final 'restoration' of the Republic, Augustus relinquished his emergency triumviral powers and formally ended the Second Triumvirate by declaring that the Republic had been restored to the *auctoritas* of the Senate and Roman people. Augustus claims he conducted the transfer of the *res publica* in his sixth and seventh consulships, which were both shared with Agrippa (*RG* 34.1), signifying that this abdication was an extended process, not a single act as Dio, the most complete source for the First

Settlement, describes it (53.4, 53.8.2, 56.39.1– 4). By 28 BCE, the formal powers of the Second Triumvirate—long associated with autocracy and civil war—had since effectively been absorbed into Augustus' broader authority, yet increasingly exercised through, and in concert with, Agrippa, rather than by him alone.

To sever those negative associations with the Augustan name and present himself as the restorer of Roman legal and constitutional order, he publicly annulled the decisions and decrees of the Triumvirate, distancing the new regime from the Triumvirate's oppressive and sometimes arbitrary actions.[130] This act was symbolic, indicating a transition from the exceptional triumviral powers of civil war to the restoration of order under the Principate (Tacitus, *Ann.* 3.28). By framing this as a restoration of *leges* and *iura*, the co-Consuls presented Augustan leadership as a return to stability and traditional Roman governance. An *aureus* minted in 28 BCE commemorates this act of legal restoration. On the reverse of the coin, Octavian appears seated, holding a scroll—symbolizing the codification and enforcement of laws—with the inscription: *LEGES ET IVRA P R RESTITVIT*.[131] This imagery, along with the accompanying inscription, functioned as overt political propaganda: it not only distanced the Principate from the violence and instability of preceding years, but also conveyed the message that Augustan rule signalled the end of arbitrary domination and the advent of a lawful, stable regime. Although the coin does not depict Agrippa, it reflected the careful balance the co-Consuls sought to strike between consolidating personal authority and preserving the outward forms of Republican tradition. Certain domestic elements of governance—such as the election of magistrates and the nominal return of control over the

[130] Suetonius' comment that Augustus "incurred general detestation by many of his acts" while serving as triumvir (*Aug.* 27.3) reflects a broader contemporary discomfort with the triumvirate's violence, proscriptions, and concentration of power. The retrospective annulment of its decrees thus functioned as both legal reform and image management—allowing Augustus to dissociate his Principate from the excesses of that earlier phase and to present his rule as a principled restoration of order, rather than a continuation of autocratic coercion.

[131] Rich and Williams (1999: 169, note 2: British Museum accession number CM 1995.4-1.1). "He restored the laws and rights of the Roman people."

*aerarium* (state treasury) to the Senate—were restored, offering a measure of continuity and control to traditional Republican bodies.[132]

However, the provinces and their associated military commands posed a far more complex constitutional challenge. The re-emergence of autonomous provincial commands would have enabled ambitious generals to cultivate personal allegiances among the legions, echoing the crises precipitated by figures like Pompey, Caesar, and the Liberators. Yet, conversely, retaining all provinces and their armies under Augustus' personal authority would have laid bare the autocratic reality of the Principate, undermining the carefully crafted narrative of a restored *res publica*.

Augustus' staged abdication of extraordinary powers in January 27 BCE offered a solution. By formally presenting his renunciation of provincial and military control before the Senate, he cast himself as a restorer of constitutional norms. In a correspondingly performative response, the Senate protested, imploring him to retain command of four key provinces—Spain, Gaul, Syria, and Egypt—for a ten-year term (Dio 53.2.6–53.16.8; Ovid, *Fasti* 1.589–590; Strabo 17.3.25; Suetonius, *Aug.* 47). These territories were not chosen arbitrarily: they closely mirrored the triumviral allocations of 55 BCE—Spain, Gaul, and Syria—while Egypt, the empire's most lucrative and strategically sensitive province, completed Augustus' claim to Mediterranean supremacy.[133]

However, Augustus' power no longer rested solely on the symbolic legitimacy of his name as Caesar, but on the concrete reality of military hegemony—exercised, above all, through Agrippa. The imperial provinces reserved for Augustus in 27 BCE contained the vast majority of Rome's legions, and while Augustus retained formal imperium over them, the operational execution of military command was consistently entrusted to Agrippa. This arrangement was

[132] Rich (2015: 112).
[133] Eck (2007: 52).

already visible in 28 BCE, when Agrippa, as consul alongside Augustus, was granted half of the fasces and jointly issued the imperial watchword—military instruments that signalled real authority, not ceremonial honour (Dio 53.1.1–3). This was not a provisional exercise of Augustus' imperium, but a consciously structured form of shared command in which Agrippa functioned as his equal partner in the military governance of the empire.

Moreover, through a system of direct appointments—often bypassing traditional sortition—Augustus and Agrippa jointly oversaw the placement of governors and legionary commanders in the imperial provinces.[134] This structure of appointments allowed Augustus, as *princeps*, to maintain supreme authority in name, while Agrippa conducted the practical demands of imperial command across the empire. His repeated deployments—to Gaul, Spain, and the Eastern provinces, as well as his oversight of the naval fleet, the city of Rome, and later, Syria—were not *ad hoc* commissions but components of a coherent and deliberate system of shared authority.

The arrangement—conceived by the consular duo—should be reinterpreted as a formal endorsement of 'consensus politics.' This provided the Senate with a platform to demonstrate publicly their allegiance to Augustus and his restoration of the Republic, encouraging others to follow their example.[135] Syme accurately determines that for most people—particularly the plebeians—imperial rule required little explanation or persuasion, since it addressed their needs or expectations in predictable ways. Ergo, propaganda aimed at these groups may have been unnecessary or simplistic. However, for the patrician class, the transition from a Republican

[134] On the evolving structure of provincial command under the Principate, particularly in the imperial provinces, see Alberto Dalla Rosa (2021: 191–219, esp. 193–197). See also Cooley (2019: 71–87, esp. 73–77).
[135] Rich (2015: 109–112).

system to an imperial regime was more complicated. These elites, who had lost political freedom under the new system, required more nuanced justifications.[136]

The Senate's formal recognition of the Principate, and the role of the *princeps*, not only provided a legal and public framework for the new political order but also enhanced its legitimacy. This was particularly necessary in light of longstanding elite anxieties about 'Eastern' forms of rulership—frequently characterised in Roman discourse, particularly in Tacitus, as decadent, ornamental, and corrosive to *disciplina* (cf. *Ann.* 6.43, 11.16, 14.20, 15.31). Agrippa's prominent command in the East, and his adoption of Hellenistic architectural and civic models—such as monumental bathhouses, decorative fountains, and public leisure complexes—risked being interpreted through this lens, amplifying concerns that the Principate might be drifting toward autocracy masked by aesthetic grandeur. Over time, however, the patrician class came to accept the Augustan model as a constitutional compromise: one that promised *libertas* with *disciplina*, stability without tyranny, and civic order without the chaos of unrestrained autonomy.

Although Octavian declined monarchical titles, the Senate nonetheless conferred upon him the name Augustus and the honorific *Princeps* (first citizen)—a formulation that expressed his supremacy in terms of *auctoritas*, not overt domination (*RG* 34.3).[137] The success of this arrangement depended not only on legal ambiguity, but on the careful staging of shared rule. Agrippa's continued presence as co-consul—and as Augustus' most trusted political partner—gave institutional weight and political plausibility to this new structure. His support helped consolidate consensus among multiple constituencies. For the Senate and patrician class, Agrippa's longstanding loyalty and non-dynastic identity reaffirmed the possibility of patrician

[136] Syme (1976: 154).
[137] The nature of Augustus' legal powers will be addressed more fully in Chapter Four. However, as Paweł Sawiński (2021: 39) argues, the only definitive distinction permitted by the sources is that Augustus exceeded Agrippa solely in *auctoritas*, not in formal *imperium*.

influence within the new order. For the plebians and equites, his reputation as a victorious general and benefactor of the city—especially through his works as Aedile (as discussed in the previous chapter)—emphasized the regime's commitment to public welfare and service. Agrippa's prominence made Augustus' claim to reluctant leadership credible and gave the emergent Principate a co-regent whose authority, though framed as lawfully subordinate, was visible and active. His partnership thus rendered Augustus' singular elevation palatable: Agrippa's presence reassured traditionalists, legitimized innovation, and helped transform a potentially autocratic regime into a broadly acceptable and durable imperial system.

The reforms initiated during these years of joint consulship had a lasting impact on Rome. Agrippa's engineering, logistical, and military skills complemented Augustus' political acumen, allowing them to create a sustainable governance model based on consensus. Yet, between 32 and 28/27 BCE, Octavian's authority was legitimized not solely through popular support, but also through his official role as a magistrate possessing *consular imperium* alongside Agrippa.[138] The reciprocal image of shared power was critical. Agrippa's presence as co-consul was deliberate, not incidental: it consciously evoked the Republican tradition of paired magistracy, signalling that Octavian's emerging supremacy remained tethered to constitutional forms and collective agreement.

Such a calculated balance of power, with Agrippa positioned as a constitutional partner rather than a subordinate, allowed Augustus to maintain a public image grounded in Republican continuity. This was more than a political arrangement—it was also a narrative opportunity. Authors like Livy seized on the symbolic potential of this moment to portray Augustus as *unus vir*—the one man who rose by consensus, not coercion. Livy's use of the phrase *unus vir* operates

[138] Lobur (2008: 35).

less as a technical political designation than as a symbolic literary construct, signifying the highest form of praise he could bestow upon a character by marking them as singularly heroic and central to pivotal events in Roman history.[139] In Livy's historical framework, the ideal *unus vir* is not an isolated autocrat, but a singular figure elevated by collective necessity and public consensus. The two-man leadership of 28–27 BCE, culminating in the formal restoration of the Republic to the *auctoritas* of the Senate and Roman people, enabled Augustus to embody the *unus vir* ideal without appearing to seize kingship. Agrippa's visible loyalty, military achievements, civic benefactions, and status as a *novus homo* without dynastic ambition all reinforced Augustus' public image: he was the 'one man' necessary to lead yet appeared to do so within a collegial Republican order, rather than as a ruler whose authority undermined the very ideals he professed to uphold.

Although Livy does not explicitly name Agrippa within this framework, his thematic emphasis on consensus-driven leadership resonates strongly with the historical reality of their partnership, in which shared consular authority and Republican continuity masked the emergence of a new, dynastic order. Thus, Livy's *unus vir* concept and the historical Augustus–Agrippa partnership are not contradictory but mutually reinforcing. Agrippa's indispensability, both practical and symbolic, helped sustain the illusion of Republican consensus even as monarchical structures quietly solidified. His presence ensured that Augustus' elevation could be interpreted as the fulfilment of Roman ideals, rather than their betrayal.

[139] L'Hoir (1990: 30). *Unus vir*, in Livy's historiography, denotes a morally singular Roman who rises to prominence in crisis through consensus and virtue, not institutional overreach. While often cast in terms of symbolic singularity, this figure remains embedded within Republican values and magistracies. In the Augustan context, it functions as a rhetorical bridge—justifying Augustus' ascendancy without endorsing monarchy and allowing space for cooperative actors like Agrippa within a framework of moral singularity. Cf. Carlyle's 'great man' theory (1840), which similarly foregrounds singular figures as catalysts of political and historical development (see also Introduction: 8, note 4). While Livy's *unus vir* emerges from collective necessity and civic idealism, the modern historiographical tendency to cast Augustus as a lone architect of the Principate has obscured the essential contributions of figures like Agrippa.

## I. The Crises of 23 BCE and Parthia

Modern historians commonly follow the ancient authors' interpretation of Agrippa's Eastern expedition in 23 BCE as a resentful retirement (Suetonius, *Aug.* 66.3, *Tiberius* 10.1; Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.53; Velleius Paterculus 2.93.2) or a shameful banishment (Pliny 7.149; Dio 53.32), stemming from tensions with Marcellus after Augustus, on his presumptive deathbed, entrusted Agrippa with his signet-ring and unceremoniously named him 'successor' in front of Rome's leading Senators. Both assertions lack significant rational support, considering that when Augustus regained his health——and the implementation of the Second Constitutional amendment solidified his authority through an enhanced *tribunicia potestas* and renewal of his *imperium maius*——he immediately appointed Agrippa as his *de facto* co-ruler by granting him shares of both powers, subject and subordinate only to his own. This enabled Agrippa and Augustus to maintain alignment with republican constitutional law through a system of shared governance.[140] Agrippa, vested with *proconsulare imperium*, now held authority over the *legati* whom Augustus personally appointed in the imperial provinces.[141] Wherever Agrippa was without Augustus, he will function as διάδοχος Καίσαρι—Caesar's successor and co-regent—whether in the East, the West, or even Rome herself.[142]

Furthermore, retirement or exile after the bestowal of such significant powers seems highly unlikely. The 'shameful banishment' is even more implausible, as Syme so aptly indicates: "a political suspect is not placed in charge of provinces and armies."[143] Flavius Josephus, nescient of gossip from within the capital, appropriately defines Agrippa's position and assignment during his trip to the East in 23 BCE: Agrippa was sent to succeed Augustus in the government of the

[140] Koenen (1970: 220).
[141] Powell (2015: 323).
[142] Gray (1970: 234).
[143] Syme (1939: 342).

countries beyond the Ionian sea; he recognizes Agrippa and Augustus equally, as co-regents of the Roman Empire: "so that two of these rulers of the Romans were equal in greatness, Caesar and with him Agrippa" (*Jewish Antiquities* 15.350; 15.361). It is important to remember that the Romans had long been enemies of eastern rulers, and the restoration of Roman prestige in the region was of great importance; neither Crassus nor Antony could fully pacify or conquer the territory, and the standards of both Roman generals' legions were still in possession of the Parthians.[144] If one considers only a handful of events during the period leading up to Agrippa's departure for the East in 23 BCE, it becomes evident that this was a time of crisis for the Augustan regime that threatened the newly formed peace.[145]

### i. Augustus' Travels, Illness, and the Political 'Coup'

First, in the summer of 27 BCE, Augustus travelled to Hispania to embark upon his Spanish Campaigns (26–25 BCE), leaving Agrippa to oversee the administration of Rome for the subsequent three years. During this period, Augustus suffered an illness, a recurring issue during military engagements, which prevented him from returning to Rome for the wedding of his daughter Julia to his nephew Marcellus.[146] As Agrippa managed the extensive building initiatives and governed Rome in Augustus' absence, he effectively assumed the role of *paterfamilias* within the *domus Augusta* and served as the patron of the wedding ceremony (Dio 53.27.5).[147]

There were also significant political and military setbacks during this period, foremost among them the failed Arabian campaign of Aelius Gallus, prefect of Egypt. In 24 BCE, Gallus embarked on an expedition into Arabia on the direct orders of Augustus, whose aims, according

[144] Magie (1908: 148).
[145] See Badian (1982), who critiques teleological accounts of the Principate, instead framing its emergence as the product of contingent decisions and strategic improvisation—such as those of Agrippa and Augustus, as examined in this thesis.
[146] Powell (2015: 256).
[147] See also Sawiński (2013: 146).

to Dio, included surveying the territory, evaluating its population, fostering diplomatic relations, and, if resistance arose, securing the region by force (53.29.3). The undertaking, however, was critically compromised from the beginning due to the calculated deceit of Syllaeus, the Nabataean minister who served as guide to the Roman forces. As Strabo reports, Syllaeus intentionally diverted the army along an unnecessarily circuitous and inhospitable route, subjecting them to harsh conditions and delaying their progress for six months. When the exhausted troops finally reached the capital in Southern Arabia, Gallus attempted a brief and unsuccessful siege lasting only a week before retreating to Alexandria. The consequences were catastrophic: the vast majority of casualties were not the result of combat but of disease, hunger, and the physical toll of the journey. Strabo strikingly remarks that although thousands perished during the expedition, only seven soldiers were reported to have died in actual battle (16.4.23–24).

Further, there was a 'conspiracy' to assassinate the *princeps*. The year, either 23 or 22 BCE, has been debated *ad nauseam*, but the scholarly majority favours 23 BCE because of the direct correlation between the conspiracy and the trials of Marcus Primus and Varro Murena, respectively.[148] Primus, former proconsul of Macedonia, faced charges of treason for conducting an illegal campaign against the Odrysian kingdom of Thrace without obtaining permission from the Senate (Dio 54.3). Murena, the former Syrian legate, was summoned as counsel for Primus. The defence implicated that Primus was acting first on behalf of Augustus and, later, his late son-in-law, Marcellus. Macedonia was a senatorial province where neither Augustus nor Marcellus held the constitutional authority to give such commands, and an order to lay siege to a

[148] Atkinson (1960: 440). Jameson (1969: 219) suggests that Agrippa's deployment to the East in 23 BCE was prompted by the conspiracy of Varro Murena—consul that year and collaborator of Augustus—arguing that Agrippa's principal objective was to remove the Syrian governor (likely Murena's brother) and secure the loyalty of the eastern legions, whose potential support for the plot could have destabilized the regime.

neighbouring ally would have jeopardized the carefully constructed façade of the restored Republic.

The alleged participation of Marcellus exacerbated the accusation, since it substantiated anxieties of an imminent Augustan monarchy. Augustus testified under oath, vehemently denying the allegations; while some of the jury voted for acquittal, Primus was convicted (Dio 54.3.6). Murena was indignant with the outcome, publicly questioned Augustus' motive and *locus standi* (right to appear in court), and soon found himself embroiled in an unsuccessful conspiracy to assassinate the *princeps*. The thwarted plot also contributes to rumours regarding the decline in the authority of Augustus' longtime advisor and friend, Maecenas, who was second only to Agrippa (Tacitus, *Ann.* 3.30). When the conspiracy was uncovered, Murena avoided capture by fleeing Rome after his sister Terentia, the wife of Maecenas, warned him of his impending arrest. The implication was that Maecenas had betrayed Augustus through his failure to remain discreet (Suetonius, *Aug.* 66.3). However, this narrative of Maecenas' 'fall' should be treated with caution, much like accounts of Agrippa's departure for the East, which David Magie describes as "inconsistent, ill-founded, and incredible," noting also that its details lack reliability and its overall authority is weak.[149]

Intriguingly, Velleius suggests Agrippa opposed Marcellus' potential succession, a claim that has led to an onslaught of ongoing speculation concerning the dynamics among the three men during this period (2.93.2). However, if Agrippa held any reservations regarding Marcellus, he chose not to express them publicly. Upon Augustus' return to Rome, in 23 BCE, he fell ill yet again and called a meeting that included magistrates, prominent Senators, select *equites*, and Agrippa, to deliberate on the future of Rome.[150] According to Dio, Augustus intentionally refrained

[149] Magie (1908: 146–147).
[150] Powell (2015: 259).

from naming a successor (53.30); however, the act of handing his signet ring to Agrippa was profoundly symbolic. The ring was not merely a practical tool used to seal private documents: it functioned as a marker of executive authority and the ability to issue decisions in the name of the *princeps*.[151] The act of transferring it to Agrippa would have been interpreted by the Senate and elite audience as a deliberate gesture, implying that Agrippa was to assume sole command if Augustus died.

There has been significant debate over the implications of this act. While Dio remains adamant that Augustus did not formally appoint a successor—either in person or in his will—the ring nevertheless functioned as a quasi-official gesture: a form of symbolic succession that deliberately avoided the formal mechanisms of adoption or nomination. Given Augustus' famed *providentia*, as Duncan Fishwick argues, this gesture was no accident; rather, it represents the first tangible demonstration of that *providentia*.[152] Augustus had a vested interest in maintaining the artifice of Republican continuity and avoiding the alienating optics of dynastic imposition. The transfer of the signet ring allowed him to navigate this tension: it publicly displayed his trust in Agrippa, while preserving the notion that no succession had yet been arranged. This calculated ambiguity ensured that, should Augustus die, Agrippa could step into power without controversy or constitutional rupture, given his status as co-regent in all but name.

As previously stated, retirement or exile following the bestowal and enhancement of powers as significant as those shared with Agrippa appears highly improbable. In a manner akin to Velleius' speculation (2.93.2), Suetonius reports that Agrippa initially left Rome out of

[151] Simpson (2005: 181–184).
[152] Fishwick (2010: 251–253). *Providentia*, originally a philosophical abstraction closely tied to *prudentia*, was defined by Cicero as "the knowledge of things that are good or bad or neither" (*De Inventione* 2.160) and comprised part of a broader framework of rational foresight (*memoria*, *intellegentia*, *providentia*). Under Augustus, this virtue was elevated into a defining imperial attribute—*Providentia Augusti*—and came to symbolize the *princeps*' capacity to foresee and secure the long-term wellbeing of the state.

resentment, believing Augustus favoured Marcellus, only later presenting his departure as a self-effacing gesture to avoid eclipsing the youth (*Aug.* 66.3).[153] Pliny reports that Agrippa endured a "disgraceful banishment" ordered by Augustus himself, suggesting he departed unwillingly (7.149). Tacitus offers another reason entirely, stating that Agrippa was weary of life in Rome and sought retirement, which Augustus permitted (*Ann.* 14.53.3, 14.55.2–3). Dio, like Suetonius, attributes the decision to tensions between Agrippa and Marcellus, with Augustus resolving the conflict by sending Agrippa to Syria (53.32.1).

Still, it is important to note that, according to Velleius and Dio, it was not Augustus but the Roman public who viewed Marcellus as a potential successor. Paweł Sawiński argues that this perception—common in ancient accounts—reflects an *ex post facto* construction, shaped by hindsight and the later institutionalization of dynastic succession. In this view, Marcellus' role in the imperial family has been retrospectively elevated to the status later held by Agrippa, Gaius and Lucius Caesar, and ultimately Tiberius, thus overstating his actual influence within the new regime.[154]

### ii. The Retrieval of the Parthian Standards

Agrippa's mission to the East was not a withdrawal from power, but a premeditated deployment designed to consolidate and strengthen Rome's position in the region, prepare for Augustus' eventual visit, and lay the groundwork for the return of the *signa militaria* lost to the Parthians. Yet scholars have frequently accepted the traditional narrative that Agrippa's time in the East represented either a voluntary retirement or a disgraceful banishment, seldom considering

[153] See also Suetonius, *Tib.* 10. Tiberius used Agrippa's 'retirement' as the justification of his own withdrawal to Rhodes when he saw Lucius and Gaius Caesar rise above him.
[154] Sawiński (2018: 29–30). To summarize, Sawiński writes that there is not enough evidence to assume the *princeps* wanted Marcellus to be his political successor at all.

the possibility that he was, in fact, acting in an official capacity as co-regent. The preservation of these rumours was likely essential to the success of the mission: by concealing Agrippa's true authority and political role, the Augustan regime could deflect attention from the strategic importance of his presence in the East. Portraying Agrippa as politically sidelined or semi-retired allowed Rome to project a less confrontational image, mitigating Parthian resistance and enabling diplomatic manoeuvres to proceed without triggering suspicion or escalation. Secrecy may also have been necessary because the entire arrangement—implicitly trading a foreign usurper for the return of the *signa militaria*, particularly the lost *Aquilae*, emblematic of Roman military honour and identity—risked being construed as a humiliating capitulation via blackmail.[155]

At a moment when Augustus was still politically vulnerable in the aftermath of 23 BCE, he could ill afford the perception that Rome's most symbolically significant foreign triumph had been achieved through negotiation rather than martial superiority. A quiet, diplomatic victory was far more advantageous—especially if it could later be staged in Rome as a moral and political triumph, reinforcing Augustus' image as *Princeps* and restorer of order. It is therefore difficult to justify why modern historians continue to perpetuate the fiction of Agrippa's political sidelining—particularly in light of Eastern primary sources, the extensive powers he wielded, and the scale of administrative and diplomatic work he was tasked with. Amid the instability of the early Principate, Augustus was in no position to embark on another Eastern war. Following the reorganization of his powers in 23 BCE, the recovery of the standards lost by Crassus and Antony, and the consolidation of client-king alliances—especially with Herod of Judea—became essential

[155] In agreement with Sawiński (2021: 81), I maintain that Agrippa's mission to the East in 23 BCE should not be understood as a response to any single event. Rather, it ought to be seen as part of a broader strategic initiative linked to Augustus' planned Eastern tour in 22 BCE, as well as the negotiations for the return of the Parthian standards. Agrippa's role, in this context, appears to have involved preparing the ground for the *princeps*' visit—addressing regional priorities such as stabilizing the Parthian frontier, managing relations with client kings, overseeing provincial administration, and reinforcing loyalty to the nascent regime.

components of reasserting Roman supremacy in the region. If successful, Agrippa and Augustus would achieve what no Roman general before them had accomplished: the restoration of honour lost in Rome's most ignominious Eastern defeats. In doing so, Augustus could present himself not merely as a restorer of Republican tradition, but as the supreme protector of Roman interests and imperial supremacy abroad.

Upon his arrival in the East, Agrippa travelled no further than Mytilene in Lesbos—where many notable Romans had previously lived in exile—and spent the winter with King Herod, who had travelled to meet him.[156] The assignment was precarious and required incredible discretion, and to keep up the appearance of the rumoured exile, he sent only his legates to Syria, then Parthia (Dio 53.32.1). These legates were vested with leverage that was of dire importance to Phraates IV, rightful king of Parthia. Two years prior, Tiridates II, an expelled usurper of the Parthian throne, came to Augustus for support and with him he brought a valuable hostage: the son of Phraates (Dio 51.18). Prompted by the fortunate course of events, a plan to compel the Parthian king to return the lost Roman standards using the young Prince's life as leverage was set into motion. However, an arrangement that closely resembled extortion could not be initiated by Augustus himself, since he needed to avoid any perception of conspiring for the sake of personal prestige, which could damage both the reputation of himself and his regime.[157] Rather than Augustus, it was his most trusted collaborator—acting as co-regent within their strategically veiled diarchy—who was best positioned to manage this diplomatically sensitive mission and discreetly present the offer to the Parthian king.

Agrippa was successful in his mission, and, by late summer of 23 BCE, Parthian envoys arrived in Rome requesting the surrender of the usurper and the return of the young prince (Dio

[156] Magie (1908: 148).
[157] Magie (1908: 149–150).

53.33). That such a high-level delegation was dispatched to Rome at all is itself a measure of Agrippa's diplomatic success. It is likely that Agrippa had already communicated to Augustus both Parthian willingness to negotiate and the broader political climate in the region—securing not only Roman prestige and alliances, but also quietly collecting intelligence on Parthian internal dynamics, regional allegiances, and diplomatic vulnerabilities, all of which was information essential to Rome's long-term geopolitical strategy. While Augustus refused to surrender the usurper, he brokered a deal that if the surviving Roman standards and captive soldiers of Crassus and Antony were returned, he would then relinquish the young prince. To be sure, it was one of the greatest diplomatic triumphs in Roman history (Dio 54.8).

Agrippa remained in the East and maintained the illusion of his exile while cultivating crucial alliances, most notably with King Herod—an arrangement that would pave the way for Augustus' eventual tour of the East to retrieve the standards himself (*RG* 29.2; cf. Josephus 15.350). But before Augustus could embark on this mission, he recalled Agrippa to Sicily in 22 BCE and again increased his authority, further granting him supreme command (*imperium maius*) over Rome and the entire Western Empire in his absence (Dio 54.6.4–6). Agrippa's position at this juncture functioned in every practical sense as a co-ruler: he was Augustus' diplomatic surrogate, his political equal in delegated authority, and the most indispensable instrument of imperial policy.[158]

While Augustus focused on consolidating Roman dominance in the East, it was Agrippa who achieved military success in the West, suppressing a series of rebellions in Hispania that Augustus himself continually failed to subdue (Dio 54.11). As Michael Grant has noted (1969:

[158] On Agrippa's diplomatic authority in the East and his likely role in intelligence gathering during the Parthian negotiations, see Roddaz (1984: 324–328); and Syme (1939: 338, 342–348). For the ideological significance of the Parthian standards and the public commemoration of their return, see Zanker (1988: 183–192, esp. 187–188).

171–172, Pl. V 29), this campaign resulted in the issuance of a series of bronze coins in Spain commemorating Agrippa's victories. The obverse of these coins displays his portrait and the inscription AGRIPPA, while the reverse shows various civic titles, including MVNICIPI PATRONVS (Vives 11.35), MVNICIPI PARENS (Vives 11.36 cf. 12.41), and MVNICIPI PATRONVS PARENS (Vives 11.39). Particularly significant are the issues that include M. AGRIPPA COS. III. MVNICIPI PARENS (Vives 10.25, 11.27), which frequently depict Agrippa enthroned upon a curule seat and paired with the head of Hercules Gaditanus (Vives 12.42). Each coin in this series also features the *acrostolium*, a naval emblem reinforcing Agrippa's central role in Rome's maritime supremacy.

Among these symbols, the designation *parens* carries exceptional ideological weight. While *patronus*, though prestigious, signified a formal legal and social protector, *parens* evoked the language of civic origin and cultural foundation.[159] In Roman rhetorical and political vocabulary, *parens* denoted a figure whose role extended beyond mere benefaction—one who was regarded as the symbolic creator or father of a community. The application of this title to Agrippa, therefore, implies that his victories were understood not simply as military conquests but as acts of foundational significance, integrating Hispania into the Roman order through a combination of military success and civic patronage. This ideological resonance is reinforced by the inclusion of Hercules Gaditanus, a mythic civilizer associated with Hispania's legendary past, who further anchors Agrippa within a narrative of heroic foundation and cultural transmission.

Agrippa's portrayal within this iconography projects a powerful ideological claim: that his authority transcended the sphere of military command and extended into the cultural and political

[159] On the term *parens* in Roman civic and rhetorical language, see Stevenson (2000: 27–46, esp. 28–30. See also *idem* (2009: 97–108, esp. 97–99), which contrasts the ideological connotations of *parens* and *pater* in civic honours. See also Brunt (1990: 405–409), on the transformation of Roman elite titles into tools of imperial legitimation.

identity of the provincial communities he helped to integrate into the Roman Empire. When Augustus returned to Italy in 19 BCE, he staged a triumph as if the Parthians had been vanquished in battle, displaying the long-lost standards and soldiers as symbols of Roman dominance (Dio 54.8). Yet the real architect of both eastern diplomacy and western consolidation was Agrippa. Far from a subordinate lieutenant, Agrippa again emerges as the indispensable co-author of Augustus' imperial mission. His military achievements, public persona, and symbolic stature were not merely auxiliary, but fundamental, woven into the very fabric of the regime and integral to the imperial narrative Augustus sought to project.

## I. Establishing and Advertising the Co-Regency

From this point forward, and until the end of his life, Agrippa shared both the administrative and military control of the imperial provinces with Augustus.[160] His first eastern campaign was marked by significant diplomatic success, and his close personal relationship with King Herod offers a unique lens into how his authority was perceived by provincial rulers who were less influenced by the overly sciolistic Roman nobility. This phase of his career also signalled Agrippa's formal elevation within the *domus Augusta*—from a politically strategic connection through his earlier marriage to Claudia Marcella, to a position of central dynastic and ideological significance through his 21 BCE union with Julia, Augustus' only biological child. The significance of this elevation is most evident in 17 BCE, when Agrippa co-presided with Augustus over the Ludi Saeculares, ceremonially inaugurating—as equal partners—the *saeculum aureum*, or 'Golden Age,' they jointly established through their co-rule.

[160] Reinhold (1933: 169).

### i. Herod the Great

Josephus reports that Herod was said to be beloved by Augustus next only to Agrippa, and by Agrippa next only to Augustus (15.361). While this claim may be rhetorical, the mutual admiration between Herod and Agrippa is well attested and suggests that Agrippa's power and stature were clearly recognized in their own right by those outside the Roman Senate, especially in the eastern provinces.

Herod's honours to Agrippa were deliberate acts of political alignment. He erected an entire city and harbour—which has the architectural mark of Agrippa all over it—named Caesarea, and renamed the reconstructed port city of Anthedon as Agrippeion, an act that publicly acknowledged Agrippa's standing as a foundational figure within the empire's expanding frontier.[161] Moreover, in Jerusalem, Herod named the two most lavish apartments of his palace that dominated the western ridge, after Augustus and Agrippa respectively—placing Agrippa on an equal honorary footing with the *Princeps*.[162] These dedications functioned on multiple levels: they reflected Herod's genuine personal regard for Agrippa and served as calculated declarations of loyalty and affiliation with Rome's two central rulers. Herod was not paying tribute to a military deputy of Augustus—he was acknowledging a dual power structure that provincial elites like himself perceived with clarity. This recognition is especially evident in Herod's dynastic choices. His grandson—who would later become Herod Agrippa I—was named Marcus Julius Agrippa, combining the nomenclature of both Augustus' adoptive lineage (Julius, honouring the deified Julius Caesar) and Agrippa's personal name, which dominates the formulation.[163]

[161] Hohlfelder (2000: 243, 247); Gelb (2013: 84).
[162] Grant (1971: 130).
[163] Curran (2014: 500); Gelb (2013: 157); Grant (1971: 219–220).

That Agrippa, rather than Augustus, occupies the most prominent position in this naming convention indicates that Herod understood Agrippa to be not merely a proxy of Augustus, but an autonomous and integral figure in the Roman power structure. The continued dynastic use of the name Agrippa by the Herodian royal house—visible again in Agrippa II—reinforces this perception. In this light, Herod's architectural and genealogical tributes to Agrippa may be seen as a sophisticated diplomatic strategy: by inscribing Agrippa's name and image into the architectural landscape and dynastic lineage of his kingdom, Herod secured symbolic proximity to the dual facets of Roman authority—its political legitimacy and commanding military power. For provincial rulers navigating the dynamics of the imperial centre, such gestures provided not only political security but also a subtle recognition of the reality that Agrippa—particularly in the East—was not perceived merely as an agent of Augustus, but as his equal in power and influence.

### ii. Marriage to Julia and their Descendents

To further consolidate Agrippa's already established position within the *domus Augusta*, Augustus arranged for Agrippa to marry his only biological child, Julia, in 21 BCE—elevating him to a central dynastic role within the regime's constitutional and ideological framework (Dio 54.6.5; Suetonius, *Aug.* 63). This union positioned Agrippa not only as Augustus' closest political partner but as the sole viable candidate for co-regency—both in the East and across the empire.[164] By more decisively aligning the imperial household with Agrippa's authority through the highest form of dynastic integration, Augustus made clear that Agrippa's role extended beyond trusted advisor to *de iure* co-ruler of the Roman world.

[164] Reinhold (1933: 86–87); Marsh (1931: 27–38); Corbett (1974: 88). In Dio (54.6.5), a confidant of Augustus claims that the *princeps* had made Agrippa so powerful that there was no choice but to make him his son-in-law or put him to death. The fact that Agrippa so readily acquiesced to Augustus' wishes should not reflect subordination, but political prowess on both ends.

This arrangement was confirmed in 18 BCE, when the Senate renewed Agrippa's *proconsulare imperium* in the imperial provinces for another five years, and Augustus granted him *tribunicia potestas*—matching his own in both duration and constitutional weight (Dio 54.12.4–5). Agrippa now held the two most essential prerogatives that had formed the legal foundation of Augustus' power just five years earlier.[165] While Augustus remained the sole *princeps* and continued to surpass Agrippa in *auctoritas*—a distinction rooted in his adoptive divine ancestry, which Agrippa now tangentially shared as a legal member of the imperial family—such differences were retrospective and semantic. They offer little insight into how Agrippa viewed himself, or how Augustus intended his role to be understood at the time. Although Augustus never publicly named Agrippa as his successor, the bestowal of *tribunicia potestas* appears to have delineated a path toward succession (Tacitus, *Ann.* 3.56). Others might argue that it simply formalized Agrippa's role as co-regent. Either way, the following year, in 17 BCE, Augustus adopted Agrippa's two sons by Julia—Gaius and Lucius—clearly signalling the desire for a dynastic succession rooted in their shared lineage.[166]

Despite the adoption of Gaius and Lucius Caesar as heirs to the Principate, the eventual preservation of the Julio-Claudian line did not pass through them, but rather through their sister—Agrippina the Elder. As the daughter of Julia and Agrippa and the granddaughter of Augustus, Agrippina became the vital conduit through which the dynasty endured. Her marriage to Germanicus once again brought together the Julian and Claudian bloodlines—this time through a direct union between Augustus' granddaughter (Agrippina, a member of the *Iulii*) and Livia's grandson (Germanicus, a member of the *Claudii*)—linking the two dynasties by blood as well as

[165] Sawiński (2013: 149).
[166] Fishwick (2010: 253).

political intent.[167] Through her children—most notably their son, Gaius (Caligula), and great-grandson, Nero—the imperial line, and the office of emperor itself, remained tied to Agrippa's bloodline into the following generations.[168] While Agrippa was not a member of the Julio-Claudian house by birth or legal adoption, his role as the biological father of Julia's children—and thus the grandfather of Caligula and great-grandfather of Nero—positions him as a foundational figure in the Julio-Claudian dynasty's genealogical legacy. Although his contribution came through a maternal line—via his daughter Agrippina the Elder, rather than a son—he remains the only male progenitor whose bloodline extended into subsequent imperial generations. Since Julia was Augustus' only biological child, and Agrippina the Elder was born of both Julia and Agrippa, the Julio-Claudian dynasty endured as much through Agrippa's lineage as through Augustus'. In this respect, Gaius and Lucius were the heirs-designate, but it was ultimately Agrippa's daughter who ensured that the biological legacy of the dynasty descended as much from him as from Augustus.

Although the long-term survival of the Julio-Claudian line would ultimately depend on Agrippa's descendants, there is no doubt that Augustus also saw Agrippa himself as fit to rule Rome in his absence—not merely as a loyal proxy, but as a stabilizing regent and *de facto* successor. Had Augustus died before him, Agrippa would have automatically assumed control as Regent of the Empire until the *Principes Iuventutis* were of age to rule—not as an heir in name, but as a constitutional ruler whose position rendered any abrupt shift in power appear as continuity, not rupture.[169] This co-regency was not merely symbolic; it served as a structural safeguard against

[167] Barrett (1996: 13–14, 21). Barrett explicitly observes that Agrippina the Elder, in the 'Augustan scheme', was intended to provide the necessary Julian bloodline for dynastic succession through her children, and that she ultimately proved to be "the only Augustan descendant of her generation to sustain his [Augustus] hopes." See also Shotter (2000: 343), who further notes that Agrippina's marriage to Germanicus was central to Augustus' revised dynastic plans following the deaths and disgraces of earlier heirs.

[168] Wood (1988: 410).

[169] Sawiński (2013: 153). The grant of tribunician power and imperium—formally renewed in 18 BCE and further elevated in 13 BCE—placed Agrippa constitutionally just below Augustus and clearly identified him as the designated wielder of supreme authority should Augustus die suddenly. See also Rich (1990: 189) and Sawiński (2018: 44).

political instability, pre-empting the risks of factionalism, senatorial hesitation, or military opportunism.

In this arrangement, Augustus ensured that imperial power would not be vulnerable to dispute or usurpation. Through the dual foundations of dynastic affiliation and personal *auctoritas*, Agrippa embodied a mode of succession that balanced tradition with competence. His presence would have made the emergence of a rival claimant not only improbable, but unnecessary; and his long military record and enduring popularity among the legions made him uniquely capable of commanding both practical obedience and emotional loyalty.[170] In such a scenario, the conditions that later produced succession crises—such as the mutiny of 14 CE and the army's overtures to Germanicus in the wake of doubts about Tiberius (Tacitus, *Ann.* 1.31–40)—would have been effectively neutralized.

Agrippa's position was more than a pragmatic solution; it was a deliberate fusion of dynastic and meritocratic legitimacy.[171] As the father of Augustus' only male descendants, he offered a bloodline that combined the prestige of the *gens Iulia* with his own earned reputation for military command, administrative competence, and civic virtue.[172] The succession was thus given visible form: the future emperors would be the sons of both Augustus and Agrippa, bearing the former's name and the latter's proven capabilities. This arrangement temporarily resolved the pressing question of succession in a way that spoke to multiple constituencies. To the provinces and the army, Agrippa's administrative competence and military fame provided assurance of stable

[170] This is not a hypothetical projection: after Augustus' death in 14 CE, military mutinies broke out on the Rhine and Danube, and Germanicus was openly offered the empire over the designated heir, Tiberius (Tacitus, *Ann.* 1.14; Suetonius, *Tib.* 25.1). Such scenarios were far less likely under Agrippa's oversight, as he combined both dynastic legitimacy and military allegiance in a way that made widespread resistance virtually unthinkable.

[171] Rich (1990: 165–167, 179). Augustus even entrusted his signet ring to Agrippa—a gesture that modern scholars have interpreted as the closest possible signal of successor designation under republican forms. As Sawiński (2018: 44) aptly puts it, Agrippa served as Augustus' '*Platzhalter*,' a placeholder not in the sense of inferiority or contingency, but as a necessary guardian of imperial continuity, one whose authority was designed to bridge the generational gap between Augustus and his heirs.

[172] Reinhold (1933: 101).

leadership and respect for hierarchical order. To the senatorial elite, his longstanding status as Augustus' co-ruler—already vested with *imperium maius* and *tribunicia potestas*—rendered him a legitimate and institutionalized authority, one integrated into the Principate without threatening its equilibrium. His assumption of sole rule, even if temporary, would not have appeared as a break with precedent, but as a predictable extension of the existing regime.

Indeed, Agrippa's position had been so fully constitutionalized through repeated honours and grants of power, that obedience to him would have seemed expected rather than exceptional. The presence of such a stabilizing figure made power struggles among the elite, civil unrest, or military defection during a transition far less likely. In this way, the co-regency was not a contingency plan but the regime's primary instrument of continuity—a mechanism designed not to respond to instability, but to prevent it altogether.[173]

### iii. The Ludi Saeculares

By decree of the Senate, in 17 BCE Augustus and Agrippa celebrated the Ludi Saeculares to signify the new *saeculum*, a Golden Age of peace that they had ushered in through their combined rule as the sharers of *tribunicia potestas*.[174] Despite having briefly covered this subject in Chapter One (pp. 43–45), there is additional material evidence that further reinforces Agrippa's pivotal role in reshaping the Ludi Tarentini into the Ludi Saeculares. It has already been shown that the Ludi Tarentini underwent significant transformation to connect the new games with the concept of the *saeculum*—a span of time associated with the birth of a new age—drawing on first-century BCE interest in *saecular* transitions and influenced by Etruscan ideas of civilizational ages. Censorinus (*On the Natal Day* 16.7–17.8–11) and Livy (Fragment 56; quoting Censorinus) suggest

[173] Rich (1990: 165–167, 195); Sawiński (2018: 44).
[174] Reinhold (1933: 104).

that the games had been performed at intervals of approximately one hundred years, and there is no evidence prior to Augustus linking them explicitly to a *saeculum*, but rather fixed intervals tied to specific events or portents.

Agrippa not only participated in organizing the festival, but he also influenced its symbolic association with the new age inaugurated by Augustus. Extending back to 38 BCE, the coin he minted as governor of Gaul featured the *Sidus Iulium* (Julian Star) above the image of Caesar (Julius or Octavian) illustrates his early efforts to connect celestial phenomena with the legitimacy of Augustan rule. Inscribed with IMP DIVI IVLII F (imperator, son of the Divine Julius), the coin demonstrates Agrippa's foundational contribution to the propagation of Augustan imagery and alignment with the broader narrative of renewal and divine endorsement (*RRC* 534.1). The *Sidus Iulium* could also convey the comet of Venus Genetrix—honoured during Julius Caesar's funeral games in 44 BCE—which would link the comet's appearance to the deification of Caesar and the onset of the new Augustan *saeculum*.[175] Pliny recounts how the comet became a symbol of both Caesar's apotheosis and Augustus' divine favour (2.93–94), as did the coins minted for the 17 BCE games itself (*RIC* $1^2$ 338–340). Agrippa's earlier coinage in 38 BCE prefigured this strategy, highlighting his foresight in crafting enduring symbols of imperial legitimacy; the early imagery of the comet was integral for embedding celestial and divine motifs into public consciousness, reinforcing the narrative of a divinely sanctioned new age.

The festival's reformulation as a once-in-a-lifetime event reflected efforts to solidify this new age. The *Acta* of the Ludi Saeculares, as recorded in inscriptions (*CIL* VI 32323; line 54), emphasizes the singularity of these games, asserting that no mortal could witness them more than once.[176] This constitutes a narrowing of the definition of the term *saeculum*; previously tied to

[175] Weinstock (1971: 377).
[176] Schnegg (2020: 21).

generational or natural time spans, the *saeculum* now celebrated Augustus' achievements and foretold the continuity of imperial stability. Suetonius remarked that Augustus' death inspired proposals to rename the period of his life the 'Age of Augustus,' further solidifying the era's influence over the concept of time (*Aug.* 100.3). Agrippa's consistent role in promoting this imagery highlights his importance in bridging Republican practices with the Augustan reimagining of Rome's future. As co-organizer of the Ludi Saeculares, he staged rites that inaugurated a symbolic new age yet rooted them in ancestral tradition (*mos maiorum*). His continued performance of traditional magistracies alongside Augustus—especially the consulship and tribunician power—helped domesticate imperial innovation within recognizable Republican forms. By embracing civic, religious, and military traditions while co-directing Rome's ideological renewal, Agrippa helped root imperial innovation within the familiar forms of Republican continuity.

In her translation and commentary on the *Acta Augusta*, Bärbel Schnegg corrects an error in Theodor Mommsen's 1891 emendation of the inscription, which impacts the overall significance of Agrippa and his role in the Ludi as an individual. On line 119, Mommsen added IMP. CAESAR AVGVSTVS as the subject at the end of the line after the information about the sacrifice and *ibidem alteram* in order to connect to the preserved subject AGRIPPA of line 120—where the oracle only speaks of a female cow as a sacrifice for Juno (Zosimus 2.6.15f)—but this addition does not match the subsequent predicate in the singular PRE-CATVS E[st].[177] She argues that line 104, which refers to Augustus and Agrippa as praying, reads *p[re]cati autem sunt*; and line 140, where both are also involved in the Apollo and Diana sacrifice, reads *preca]ti sunt ita*. It can therefore be assumed that Agrippa alone sacrificed and prayed here, and that further details

[177] Mommsen (1891: 655–656).

about the sacrifice were given at the end of the line. When compared to the textual constitution of lines 123 and 132, this assumption is confirmed.[178]

In line 123, Schnegg has deduced that M. AGRIPPA needs to be added to the verb *praeit* in line 124. She found that Agrippa (and not Augustus) is the speaker here, which can be seen from line 132, where Agrippa is mentioned, without Augustus, as being present at the Juno sacrifice. If Augustus had been present in addition to Agrippa, he would have had to be mentioned first in the list of the present *Quindecimviri*. This also fits with the revised addition in line 119, according to which Agrippa alone performed the sacrifice to Juno. They are the introductory lines to the supplication prayer, which Agrippa recited to the matrons. The supplication occurred directly after the sacrifice, since the enumeration of those present, which concludes the sacrifice, only follows the supplication prayer (line 132). The supplication of the one hundred and ten matrons can be regarded as a highlight of the rites performed during the day. The reference to QVIBVS DENVN[tiatum erat refers to the preparatory edict of lines 64–89, in which the final lines also speak of the *matres familiae* of the *supplicatio*. The phrase *praeire in verba* is recorded as meaning to recite prayers or vows; Agrippa, standing before the kneeling matrons, would have recited the prayer to them. The act of *supplicatio* was always an extraordinary measure to appeal to the gods in cases of particular threat or, after being saved from such threats; it was ordered by the state and, after consulting the Sibylline books, the Quindecimviri handled its execution—which is why it is assumed that it was performed according to the *rite Graecus*. Schnegg notes it was one rite of the Roman religion that had a great effect on the population because of the participation of many people and their extraordinary nature.[179]

[178] Schnegg (2020: 64).
[179] Schnegg (2020: 148–149).

Through Shnegg's analysis, the religious acts of lines 103–109, which describe those on the first day that occur in the centre of the city, on the Capitol, and in front of the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximusque, also become more significant. It is notable that the introduction to the prayer only states that an ox was sacrificed to Jupiter by Augustus, followed by the fact that a second ox was sacrificed in the same place by Agrippa, and not that two individual oxen were sacrificed to Jupiter. She contends that this introduction goes back to the prayer text, in which each of the two sacrificants named an ox, and that this formulation clarifies that Augustus and Agrippa did not perform two sacrifices together, but each one a sacrifice in turn.[180] This interpretation also resolves a clear inconsistency in the following text: line 104 introduces the prayer text with *p[re]cati autem sunt ita*, which could also mean that the two prayed together. In the prayer itself, however, line 106 says: *quaeso precorque*; this means that everyone said a prayer to his sacrifice, and because it was the same prayer in both cases—and the *commentarium* did not want to leave out both—the prayers are preceded by: *precati autem sunt ita*. This explicates Agrippa was not performing an assisting function here, as the *quindecimviri* did during other sacrifices, but rather acted as an independent sacrificer of a second ox after Augustus.[181]

Alongside philological analysis, the offering provides further support for the view that Agrippa conducted this sacrifice alone. The oracle only mentions one female ox for Juno, whereas it speaks of several male oxen for Jupiter (Zosimus 2.6.15; 2.6.12). Under these conditions, it must be assumed that the sacrifice to Juno on the second day, on line 119, was performed by Agrippa alone, who sacrificed a heifer that was white. It is important that the exclusion of Augustus from the sacrifice of the second day solves the problem of his sudden absence in line 132—and does not alter the regularity of the distribution of the sacrifices—as Augustus seems to have taken sole

[180] Schnegg (2020: 137).
[181] Schnegg (2020: 138).

execution for the sacrifices of the nights. The sacrifice to Jupiter, the highest of all gods, was performed by Augustus and Agrippa together, as were the sacrifices to Apollo and Diana—indicated by the phrase *preca]tique sunt ita* in line 140, which implies of the participation of both. Furthermore, Schnegg believes that there is no reason to assume that all three daily sacrifices were therefore performed jointly by Augustus and Agrippa. Rather, that Agrippa was allowed to play the leading role on one day alone, in order to step out of Augustus' shadow. One reason is the birth of Agrippa's sons with Julia in 20 and 17 BC—which undisputedly fortified Agrippa's position within the dynastic legacy of Augustus—and his participation in the exercise of distinct and autonomous power, was demonstrated throughout the games.[182]

The deliberate individual and joint participation in the celebration can also be placed in this context. Together with Augustus, Agrippa was the only member of the *Quindecimviri* to perform the sacrifices to Jupiter on 1 June at the Capitol, as well as the sacrifices to Apollo and Diana on the Palatine Hill on the final day. On the second day of the Games, Agrippa had the distinguished honour of performing the sacrifice of a heifer to Juno independently of Augustus and, subsequently, together with the matrons, reciting the supplication prayer. Alongside his marriage to Julia and the birth of their three children, Agrippa and his wife embodied the ideals of the Augustan family, thereby implicitly endorsing the emperor's marriage legislation.[183] The exclusive and distinct involvement of Agrippa, according to Schnegg, communicated that Agrippa was as integral to the Augustan regime as Augustus himself, and emphasized the *princeps*'

[182] Schnegg (2020: 147–148).
[183] The *Lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus*, a law on marriage introduced by Augustus in 18 BC, aimed to increase the number of children in elite families (Augustus, *RG* 8.5; Galinsky 1996: 100). Reconstructing the details of this law is challenging due to the complex transmission of the text. In the same year, Augustus also proposed the *Lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis*, a law addressing adultery: Edwards (1993: 34–62); Galinsky (1996: 128–140).

dynastic wishes, which were publicly expressed in the prayers of the secular celebration with the concluding statement: *mihi domo familiaeque*.[184]

## I. Agrippa in the East

It was not long after the celebration that Agrippa, accompanied by his wife and children, once again departed for the East. The sources for this period are scant, but he is said to have landed in Syria with his family by 15 BCE.[185] However, the material evidence of his generous benefaction throughout his entire life and career is attested by inscriptions from across the Roman world, including many of the places he visited. These inscriptions have allowed a speculative, non-linear reconstruction of his far-reaching influence and journeys across the Empire.

The nature of Agrippa's overarching authority can be visibly measured through epigraphic and material evidence from numerous buildings, structures, and commemorations erected by him personally, or by others in his honour. Aside from those which have already been detailed in previous chapters (for example, the Pantheon: pp. 58–61), the Pons Agrippae in Rome is known from inscriptions (*CIL* VI 39087, VI 29781 = *ILS* 6003; *CIL* VI 31545 in Ostia). Other examples include Agrippa's mausoleum, which is confirmed to have been in the Campus Martius by Fragments 72 and 103 on the Map of Rome.[186] Roman warehouses or granaries, the Horreae Agrippae**,** are recorded (*CIL* VI 2.10026), and an inscription chronicles a *vestiarius* (financial manager) who worked there (*CIL* VI 2.9972). A pedestal, which had once been part of a column made of pavonazzetto marble from Agrippa's own quarry in Phrygia (*CIL* XV p.988), was found

[184] Schnegg (2020: 275–276).
[185] Reinhold (1933: 106).
[186] La Rocca (1999: 273–274).

but is now lost. Finally, a Greek inscription from the Jewish cemetery in Rome mentions the Agrippision, a synagogue, named after him (*CIG* VI 9907; IV 9906).

Agrippa was celebrated as the patron for several Italian towns, including Claterna (*CIL* XI 6814), Cubulteria (*CIL* X 1.4616), Gnathia (*CIL* IX 262), Puteoli (*CIL* X 1.1682 = *ILS* 1.933), Reate (*CIL* IX 4677 = *ILS* 6543) and Rufrae (*CIL* X 1.4831). The city of Nîmes in Gaul provides some of the most significant surviving material evidence on Agrippa, with the temple he built, known today as the Maison Carrée (square house), in 16 or 15 BCE.[187] It stands today as the best-preserved temple from this period, but its importance stems from the inscription that was once present on the architrave. The French epigrapher, Émile Espérandieu, studied the pattern of holes where the bronze letters were attached to the architrave and determined it once read: M AGRIPPA L F COS III IMP TRIBVN POTEST III COL AVG NEM DAT.[188] Two other monumental architraves in Nîmes originating from other structures—a bathing complex and a temple dedicated to Diana (*CIL* XII 3154)—feature dedicatory inscriptions to Agrippa (*CIL* XII 3153). In Portugal (Lusitania), the theatre of the colonia Emerita Augusta has a dedication mounted above the entrance archway confirming that Agrippa was its benefactor (*CIL* II 472, 474).

### i. Eastern Provinces (Greece)

However, Agrippa's greatest impact was on the Eastern provinces and Syria. First, he contributed significantly to Roman colonization efforts in the East. Unlike in other regions, settlements here focused on practical needs, such as providing land for veterans, reviving local economies, and establishing military outposts. Agrippa played a central role in founding key colonies during his

[187] Powell (2015: 284).
[188] Espérandieu (1919: 337): "Marcus Agrippa, son of Lucius, Consul three times, Imperator, holder of the tribunician power three times, gave [this building] to the colony of Augusta Nemausus." Thomas and Witschel (1992: 135–177), however, demonstrate that Roman rebuilding inscriptions often employ ideologically charged and non-denotative language, blurring the line between actual construction and symbolic civic messaging. See also Fagan (1996: 81–93).

second visit to the East around 15 BCE, including Patras, Berytus (modern Beirut), and Alexandria Troas.[189] At Patras, the colony supported economic growth and complemented Julius Caesar's earlier work in Corinth.[190] Agrippa helped settle veterans from the legions and integrated locals into the colony. The colony at Berytus had both economic and military purposes: Agrippa stationed two legions there and expanded its territory to secure Roman control (Strabo 16.2.19). Evidence suggests that he personally oversaw its reconstruction after significant destruction (*CIL* III 156: I.O.M. PRO SAL[V]TE AGRIP[PAE]). Although less clearly connected to Agrippa, Alexandria Troas was founded during this period and became a vital trade hub linking the Mediterranean to the Black Sea (Pliny 5.124).

As Agrippa travelled East, inscriptions bearing his name have been discovered in over a dozen locations throughout Greece.[191] The two Greek inscriptions from Kalymnos and Corcyra, both of which explicitly identify Agrippa as their πάτρων (patron), provide rare but mutually reinforcing epigraphic evidence for his commemoration in the eastern provinces as a figure of independent and elevated authority. Though each draw upon the conventional vocabulary of Hellenistic civic euergetism, they do so in a way that contributes to a coherent ideological portrayal of Agrippa—not as subservient to Augustus, but as an autonomous and authoritative figure. The honours they record reflect a shared provincial perception: that Agrippa was not merely a Roman benefactor, but someone endowed with the symbolic and political stature of a ruling sovereign.

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[189] Roddaz (1984: 431–432).

[190] Bowersock (1965: 94).

[191] These include: Andros (*IG* XII 5.740), Argos (*RAA* C24), Athens (*IG* 3.575, 3.576), Corinth—as patron (Dean [*AE*] 1919: 167), Epidaurus (*IG* 4.1363), Kalymnos—as patron (*ASAA* 6–7 (1944–1945[1952]): 164, no. 141 = Segre [*AE*] 1954: II), Eresos on Lesbos (*IGR* 4.7 = *IG* 12.2.531), Gytheio (*IG* 5.1.1166), Corcyra—as patron (*CIG* 1878; *IG* IX 1.723), Megara (*IG* 7.64–65), Mytilene on Lesbos (*IG* 12.2.164; *IGR* 4.65b = I*G* 12.2.169; *IGR* 4.69 = *IG* 12.2.170; *IGR* 4.78a = *IG* 12.2.172), Oropos (*IG* 7.349), Sparta (*CIG* I 1299, *CIL* III 494 = *IG* 5.1.374), Delos (*SIG* II 6.777), Taenarum (*CIL* 3.491 = *IG* 5.1), and Thassos (*IG* 12.8.381b; *ILS* 2.2.8784). Even further East, epigraphic evidence of Agrippa's benefactions, travels, and influence have also been found at Ephesus (*ILS* 8897; another important inscription, as it designates Agrippa with the title 'IMP' following his name), Troy (*CIG* 3609*; Syll.*[3] 776*; IGR* 4.204), Mysia (*CIG* 2.3609), and Cyme (*SEG* XVIII 555; *I. Mus. Leyden* no. 57; *RAA* C22). Moving towards Anatolia, inscriptions have been found throughout Lycia at Letoon (*F. Xanthos* [Balland] VII 23–24), Myra (*IGR* 3.719), and Patara (*SEG* 44 1208), as well as in Syria at Berytus (*CIL* 3.1.156).

The Kalymnian inscription, while formulaic in structure, reflects a deliberate and formal act of public recognition. The use of the aorist verb ἐτίμασε—third-person singular indicative of τιμάω—marks the act of honouring Agrippa as a sanctioned and completed civic decision, consistent with established epigraphic conventions.[192] The substitution of the Doric δᾶμος for the Attic δῆμος further asserts a regional civic voice, reinforcing local identity through dialectal continuity. The reflexive genitive ἑατοῦ (their own) intensifies this relationship, suggesting a reciprocal identification between Agrippa and the Kalymnian polity—an expression not only of formal honour, but of political intimacy.[193] The dual honorifics πάτρων and εὐεργέτης situate Agrippa within a longstanding tradition of Hellenistic civic honours conferred upon individuals who rendered material or political assistance.[194] However, in this context, their application to Agrippa carries implications beyond routine public gratitude. Even within the constraints of conventional civic vocabulary, these titles function as instruments of political elevation—marking Agrippa not simply as a benefactor, but as a figure whose authority was recognized as integral to the civic order.

The Corcyraean inscription, by contrast, presents a more overt and ideologically intensified depiction of Agrippa's authority. Here, he is commemorated not only as πάτρων, but also as σωτήρ (saviour) and αὐτοκράτωρ (imperator/emperor)—titles that carry significant ideological weight in both Hellenistic and Roman contexts. The term σωτήρ was traditionally reserved for rulers or deities credited with delivering cities from crisis, and its use here implies both salvific function

[192] While direct commentary on this specific usage is scarce, the general function of the aorist tense in ancient Greek—to present actions as complete and bounded—is well-established. This aspectual nuance aligns with the purpose of honorific inscriptions, which aimed to record and commemorate formally completed civic actions. On the aspectual force of the aorist in Classical Greek and its relevance for expressing bounded, completed actions, see Rijksbaron (2002).
[193] Colvin (2007: 44–45). On the use of reflexive pronouns, see Smyth (1920: §1230–1235).
[194] See Ma (1999: 182–193) for a comprehensive analysis of 'the language of euergetism' and the civic rhetoric surrounding honorific titles such as πάτρωνα and εὐεργέτα. See also Gygax (2016) for a concise overview of the institutional and rhetorical foundations of euergetism as it developed in the Hellenistic period.

and elevated, potentially divine, status.[195] Although originally designating military commanders with full authority, by the early Principate, αὐτοκράτωρ had become closely associated with imperial sovereignty, and in Greek contexts was frequently used to denote Augustus himself.[196] Terms such as αὐτοκράτωρ, Καῖσαρ, and βασιλεὺς came to function as recognizable designations for the Roman emperor, irrespective of their Latin equivalents. As with ἡγεμών—which maintained descriptive validity even outside its formal adoption as a Greek analogue for *princeps*—αὐτοκράτωρ likewise gained currency as a culturally resonant title for the emperor, reflecting his sovereign power beyond the context of military command. Its application to Agrippa thus signals a level of parity, at least in local perception, between Agrippa and Augustus as co-rulers.

The final phrase, θεοῖς (to the gods), reinforces the heroizing—if not explicitly cultic—character of the dedication, aligning Agrippa with figures deemed worthy of divine honours within the civic pantheon.[197] While such language was not uncommon in the evolving epigraphic idiom of imperial honours, its attribution to Agrippa—rather than both he and Augustus—suggests an intentional re-framing of imperial hierarchy at the local level. In this context, Agrippa appears not merely as a powerful general or administrator, but as a quasi-divine sovereign whose ideological standing was recognized independently of, and theoretically equal to, that of Augustus. Taken together, these inscriptions obfuscate the traditional historiographical portrayal of Agrippa as a subordinate confined to Augustus' shadow.[198] The recurrence of such elevated language in two geographically and politically distinct cities implies that this was not an isolated anomaly, but part

[195] Persig (2022: 21–22).
[196] Syme (1958: 50–51).
[197] Price (1984: 245–246).
[198] The Kalymnian text situates him within traditional civic frameworks of patronage and benefaction, while the Corcyraean inscription elevates him to a plane of near-divine sovereignty. Both use reflexives (ἑατοῦ/αὐτοῦ), which further suggest a reciprocal identification between Agrippa and the communities that honoured him—not as an external Roman magistrate, but as an integral part of the local political and ideological order.

of a broader provincial strategy for conceptualizing Agrippa's power in imperial terms—on a level commensurate with that of the *princeps* himself.

While it is understood that the Eastern portion of the Roman Empire was initially entrusted to Agrippa's command in 23 BCE, it has been shown that Agrippa subsequently governed the Eastern territories as an *Imperator* and maintained this role, with a return to the Western provinces for a period of four to five years, until 13 BCE (Josephus 16.86: Αγρίππα γε μὴν ἀνιόντος εἰς τὴν ῎Ρώμην μετὰ τὴν διοίκησιν τῶν ἐπὶ τῆς ᾽Ασίας δεκετῆ γεγενημέν ~ when Agrippa went up to Rome after the administration of Asia which had lasted ten years").[199] Scholarly consensus advocates that the territories that Agrippa 'ruled' himself in the East encompassed only a portion of the Asiatic continent (Dio 53.32.1; cf. Josephus 15.350) and rarely investigated are the notable disparities between the perspectives of Josephus and Dio. Most modern scholars appear to favour the views of Dio's while seemingly obscuring this distinction enumerated by Josephus.[200] Although Agrippa's stay on Lesbos was partly orchestrated to maintain the appearance of his political exile, the reality of his position suggests otherwise. His method of command, the formal authorization he had received, and his right to bear the title *Imperator* placed him in a role closely aligned with that of the *princeps*. Like Augustus, Agrippa directed military and political operations

[199] See Vollgraff (1919: 268f.), who argues that Agrippa's authority in the East from 23 BCE extended beyond Syria to include senatorial provinces such as Achaia and Asia, citing Josephus (15.350) and an inscribed letter to the Senate of Argos in which Agrippa styled himself "*tamquam rectorem et dominum*" (as ruler and lord) and claimed to have restored their abolished rights—language suggestive of formal provincial governance.

[200] Wilhelm Dittenberger, in his commentary (*Syll.*[3] 776) on *CIG* 3609—"Μᾶρκον Ἀγριππαν τὸν συνγενέν | και πάτρωνα τῆς πόλεως και εὐεργέτην, επι τῇ προς την θεον | ευσεβεια και επι τῇ προς τον δῆμον | ευνοια ~ Marcus Agrippa, kinsman and patron of the city, and benefactor, for his piety towards the goddess and for his benevolence towards the people"—agrees that Agrippa presided over the provinces of Syria during the reign of Augustus for a decade (23–13 BCE) and cites Josephus, who indeed reports that the entire Eastern part of the empire was entrusted to his care (15.350: "πέμπεται δὲ Ἀγρίππας τῶν πέραν Ἰονίου διάδοχος Καίσαρι ~ Now Agrippa was sent to succeed Caesar in the government of the countries beyond the Ionian Sea"; and 16.86: "Αγρίππα—ἀνιόντος εἰς τὴν ῎Ρώμην μετὰ τὴν διοίκησιν τῶν ἐπὶ τῆς ᾽Ασίας δεκετῆ γεγενημέν ~ Agrippa was returning to Rome, after he had finished his ten years government in Asia"), determining that, at the same time, Agrippa also held proconsular power in the Eastern senatorial provinces, especially in Asia.

from afar, orchestrating the campaign from Lesbos while his *legati* carried out actions in Syria (Dio 53.32).

W. H. Waddington further bolsters the claim that Agrippa held significant authority in Syria, acting as the *de facto* imperial legate and governing through appointed deputies; he supplies evidence for this arrangement in the absence of records or monuments indicating another imperial legate in Syria during these years, despite Augustus' visit to the region in 20 BCE and Agrippa's activities in other parts of the empire.[201] The resumption of a regular series of legates in Syria immediately following this period supports the view that Agrippa managed the province through appointed representatives until 13 BCE. In agreement with Wilhelm Dittenberger, Waddington also argues that Agrippa's authority extended to other imperial provinces like Galatia, Pamphylia, and Cyprus. Although conclusive proof is unlikely to surface, his influence in these regions, which Augustus made provinces by 25 BCE, remains credible.

By 16 BCE, Agrippa became increasingly involved in the affairs of Asia and Pontus, both senatorial provinces. Josephus preserves several letters from Agrippa that pertain to privileges for Jewish communities, which were sent to governors of Asia and Cyrenaica, further demonstrating his influence in these areas (16.167–170). A significant gauge of Agrippa's standing in Asia and Cyrenaica is his reference to local governors by the title στρατηγός (strategos), instead of the usual proconsular title.[202] This suggests that the Senate might have granted Agrippa proconsular authority over these regions, allowing him to administer them through deputies, much as he did with Syria. This scenario explains why Agrippa could intervene directly in the governance of these senatorial provinces from 16 to 13 BCE, and why Josephus later references Agrippa's decade of

[201] Waddington (1872: 88–90, note 54). See also Dąbrowa (1998: 18–19, esp. note 22), who states that M. Titius' governorship in Syria is almost unanimously agreed by scholars to have been connected with the end of Agrippa's mission in the East at the end of the first half of 13 BCE (Josephus 16.270ff; Strabo 16.1.28).
[202] Waddington (1872: 89–90, note 54).

control over the administration of Asia. Later emperors granted similar powers: Tiberius, Nero, and Marcus Aurelius granted Germanicus, Corbulo, and Avidius Cassius, respectively, extraordinary provincial authority, mirroring the broad powers Augustus vested in Agrippa (*Germanicus*: *SCPP* 350–353; *Corbulo*: Tacitus, *Ann.* 13.8; *Avidius Cassius*: Dio 72.22).

### ii. Syria

Upon arriving in Syria in 15 BCE, Agrippa and his family stayed in the town of Antioch on the banks of the Orontes River.[203] Of the ancient cities, Antioch rivalled the greatness of Rome, Athens, and Alexandria: Agrippa contributed to the city's magnificence by building a new residential area, expanding the public theatre, and paying for public baths that were subsequently named after him (Malalas, *Chronographia* 9.222). After an earthquake struck the city while he was delegating at a settlement of military veterans nearby, he returned and helped fund the repairs; he helped rebuild the stadium and watched an event staged there upon its completion (Malalas 9.225).

From here, his friend Herod implored him to visit Judea, where the king entertained Agrippa and his family in the new-built cities, showing off his penchant for blending Roman, Greek, and Jewish architecture (Josephus 16.12–15). Herod was said to have been incredibly proud of the artificial harbour he had built and named Σεβαστός—after Augustus—as some suspect that the original suggestion to build a new port came from Agrippa himself years earlier at Mytilene.[204] Upon reaching the capital city of Jerusalem, Agrippa was welcomed by an ovation of people clothed in their festival garments; he embraced their celebrations, offered a sacrifice of one hundred cattle to the Jewish God and feasted with the people in Herod's kingdom. Deeply

[203] Powell (2015: 168).
[204] Hohlfelder (2000: 249).

impressed by the city and its reception, Agrippa remained in Jerusalem for several days, forging a visible bond with both its government and people. When he finally departed, he did so accompanied by lavish gifts from Herod (Josephus 16.14–15).

Meanwhile, the political situation in Crimea, on the northern shores of the Black Sea, had taken a turn for the worse, and Agrippa's aid was urgently required (Dio 54.24.4–7). In the spring of 14 BCE, he set sail with a fleet to address the crisis personally. Upon hearing of his friend's campaign, Herod immediately sent a supporting squadron of ships—without being asked—as a gesture of loyalty and solidarity (Josephus 16.17–22). Herod's unsolicited assistance highlights the extent of Agrippa's prestige and the personal allegiance he commanded from provincial rulers beyond the formal structures of Roman authority. Although the lack of primary source material obfuscates the precise events of the campaign, the outcome was the stabilization of the Cimmerian Bosporus and its formal incorporation as a Roman client kingdom under Agrippa's command.[205]

As had become customary after the Cantabrian Wars, Agrippa sent formal correspondence reporting his military success. But in a decisive break from Republican precedent, he addressed his report not to the Senate, the traditional recipient of such intelligence, but directly to Augustus, who was then in Gaul.[206] This was not a minor irregularity, but a revealing expression of how the Principate functioned under the joint rule of Augustus and Agrippa. The exclusive exchange of military intelligence between the two men reinforces their status not as superior and subordinate, but as co-rulers operating within a shared constitutional framework. Agrippa's decision to bypass the Senate was neither incidental nor symbolic; it exemplifies the internal logic of their diarchic governance, in which decisions of military and administrative consequence were first coordinated between the two men before being channelled through traditional institutions. This arrangement

[205] Rostovtseff (1917: 43–44).
[206] Combès (1966: 172, note 43).

reflects a closed and reciprocal system in which each answered primarily to the other, rendering the Senate increasingly peripheral to the actual mechanisms of imperial rule. A triumph for the victory was again voted to Agrippa by the Senate, which he—unsurprisingly—refused (Dio 54.24.7).[207] However, in recognition of his success, the Bosporan capital of Phanagoria was renamed Agrippias by Queen Dynamis (*IOSPE* II 356), and a series of gold coins were issued bearing the portraits of both Agrippa and Augustus.[208]

With the Black Sea states settled, Agrippa and Herod headed for Amisos, while Julia was in Ilium (Troy), the 'spiritual home' of the Roman people; her arrival there was met with no welcome, and she almost drowned after being allowed to cross the flooded Scamander River at night (Nicolaus of Damascus *FGrHist* 90 *F* 134). Agrippa, enraged by the magistrates' irresponsibility, imposed a monetary fine on the city; but upon King Herod's appeal, he rescinded the penalty, prompting the city to commemorate his clemency with a statue bearing an inscription that honoured him as a "kinsman of our city" (*IGR* IV 204; Josephus 16.26).[209] Agrippa's clemency is further detailed through his restoration of religious rights to the Jewish people, who had suffered unjust persecution in the Roman provinces; to commemorate his kindness, a synagogue was named Agrippesioi after him.[210]

Evidence from Josephus accentuates the constitutional implications of Agrippa's authority in these matters: he preserves a letter in which Agrippa issues official instructions to the civic

[207] For analysis of Agrippa's deliberate refusal of triumphs as a reflection of his distinctive political position and calibrated public image under the Augustan regime, see Wardle (1994) and Simpson (1991).
[208] Reinhold (1933: 115–116). These coins will be discussed shortly.
[209] See also Wright (1937: 253): the people of Troy consider Agrippa a true *Iulian*, thus descended from *Iulus*—son of Aeneas and the Prince of Troy.
[210] Several Jewish epitaphs from the Monteverde Catacombs on the Via Portuense reference the συναγωγῆς Ἀγριππησίων ~ Synagogue of Agrippa: *JIWE* 2.170 = *CIJ* I.365; *JIWE* 2.130 = *CIJ* I.425; *JIWE* 2.549 = *CIJ* I.503; *JIEW* 2.130. See Rutgers (1998: 45–71) for a full analysis of the catacombs and their inscriptions. Erich Gruen (2002: 112) argues that the inference is logical and plausible due to the number of Jews settled in Rome during the late Republic and early Empire, as described by Philo (*Legatio ad Gaium* 155–158), who confirms that "he [Augustus] knew the Jews had synagogues and gathered in them, especially on the Sabbath, and he left them intact."

authorities of Ephesus and Cyrene, affirming the rights of local Jewish communities—including exemptions from legal proceedings on the Sabbath and the freedom to send sacred contributions to Jerusalem (16.167–170). Crucially, both cities lay within senatorial provinces: Ephesus in Asia, and Cyrene in Crete and Cyrenaica, governed by proconsuls rather than imperial legates. The fact that Agrippa could issue binding *mandata* in regions formally outside the Emperor's direct control suggests, according to Paweł Sawiński, that he exercised *imperium maius*—that is, authority greater than that of the senatorial governors.[211] Agrippa's power to intervene in these provinces must be attributed not merely to personal *auctoritas*, but to a constitutional prerogative deliberately conferred by Augustus. This interpretation is again reinforced by another letter from the proconsul of Asia, Iullus Antonius, also preserved by Josephus, in which he affirms Jewish legal protections by explicitly citing prior orders from both Augustus and Agrippa (16.172–173). While the precise authenticity of these documents may be debated, they reflect a broader political reality: Agrippa's authority was not limited to the imperial provinces, but extended across the empire, aligning with the expanded scope of his imperium following the settlements of 18 and 13 BCE.

Fergus Millar, in the revised edition of Emil Schürer's *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi*, observes that the name of the synagogue—along with its Augustan counterpart, the Augustesioi—was patronymic not in a strict genealogical sense, but rather derived from and commemorating a prominent individual, in keeping with naming conventions typical of the Roman imperial period. He compares these alongside organizations named after powerful figures with whom members were affiliated or to whom they were devoted, including groups composed of imperial personnel such as the Augustiani (*CIL* VI 8532), Aeliani (*CIL* VI 978), and collegium Faustinianum (*CIL* III 6077 = *ILS* 1505). Religious associations like the Pompeiastai in

[211] Sawiński (2021: 22–24).

Delos and the Agrippiastai in Sparta—worshippers of Pompey and Agrippa, respectively—further illustrate how such names expressed loyalty, patronage, or cultic devotion by deriving the group's identity from an elite or divine namesake. The names Agrippesioi and Augustesioi thus follow this pattern, reflecting symbolic affiliation with Agrippa and Augustus through onomastic formation.[212] Herod also entrusted Agrippa with his eldest son, Antipatros, whom he wished to receive a Roman education; he additionally hoped that this display of trust would help his relationship with Augustus (Josephus 16.86). Agrippa accepted this responsibility and finally embarked on his mission back to Rome. This final gesture—entrusting his son to Agrippa's care—was not only a personal demonstration of trust, but also a calculated diplomatic act, reinforcing Herod's alignment with Rome's highest authorities and acknowledging Agrippa's central role in the governance of the empire.

## I. 13 BCE: Agrippa's Ascendancy as Co-Regent and the Structural Foundations of Shared Rule

The year 13 BCE constituted a formative juncture in Roman history, where Augustus effectively cemented Agrippa's status as co-emperor through a meticulously orchestrated series of public honours, strategic imagery, and ceremonial acts. This intentional elevation transcended mere symbolism, functioning as a pragmatic affirmation of Agrippa's constitutional parity within the Augustan system. Through numismatic issues, the consecration of the Ara Pacis, and a formal reaffirmation of his legal powers, Augustus presented Agrippa to the Roman populace as his partner in rule—visibly and legally entrenched within the dual architecture of the Principate. As Gaius Stern argues, Agrippa's prominent appearance in the Ara Pacis imagery did not tell the

[212] Schürer, *et al*. (1986: 96, note 26).

Roman public anything they did not already know; it merely reinforced the message already broadcast by the coinage of 13 BCE, which functioned, in Stern's words, as "political slogans and headlines of the Roman mint." These issues had already portrayed Agrippa as if he were a second *princeps*, highlighting his accomplishments at a level never granted to any of Augustus' other colleagues.[213]

### i. Agrippa and Augustan Coinage

Coinage from this period unequivocally offers the greatest evidence of Agrippa's public standing. In 13 BCE, the prevailing trend of Augustus' near-monarchical authority within Roman mints ceased: iconography on coinage emerged depicting Agrippa's elevation to a status equal to that of Augustus—an image that simultaneously sought to neutralize lingering accusations of monarchy.[214] Augustus sharing the Roman mint with another individual was a departure from his prior singular dominance over imperial imagery.[215] An incredible denarius from 13 BCE (*RIC* 408; *BMC* 114; *RCV* 1726: obverse: bare head of Augustus facing right; reverse: M. AGRIPPA PLATORIN[VS IIIVIR], bare head of Agrippa facing right) depicts Augustus and Agrippa in equal stature and emphasizes Agrippa's indispensable role in sustaining Roman stability.[216] A second mint from the same year produced several versions of coins depicting Augustus and Agrippa as Censors. These denarii exhibit only minor variations—such as an oak wreath on Augustus—but consistently portray him and Agrippa standing in togas, each holding a scroll, with

[213] Stern (2015: 61). Stern includes Augustus' eventual successor, Tiberius, whose own enhancement of powers after 4 CE was modeled upon the precedent of Agrippa.
[214] Stern (2015: 63).
[215] See Grant (1969), whose analysis of official coinage emphasizes how Augustus monopolized the Roman mint specifically, ensuring that the imagery and messaging reinforced his authority while concurrently limiting the visibility of other prominent figures.
[216] Prior to this, the last person with whom Augustus had shared a dual portrait coin was the deified Caesar in 17 BCE (*RIC* I 338; *RSC* 'Julius Caesar and Augustus' 112: 1: *denarius*, 17 BC: obverse: AVGVSTVS DIVI F, bare head of Augustus; reverse: M. SANQUINIUS III VIR laureate head of *Divus Julius*, with a comet [*Sidus Iulium*]). See Stern (2015: 66–67).

*capsae* (document boxes) at their feet—visual references to their joint conduct of the census fifteen years earlier (*RIC* I 400; *RSC* 458; *BMCRE* 107: obverse: AVGVSTVS DIVI F, bare head facing right). Augustus is shown with a laurel crown, while Agrippa wears a distinctive combination of the mural and rostral crowns. Though Stern acknowledges the possibility that these coins commemorate the census anniversary, he contends that their principal aim was to reinforce Agrippa's personal *auctoritas*.[217]

Another denarius featuring an empty triumphal quadriga (chariot) with a palm branch on the reverse (*Roman mint*; *RIC* 399: obverse: AVGVSTVS, bare head of Augustus, *lituus* (staff borne by the *augurs*) to the left; reverse: C MARIVS C F TRO III VIR, *quadriga* and branch of palm tree, pulled by galloping horses). The empty *quadriga* symbolizes the triumph offered to Agrippa in 13 BCE, which he declined, thus displaying his *modestia* through the imagery and symbolizing his refusal of an accolade that would have been readily accepted by most other military men of this time. An additional celebratory denarius without an explicit portrait of Agrippa depicts Augustus and a *lituus* on the obverse, with a figure on the reverse commonly identified as Julia, depicted with attributes of Diana (*RIC* I 403; *RSC* 'Julia and Augustus' 160: 1). With the depiction of Julia as Diana, the coin indirectly honours Agrippa by featuring his wife—Diana's presence would also implicitly honour Agrippa, as she was celebrated for her role in the victories over Sextus Pompey during the Sicilian War.[218] These are but a few of several surviving examples.

Stern singles out another denarius (*RIC* I 401; *RSC* 455a: obverse: AVGVSTVS DIVI F; bare head facing the right with an oak wreath border; reverse: C MARIVS C F TRO III VIR; *Pontifex,* veiled and togate, holding a *simpulum* [sign of priesthood/*insignia* of the college of

[217] Stern (2015: 67). This imagery is consistent with another *denarius*, which portrayed Augustus and Agrippa seated as tribunes (*RIC* I 406; *RSC* 529: Obverse: CAESAR AVGVSTVS, bare head right, Reverse: C SVLPICIVS PLATORIN, Augustus and Agrippa seated left on *daïs*, decorated with spears and three prows).
[218] Stern (2015: 69). Diana had previously appeared on several coin issues in 15 BCE. Regardless of whether the figure represents Julia or Diana, both interpretations serve as indirect tributes to Agrippa.

pontiffs] in right hand), stating that despite most authorities claiming it is Augustus on both sides, this coin truly features Agrippa in the capacity of *Pontifex*, emphasizing his sacred *dignitas* to the public.[219] The deliberate amplification of Agrippa's religious authority is further illustrated by several additional coins. An *aureus* (*BMC* 118; *RIC* 411: obverse: CAESAR AVGVSTVS, oak-wreathed head; reverse: GC·ANTIST·REGIN GABINVS FOEDVS, two veiled priests facing each other performing a sacrifice over a lit and garlanded altar; below: P R QGVYM) from 13 BCE depicts two individuals sacrificing a pig at an altar, mirroring an earlier *denarius* from 16 BCE that illustrates Augustus and Agrippa engaging in sacrificial rites during the Ludi Saeculares (*RIC* $I^2$ 363). The 13 BCE coin represents them sacrificing a pig—an animal symbolically linked to peace—perhaps during the ceremonial closing of the Gates of Janus or the Ara Pacis observance.[220]

Another denarius issue from 16 BCE (*RIC* I 368; *RSC* 348a; *BMCRE* 98) can be analyzed to interpret another complementary 13 BCE iteration (*RIC* I 410; *RSC* 347; *BMCRE* 119–120: obverse: CAESAR AVGVSTVS, bare head facing right; reverse: C • ANTISTIVS • REGINVS III • VIR, with sacrificial tools: *simpulum, lituus, tripod,* and *patera*). The former features four religious symbols (*simpulum, lituus, patera, tripod*) for the corresponding religious colleges, and the reverse legend reads COS IMP CAESAR AVGV XI, assumed to commemorate Augustus' entry to the college of the *Septemviri Epulonum*. The latter makes the same statement about Agrippa's entry into the same religious colleges. Finally, a denarius minted in early 12 BCE, prior to Agrippa's passing in that spring (*RIC* I 414; *RSC* 'Agrippa and Augustus' 160.1; *BMCRE* 121: Obverse: AVGVSTVS COS • XI. Reverse: M • AGRIPPA • COS • TER • COSSVS •

[219] Stern (2015: 70).
[220] Stern (2015: 70–71). Notably, both coin legends reference a *foedus* (treaty). For the 16 BCE issue, some interpret this as an allusion to the ancient treaty with *Gabii*, yet its precise connotation remains ambiguous.

LENTVLVS) features side-profile portraits of both Augustus and Agrippa on each side, which symbolizes their equality, but embellished with distinctly different ornamentation: Augustus wears an oak wreath, while Agrippa is wearing his unique mural and rostral crown—a prestigious honour that he alone was entitled to wear whenever those who triumphed wore their laurel crowns (Dio 49.14.4; Velleius Paterculus 2.81.3). As such, this issue serves as a formal and public acknowledgment of Agrippa's status beyond *socius laborum*, to *socius imperii*, even *socius regni*.[221]

### ii. The Ara Pacis Augustae

The Ara Pacis Augustae (Altar of Augustan Peace) further exemplifies Agrippa's co-emperorship: the peace that the Ara Pacis was commissioned to celebrate was primarily because of Agrippa's military accomplishments, particularly in the Eastern territories. Furthermore, as a member of the imperial family alongside his wife Julia, Agrippa's political significance and role as a stabilizing figure in the Augustan succession were not merely symbolic—they were deliberately represented in the visual programme of the Ara Pacis Augustae. Positioned at the far right of the southern frieze, opposite Augustus (the sixth figure from the left), Agrippa is one of the few figures whose portrait is rendered with recognizable individuality. This makes his depiction even more significant within an otherwise idealized and generic familial procession. Standing beside Agrippa is a child traditionally identified as Gaius Caesar, his son with Julia. This interpretation is based primarily on proximity and scale, which seem to imply a father-son relationship. A similar child figure—

[221] Stern (2015: 71–73). When Augustus prepared the formal elevation of Tiberius, he admitted him into the foremost four religious colleges. And as a strategic manoeuvre to eliminate Sejanus, Tiberius allowed Sejanus to believe he was being elevated to various priesthoods as a precursor to his own ascension, subsequently seizing the opportunity to dismantle him when Sejanus was most vulnerable. See also Nicols (1974) and Jameson (1966) for further analysis of numismatic evidence reflecting Agrippa's sustained public prominence, distinct titulature, and formally constituted authority within the Principate, which affirms his role as an institutionalized co-ruler alongside Augustus.

also dressed in eastern attire—appears on the northern frieze and has often been identified as Lucius Caesar, Gaius' brother. However, Charles Brian Rose challenges these assumptions, arguing that the children's dress and regalia are conspicuously non-Roman and do not match depictions of Julio-Claudian youth elsewhere.[222]

In particular, the child adjacent to Agrippa wears a *diadem*, a torque necklace, and distinctly eastern footwear with extended laces and stylized tongue—details that align more closely with depictions of Eastern royalty or divinized figures like the Phrygian god Attis. The boy's long, curled hair further evokes the iconography of monarchs from the Bosporan and Parthian kingdoms. According to Rose, these visual cues strongly suggest that the child is not Gaius Caesar, but rather a foreign prince—Bosporan or Parthian—intended to evoke Rome's diplomatic and symbolic dominance in the eastern provinces. In this reading, the act of the child tugging at Agrippa's toga becomes not a familial gesture but a symbolic invocation of Roman patronage and hegemony.

That Agrippa is the figure chosen to stand alongside such imagery reinforces his role as a principal agent of Roman authority abroad. His documented activities support this interpretation: in 14 BCE, he intervened in dynastic disputes in the Bosporan kingdom, and in 13 BCE, he brought Antipatros—the eldest son of Herod the Great—to Rome. These concrete actions align with the Ara Pacis' broader ideological messaging, in which Agrippa is presented not only as Augustus' dynastic partner, but as a guarantor of Roman imperial order in the East. His inclusion in this elite visual schema affirms both his domestic prominence and his transregional authority at the height of his co-regency.

[222] Rose (1990: 455–456).

### iii. Renewal of Powers

The formal renewal of tribunician powers for both Augustus and Agrippa in 13 BCE—as well as the elevation of Agrippa's imperium to include all the senatorial provinces in addition to the imperial provinces (*imperium maius*; Dio 54.28)—cemented their partnership; it was an unprecedented political act that would subsequently be adopted in the elevation of Tiberius. Agrippa's honours, including his priesthoods and distinctive privileges, further cultivated his public persona. Augustus' deliberate conferral of these honours illustrated his commitment to presenting Agrippa as his co-ruler. Agrippa's ascendancy in 13 BCE reflects Augustus' pragmatic approach to government. By elevating Agrippa, a *novus homo* devoid of noble lineage, Augustus demonstrated his willingness to prioritize competence over ancestry to ensure stability. This year not only affirmed Agrippa's position as co-emperor but also provided a framework for the future delegation of imperial authority, a model that would indelibly influence succession politics in subsequent years.

Early in 12 BCE, Agrippa was again dispatched to command the war in Pannonia; his reputation preceded him, since the word of his imminent arrival was enough to quell the rebellion and frighten the Pannonians into obedience (Dio 54.28.1–2). With another victory behind him, Agrippa returned to Italy and fell gravely ill, meeting an early death in Campania; Augustus, at this time, was hosting gladiatorial games during the Panathenaic festival in his—ergo Agrippa's—son's names, and upon hearing of Agrippa's condition, departed for Campania immediately (Dio 54.28.2–3). When he arrived, he found Agrippa deceased, taken in his fifty-first year (Pliny 7.46).

# CHAPTER FOUR

## AGRIPPA'S FUNERAL AND COMMEMORATION

Agrippa's premature death in Campania in 12 BCE was a defining moment not only for the early Principate, but also for the evolution of Roman funerary and political culture under Augustus, since it afforded Augustus the chance to stage a carefully calibrated public response. In death, as in life, Agrippa was employed to test forms of commemorative practice that Augustus would later refine and appropriate for his own legacy. As Dio—our only extant source for the event—records, Agrippa's funeral was ἐν ᾧ καὶ αὐτὸς μετὰ ταῦτα ἐξηνέχθη, that is, "conducted in the same manner as that later accorded to Augustus himself" (54.28.5). Such a statement implies a degree of ceremonial parity that warrants closer examination. Far from a conventional aristocratic rite, Agrippa's funeral marked a calculated shift in the messaging of Roman commemorative culture: a state-orchestrated event that blended Republican forms with imperial ideology.

This chapter proceeds in two parts. First, it highlights the ceremonial elements of Agrippa's funeral—its structure, symbolism, and innovations relative to Republican precedent. Second, it examines the *Laudatio Funebris* delivered by Augustus, with close attention to its ideological content and its partial preservation as a Greek papyrus fragment (PKöln VI 249 = P.Colon.inv.nr.4701 = P. Köln 10). Agrippa's obsequies—framed by Augustus' rhetorical tribute—reveal how his death and commemoration served as a crucial medium for articulating the emerging ideology of the Principate. The funeral affirmed Agrippa's role as a foundational pillar of Augustan power, while simultaneously allowing Augustus to test the symbolic architecture of the imperial state funeral—a rehearsal, in effect, for his own.[223] By leading the procession ahead

[223] Although Marcellus' funeral in 23 BCE marked the first major public commemoration of a member of the imperial household—honoured through the completion of the Theatre of Marcellus and ritual inclusion in the Ludi Romani (Dio 53.30.5–6)—it remained dynastic and aristocratic in form, rooted in his blood ties to Augustus and framed more as a display of elite mourning than a matter of state ideology. In contrast, Agrippa's funeral signalled a shift from elite familial ritual to

of the *imagines*, incorporating non-familial Roman heroes into the parade, delivering a eulogy that emphasized Agrippa's role as *socius laborum*, and ultimately placing him in his own mausoleum, Augustus redefined the ideological function of the funeral.

## I. Agrippa's Funeral

Under the Republic, a funeral for a *nobilis* served as a performative celebration of dynastic continuity and elite identity. The deceased was laid in state in the atrium of the family home; the *laudatio* (eulogy) was delivered from the rostra; and the *pompa funebris* (funeral procession) featured wax *imagines* (ancestral masks) worn by actors, arranged in hierarchical order according to the magistracies once held by the ancestors of the deceased (Polybius, *Histories* 6.53–54). These rituals were almost entirely centred on male ancestry and operated within a narrowly defined aristocratic framework, deliberately excluding those without noble lineage. Their primary function was to promote elite family memory through visual and performative means—particularly through the use of imagines—reinforcing a political culture in which legitimacy was visibly and ideologically tied to patrilineal descent and inherited status.[224]

Agrippa, however, was a *novus homo*. Although lacking formal aristocratic ancestry, as the previous chapters have outlined, he secured his place within Augustus' dynastic framework through merit, military success, and—crucially—through his marriage to Julia, which made him the father of the *Principes Iuventutis*, Gaius and Lucius Caesar, and, by way of their daughter Agrippina the Elder, the principal male progenitor of the later Julio-Claudian dynasty. That he was granted a funeral resembling Augustus' own ceremonies nearly three decades later was not merely

state-oriented commemoration. This public funeral, staged in Augustus' name and culminating in Agrippa's interment in the family mausoleum, inaugurated the form and ideological function of the imperial state funeral.

[224] Flower (1996: 21–27); Price (1987: 56–57).

exceptional; it was ideologically transformative. As Harriet Flower argues, the striking similarity between the two funerals implies that Agrippa's procession included an extensive display of imagines, likely drawn from the Julian line and supplemented with representations of other Roman heroes to meet the symbolic requirements of a man who had no ancestral masks of his own.[225] The funeral positioned Agrippa as an heir not just to the *domus Augusta*, but to the broader legacy of Roman greatness.

The traditional funerals of Roman *nobiles* were always presentations of the *gens* (the extended family), and the deceased's ancestors were represented by imagines in the procession.[226] These masks symbolized the continuity of noble lineage, with the recently deceased taking their place among illustrious ancestors. However, beginning with Agrippa's funeral, this practice was altered to project a broader vision of Roman greatness. At his own funeral, Dio (56.34.2) states that Augustus was placed at the head of the procession—not only in person, but also through three distinct representations: a wax effigy, a golden statue, and a likeness in a triumphal chariot. These preceded the ancestral imagines, reversing the Republican custom in which the deceased followed his ancestors as the most junior member of the line.[227] This inversion dramatized Augustus' ambition not merely to inherit Rome's foundational legacy, but to reorder it—positioning himself as both the fulfilment of, and the standard against which, all historical and mythical precedent would henceforth be measured. While Dio does not explicitly list the imagines present at Agrippa's funeral, the direct comparison he draws to Augustus' own suggests that a similarly choreographed visual and ceremonial structure was employed. The implication is that Augustus crafted a parallel

[225] Flower (1996: 239–242).
[226] Ameling (1994: 2).
[227] Flower (1996: 245).

spectacle for Agrippa—one that elevated him beyond the traditional constraints of lineage and into the constructed visual language of imperial greatness.

Agrippa, as a *novus homo*, lacked a noble ancestral line of his own from which to draw traditional imagines. However, through his marriage to Julia, he acquired legitimate access to the Julian and Caesarian lineage. As Harriet Flower argues, this connection likely enabled him to participate in the visual rhetoric of dynastic continuity by incorporating the imagines of the *Iulii*—and possibly others manufactured or borrowed to evoke the *summi viri* displayed in the Forum of Augustus—into his own procession.[228] Indeed, the close resemblance between the two funerals would be difficult to account for if Agrippa's procession had entirely lacked imagines; their presence must be understood as part of a broader ideological programme designed to present him not merely as a trusted general or imperial son-in-law, but as a constitutional partner whose commemorative imagery mirrored that of the *princeps* himself.

Traditionally, the funeral procession was a patrilineal showcase, enshrining noble lineage and elite continuity through family-based display (Polybius 6.53–54). In Agrippa's case, however, the imagines used in the procession—especially if they included figures outside the Julian *gens*—signal an ideological shift.[229] The masks no longer simply represented genealogical ancestry; they were now tools of imperial messaging. As Flower demonstrates, Augustus' funeral spectacles—including those of his family members—progressively redefined the use of imagines as instruments of dynastic propaganda, representing symbolic affiliation rather than legal descent.[230]

[228] Flower (1996: 239–241).
[229] Just as Augustus had done in his own funeral procession, where the imagines were not limited to members of his familial *gens*. His cortege included representations of Rome's great men, even figures outside his direct lineage, such as Pompey—thereby transforming the traditional aristocratic display into a broader political statement of imperial legitimacy (Dio 56.34.2–4; Tacitus, *Ann.* 1.8).
[230] Flower (1996: 244–246).

In this context, the imagines present at Agrippa's funeral likely included a hybridized collection: legally accessible Julian masks, formulaically constructed *summi viri*, and new representations of Rome's collective past. Far from undermining the ideological message, the absence of Agrippa's own ancestral masks sharpened it: Augustus was using funerary spectacle to transform merit, loyalty, and symbolic kinship into visual claims to imperial memory and legitimacy. Agrippa's remarkable career, position as co-ruler, and marriage to Julia warranted a funeral procession that incorporated not only the masks of his own gens, the *Iulii*, but also, for the first time, those of other prominent Romans—forming a 'parade of heroes' designed to meet the exceptional demands of honouring the unprecedented Agrippa. This spectacle staged him explicitly as an heir to the legacy of great Roman, particularly military, leaders and highlighted his fundamental role within the broader narrative of Roman achievements.[231]

The most conspicuous deviation from Republican funerary tradition was the new practice of having the ancestral imagines follow the deceased. Both Agrippa and Augustus led their processions, preceding the parade of imagines with their ancestors and renowned figures from Roman history, creating a powerful visual statement of their surpassing the achievements of past leaders (Dio 56.34).[232] This arrangement would also have positioned their image directly alongside or even ahead of Aeneas, since his lineage led the procession of other Roman heroes, uniting their prominence within the framework of Roman tradition.[233] Both Agrippa and Augustus, despite—and perhaps because of—their relatively obscure familial backgrounds compared to the great aristocratic houses, would now be positioned as the ultimate exemplars of the traditional political

[231] Flower (1996: 238–239). Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.756–892, who describes a similar 'parade of heroes' for the funeral of Marcellus in 23 BCE.
[232] Dio 56.34: "There then followed the imagines (εικόνες) of all those Romans who had distinguished themselves in any way, at the head of the procession Romulus himself. Even Pompey was among them, and all the peoples conquered by Augustus, each in his native dress."
[233] Flower (1996: 245).

hierarchy, which rewarded service (rather than overt displays of power or coercion) and virtue with honour. This framed the Augustan claim to leadership and power not as a usurpation of republican ideals, but as the fulfillment of those ideals, presenting them each as merely the foremost figures in a restored social and political order.[234] The inclusion of triumphal imagery further blurred the line between funeral and state celebration. Passing through the *porta triumphalis* (the triumphal gate), the procession symbolized each of their roles as conquerors and unifiers of the Roman world.[235]

In an additional departure from traditional practice, Augustus' funeral included two orations delivered by Tiberius and his son, Drusus the Younger, at strategically chosen locations: the rostra and the Temple of the Divine Julius (Suetonius, *Aug.* 100.3). This innovation emphasized Augustus' unparalleled stature and the multifaceted nature of his legacy. Agrippa's funeral in 12 BCE likely introduced this dual oration practice. Considering Dio's comments, Agrippa's funeral was the first to feature multiple eulogies, foreshadowing the *princeps*' later ceremony (54.28.5). As it will be shown, Augustus himself delivered the partially preserved *laudatio*, portraying Agrippa as a *socius laborum* by accentuating the equal partnership in authority they shared, and as a successor to Rome's collective heritage (see pp. 130ff.). This characterization extended beyond Agrippa's bloodline, embedding him into the broader framework of Roman history and their shared imperial vision.

Agrippa's funeral also demonstrated the political utility of public mourning. Augustus' *laudatio* consecrated Agrippa as an essential part of the regime, a symbol of continuity and stability during the early Principate. Highlighting Agrippa's dedication to Rome enhanced Augustus' own

[234] Flower (1996: 246).
[235] Flower (1996: 238). The incorporation of overtly triumphal elements into a funeral—particularly the routing of the procession through the Porta Triumphalis—represented an evident deviation from Republican precedent.

authority, showing that even in death, Agrippa served the state as a ruler should. Therefore, Agrippa's funeral became a prototype for the imperial funerary rites that would culminate in Augustus' own procession. Augustus' funeral in 14 CE represented the ultimate evolution of these practices, consolidating the transformation from Republic to Empire. Agrippa's funeral was more than a tribute; it was a carefully managed display of their combined vision of Rome. Their respective funerals, incorporating and simultaneously reimagining Republican traditions, laid the ideological foundations of the Roman Empire. Agrippa's procession served as a trial for many of the innovations that Augustus would later perfect, reflecting the delicate balance between honouring individual contributions and asserting the supremacy of the imperial family.

## II. The *Laudatio Funebris*

A portion of the *laudatio funebris* (funeral oration) is preserved by a papyrus fragment (PKöln VI 249 = P.Colon.inv.nr.4701 = P. Köln 10) found in Fayum, Egypt. A Greek translation of the original Latin speech Augustus delivered in 12 BCE, the fragment has been the subject of many erudite enquires.[236] In one article, E.W. Gray was able to expand on the second half of the fragment—that L. Koenen was not able to interpret at the time of his first publication—by seeking a Greek equivalent of the Latin phrase *in summum rei publicae fastigium provectus* (having advanced to the highest peak of the state), leading to the reading and reconstruction of the previously undeciphered line.[237] This phrase is significant because it reinforces the papyrus' depiction of Agrippa not merely as an assistant to Augustus, but as one raised to the apex of Roman authority, supporting a broader argument for his co-regency.

[236] For instance, Koenen (1970) and (1970a); Gray (1970); Badian (1980); Fraschetti (1980); Haslam (1980); Sherk (1981); Gronewald (1983); and Ameling (1994). The fragment has been generally dated to the Julio-Claudian period, likely the early first century CE, based on both palaeographic evidence and textual analysis.
[237] Gray (1970: 228): ἀξ[ιωθ]εις πλείς[του] (od. πλείο[νος]) ὓφους.

Similarly, M. Gronewald was able to determine that, despite still not being an account of the entire oration, another small fragment in the Cologne collection (Inv. 4722) seamlessly continued the partial text from the original fragment identified by Koenen.[238] Building off Gray and Koenen, Michael Haslam provides a back-translation into Latin, quoting Koenen: "*Durch die griechische Formulierung schimmert die lateinische Fassung*" (the Latin version shines through the Greek wording). Adding that it does so more than even Koenen had originally thought.[239] The Greek text is an obvious translation from the original Latin, but it does not read naturally, following Latin vernacular as faithfully as possible to the detriment of idiomatic Greek.[240] Ernst Badian takes Haslam's guidelines, applying them (in his own words) more stringently than his predecessor, where linguistic or historical facts offer the prospect of new discovery to the historian:

> *tribunicia enim potestas tibi in quinque annos ex senatus consulto Lentulis consulibus data et rursus in alterum quinquennium Tiberio Nerone et Quintilio Varo consulibus generis mis delata est. et quacumque in provincia te res publica adhiberet, nullius in ea potestas maior ut esset quam tua, per legem sanctum est. in summum rei publicae fastigium provectus alive principatus nostri collega acceptus tu proprils virtutibus et beneficiis omne genus humanum devinxisti.*
>
> The tribunician power was given to you for a period of five years by decree of the Senate in the consulship of the two Lentuli, and it was given to you again for another lustrum, in the consulship of Tiberius Nero and Quinctilis Varus, your relations by marriage. Moreover, it was sanctioned by law that no one in any of the provinces in which the common affairs of the Roman people should call you would have greater imperium than you; you were raised to the highest position with our support and through your own virtues by the agreement of all men. (P. Köln VI 249).

Walter Ameling argues that Augustus, speaking before the Roman public, could not have stated anything factually untrue, but—as in the *Res Gestae*—he combined terminological precision with politically advantageous presentation.[241] The *laudatio* must be interpreted under these conditions.

[238] Gronewald (1983: 61–62).
[239] Haslam (1980: 195).
[240] Badian (1980: 97).
[241] Ameling (1994: 2).

Since the external and legal framework of Agrippa's power must be correctly represented, the funeral oration delivered by Augustus provides a more reliable account of Agrippa's powers compared to Dio's version, which Ameling states, contains discrepancies. His analysis of the *laudatio* indicates that a unique *proconsulare imperium* granted to Agrippa in 23 BCE served as the foundation of his authority in the provinces until his death. In contrast, Dio's account of the year 18 BCE gives the impression that Agrippa received *proconsulare imperium* for the first time (54.12.2), with each instance of conferral appearing to be limited to five-year terms (in 18, then again in 13 BCE). Finally, Dio's description of 13 BCE appears to indicate that Agrippa was granted *proconsulare imperium maius* (greater proconsular authority) only at that time, a claim that contradicts Augustus' funeral oration (54.28.1).[242]

Dio omits the 23 BCE grant of imperium in his history.[243] Instead of portraying Agrippa as a triumphant figure entrusted with a special law enabling him to govern the Eastern provinces, Agrippa appears as a dejected politician compelled to withdraw into exile (53.32.1). As has been shown, this depiction does not align with Agrippa's prominent authority in the provinces, so Dio delays mentioning the *proconsulare imperium* until 18 BCE, when it seems more contextually appropriate. The year 18 BCE provided a logical moment for Dio to introduce this power because it coincided with significant developments, such as the bestowal of *tribunicia potestas* on both Agrippa and Augustus, along with additional powers granted to the *princeps* (54.12.2–4). Both the *laudatio* and Dio's account confirm that Agrippa's *tribunicia potestas* was conferred for a limited time, a pattern consistent with the temporary nature of Augustus' various imperium and the powers later granted to Tiberius and other co-regents.[244]

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[242] Ameling (1994: 14ff) proposes his own explanation for Dio's deviations.
[243] Ameling (1994: 12).
[244] Ameling (1994: 13). The grant of tribunician power to Agrippa is attested epigraphically: see *CIL* 3.494, 6.32323.53, 9.3150, 3913; *IG* 12.5.740. Tacitus (*Ann.* 3.56) expresses no uncertainty: for him, the grant of *tribunicia potestas* to Agrippa signified Augustus' intention to mark him as his political equal and heir.

Many ancient historians—not just Dio—thought it logical to interpret Agrippa's extraordinary powers through the lens of later, more familiar patterns of temporary delegated authority. His *proconsulare imperium*, granted in 23 BCE, was highly irregular for the early imperial period: it conferred consular-level command over the provinces despite his holding no formal magistracy, and significantly, while Augustus himself remained active and present in Rome.[245] This arrangement effectively created a dual executive structure at the heart of the Principate—a constitutionally novel adaptation of Republican collegiality that transformed traditional power-sharing into a functional model of imperial co-rule—positioning Agrippa as a formally recognized co-regent within the machinery of governance.

It is this formalized system of shared rule that Ernst Kornemann would later term the *Doppelprinzipat* (dual principate): a model of diarchic governance grounded in legal equality and collaborative authority, first realized in the formal partnership between Augustus and Agrippa.[246] Over time, however, this radical innovation was increasingly reframed as a precursor to more familiar, transitional powers granted to later heirs. In what seems to be another *ex post facto* construction, shaped by hindsight and the gradual standardization of imperial political structures, Agrippa's powers are interpreted as analogous to the temporary delegations later granted to prospective successors. This retrospective framing in imperial historiography effaces the distinctive political and constitutional significance of Agrippa's role within the founding framework of the regime, recasting it as a more conventional, interim authority aligned with subsequent imperial norms.

This tendency to reframe Agrippa's role through later imperial models is especially evident in the case of Tiberius, who was granted *tribunicia potestas* and command of the eastern provinces

[245] Ameling (1994: 15).
[246] Kornemann (1930: 21–24).

in 6 BCE despite holding no magistracy (Dio 55.9.1–5, 55.13.1–2; Velleius Paterculus 2.99.1–2). While his powers superficially resembled Agrippa's, they were explicitly time-limited and reactive—designed to manage dynastic uncertainty rather than institutionalize parity with Augustus. Similar temporary delegations were later extended to figures like Gaius Caesar and Germanicus, whose constitutional roles were often framed as preparatory steps toward succession, not genuine power-sharing arrangements.[247]

Tiberius' protracted ascension as Augustus' heir was a reluctant compromise, not a natural succession.[248] After losing not only a political ally but also his father-in-law when Agrippa passed in 12 BCE, Tiberius was compelled by Augustus to divorce his beloved wife Vipsania—Agrippa's daughter—and marry Julia, Agrippa's widow and Augustus' daughter. This dynastic rearrangement served one purpose: to place Tiberius in proximity to Gaius and Lucius Caesar, whose political and personal development he was now expected to supervise.[249] His reward for this sacrifice was a second consulship in 7 BCE and a five-year grant of tribunician power in 6 BCE—key constitutional markers that had once defined Agrippa's ascent to the co-regency.[250] Yet unlike Agrippa, Tiberius had not been positioned as a partner in rule, but rather as a placeholder within a fragile succession plan. It was then, at the height of his legal authority, Tiberius abruptly withdrew to Rhodes. This retreat is frequently compared to Agrippa's eastern mission in 23 BCE. Another case in which later historiography has misrepresented the constitutional and strategic nature of his authority by treating it as a precedent for later imperial

[247] For comparison with Agrippa's powers, see Tiberius' tribunician grant and eastern command in 6 BCE (Dio 55.9.4; Velleius Paterculus 2.99), Gaius Caesar's *proconsular imperium* and public honours (Dio 55.9–10), and Germanicus' eastern command (Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.43). On the diarchic framing of Agrippa's authority versus the preparatory framing of later heirs, see Kornemann (1930: esp. 21–24) and Levick (1966).
[248] On the reactive and reluctant elevation of Tiberius, see Suetonius, *Tib.* 12–15; Dio 55.9–10; Levick (1999: 31–67); and Seager (2005: 18–38, 48–57).
[249] Shotter (2004: 10). Tiberius' new role was not one of empowerment but of obligation, and ancient sources suggest he did not enjoy a close relationship with Julia's sons (Dio 55.9).
[250] Shotter (2004: 11).

roles, while, in fact, distorting its original function through retrospective assumptions shaped by political structures that only emerged after his death. The comparison is both anachronistic and misleading.[251]

Despite repeated appeals to return, Augustus interpreted Tiberius' withdrawal as a betrayal of the dynastic succession and refused his petitions, allowing his tribunician power to lapse in 1 BCE and effectively reducing him to the status of a *privatus*, legally subordinate to his stepson, Gaius Caesar. (Suetonius, *Tiberius* 11.5).[252] It was Gaius, not Augustus, who ultimately granted Tiberius permission to return after the death of his brother Lucius in 2 CE—a decision that highlights both the extent of Tiberius' diminished political standing and Augustus' continued ambivalence, if not outright disregard, toward him.[253] Tiberius was only reintegrated into the imperial succession framework after the death of Gaius in 4 CE, when Augustus—out of dynastic necessity—adopted him alongside Agrippa Postumus and compelled him, in turn, to adopt Germanicus (Suetonius, *Tib.* 15.2). Even this was not a candid endorsement: as David Shotter notes, the arrangement of 4 CE was "not a straightforward succession but a negotiated concession," crafted to appease the Claudian faction while ensuring the Julian line could continue through Germanicus.[254]

This leads directly to the crux of the argument: Agrippa's constitutional role has too often been interpreted through the retrospective lens of later, more familiar patterns of delegated

[251] Agrippa's absence was a formal deployment, undertaken with enhanced *proconsulare imperium*, culminating in the diplomatic recovery of the Roman standards from Parthia (Dio 54.8.1–2; Suetonius, *Aug.* 21.3). He remained ideologically central and constitutionally empowered throughout—neither retired nor marginalized. Tiberius, by contrast, withdrew at the very moment he had been publicly positioned as Agrippa's constitutional successor in powers and honours, and unlike Agrippa, he was not free to return of his own volition.

[252] "[…] *demitteret omnem curam suorum, quos tam cupide reliquisset* ~ let him give up all concern for those whom he had so eagerly abandoned." The phrase is damning in both tone and implication, revealing Augustus' belief that Tiberius had abdicated not only his public duties, but his familial responsibilities as well.

[253] Augustus' refusal to restore his powers was not merely punitive, but political: as Levick (1972: 809–813) notes, Augustus reportedly interpreted the act as a deliberate annihilation of the chain of successors which endangered the supremacy of the dynasty, and the Principate itself.

[254] Shotter (2004: 14).

authority—such as those granted to Tiberius, Gaius, or Germanicus—distorting the fundamentally different character of his position. The dual adoption of 4 CE did not inaugurate the *Doppelprinzipat* but marked its definitive application: a model of a shared rule that originated decades earlier in the partnership between Augustus and Agrippa. Their co-regency, formalized in 18 BCE through the simultaneous holding of *tribunicia potestas* and *proconsulare imperium* (*maius* or *aequum*—a distinction which will be investigated shortly), established a framework for coordinated governance rooted in legal equality, not hierarchy, unprecedented in both duration and depth. As Kornemann argues, Agrippa was the first historical instance—and the most fully realized example—of what he calls a 'second' *princeps*: not a placeholder, but the perfected type of imperial co-ruler.[255] His authority operated in deliberate complement to Augustus', reflecting a model of joint governance in which both figures exercised coordinated and equal powers, each integral to the functioning and legitimacy of the early Principate.[256] Tiberius, by contrast, was elevated only after the collapse of Augustus' preferred succession plans. His promotion marked not the continuation of a constitutional ideal, but an improvised response to the failure of the Julian line. As Barbara Levick affirms, the conclusion to draw from the simultaneous adoptions of Tiberius and Agrippa Postumus is that Augustus expected both to take his place when he died—just as he had once planned the co-regency for Gaius and Lucius Caesar.[257]

Tiberius' eventual restoration to favour was not the outcome of long-term strategic planning or broad political consensus, but a reluctant concession to dynastic necessity. Augustus' refusal to renew his tribunician power, his orchestration of Tiberius' politically motivated remarriage, and his tacit acceptance of Tiberius' self-imposed withdrawal from public life, all

[255] Kornemann (1930: 17).
[256] Kornemann (1930: 21–24).
[257] Levick (1966: 229), (1972: 783–84); cf. Kornemann (1930: 17–20, 31–32).

emphasize a deep hesitation to position him as heir while Julian successors remained viable. This is precisely why such retrospective assumptions are historiographically damaging: they obscure the unique political and constitutional status which Agrippa held by conflating it with the reactive and contingent elevation of later figures like Tiberius. Agrippa was never a designated heir and never fell from favour, nor was his position a byproduct of dynastic necessity. From early on, he was openly treated by Augustus as a governing partner—entrusted with critical military, administrative, and diplomatic responsibilities—and in 18 BCE, this status was formalized through the conferral of *proconsulare imperium* and *tribunicia potestas*. His authority was not preparatory or subsidiary but deliberately constructed and institutionalized as part of a dual framework of governance. In contrast, Tiberius' promotion followed only from the collapse of Augustus' intended dynastic arrangements. To equate the two is not only historically inaccurate, but ideologically misleading.

Having clarified how later examples—particularly the case of Tiberius—distorted retrospective interpretations of Agrippa's authority, it is now necessary to return to Dio's description of Agrippa's powers in 18 BCE. In this year, Augustus received a renewal of his *tribunicia potestas* for another five years, and, according to Dio, Agrippa was granted powers "almost equal" to those of Augustus, especially the tribunician power "for the same length of time" (Dio 54.12.4; Tacitus, *Ann.* 3.56; Velleius Paterculus 2.90.1; Suetonius, *Aug.* 27.5). With clearly defined, time-limited, and legally equivalent powers, Augustus and Agrippa now stood together as the highest constitutional authorities in the empire. However, this passage from Dio raises critical questions regarding the scope, character, and constitutional standing of Agrippa's *proconsulare imperium*. The situation becomes even more complex in 13 BCE, when Dio reports Augustus dispatched Agrippa to Pannonia to quell military unrest, granting him authority greater

than those of other governors outside Italy (54.28.1). Interestingly, Dio's phrasing here closely mirrors his earlier description of Augustus' *proconsulare imperium maius* from 23 BCE, implying that Agrippa received similarly elevated powers in 13 BCE (53.32.5).[258]

When comparing Dio's account with Augustus's funeral oration, the discrepancies can be largely explained by the unique legal framework under which Agrippa's powers were granted. Dio interpreted Agrippa's authority through the lens of later imperial conventions, which normalized what was, realistically, an exceptional situation. As a result, the distinction between Agrippa's powers, and those of Augustus, is smaller than it initially appears. Any lingering inconsistencies stem from Dio's flawed understanding of the constitutional realities of the Augustan period, since he tended to project the political norms of his own time onto earlier events.[259]

To briefly summarize: Ameling determines that in 23 BCE, both Augustus and Agrippa were granted an *imperium aequum*, a type of conditional authority that allowed them to govern Roman provinces as needed.[260] This power, while rooted in Republican precedent, was unusual because it was not tied to a specific term of office but to particular tasks. Historically, *imperium aequum* had been avoided in the Republic because having two equal commanders in one territory often caused conflicts.[261] Therefore, Agrippa's power—though exceptional—was carefully designed to avoid creating such issues. However, when turning to Augustus' own powers after 23 BCE, the situation of 'equality' between the co-rulers becomes more apparent. In ending his

[258] Ameling (1994: 15, note. 61). Cf. Sawiński (2021: 20–25), who argues that Agrippa did not receive *proconsulare imperium maius* for the first time during the Pannonian campaign (13 BCE), as Cassius Dio (54.28.1) appears to suggest
[259] Ameling (1994: 14–15).
[260] According to Ameling (1994: 27–28), the political crisis of 23 BCE resulted in a calculated curtailment of Augustus' constitutional authority—most notably, his power in senatorial provinces, where his imperium was reduced to an *imperium aequum*: equal to that of other proconsuls and discretionary in practice ("*fakultatives Imperium*"). In contrast, Agrippa received an *imperium aequum* conferred by law and described in the *laudatio funebris* as perpetual and independent of reappointment. As Sawiński (2021: 39) notes, Augustus' own imperium was defined as a standing prerogative unbound to specific missions, whereas Agrippa's was initially tied to a provincial commission and lacked the pomerium exemption granted to Augustus.
[261] Badian (1980: 105).

permanent consulship, Augustus needed to retain his influence in the senatorial provinces. Earlier scholarship (such as Mommsen) argued that he held *proconsulare imperium maius*, a superior power that allowed him to override all provincial governors.[262]

The *laudatio funebris*, therefore, accentuates the exceptional constitutional position occupied by Agrippa, highlighting his elevation as a product of *consensus universorum*—a principal Augustus also invoked in justifying his own authority. Two key formalities are emphasized: first, "κατά δόγμα συνκλήτου" (*ex senatus consulto*), which indicates that Agrippa's authority was conferred by a senatorial decree; second, "τα κοινά των Ρωμαίων" (*senatus populusque Romanus*), which denotes the active role of both the Senate and the People as co-constitutive agents of Roman sovereignty.[263] These parallel processes signal that Agrippa's imperium, like that of Augustus, was grounded in public legitimacy and institutional consensus.[264] Moreover, Augustus' use of the verb ἐφέλκοιτο (he was drawn to it) mirrors the language he used to describe his own reluctant assumption of power. By framing Agrippa's authority as duty-bound rather than self-interested, Augustus constructs a shared rhetorical and ideological ethos of reluctant rulership—suggesting that both men wielded exceptional and parallel imperium as a form of service to the state, not personal aggrandizement.[265]

The *laudatio* also serves to redefine Agrippa's public image—not as a secondary agent of imperial policy, but as a visible and autonomous figure of authority whose imperium stood on equal footing with Augustus'. His prominence is emphasized by Hellenistic-style portraiture, widespread coinage, and monumental building projects—features more typically associated with sovereign power than delegated command. Agrippa's elevation, validated by the *consensus*

[262] Mommsen (1877: 2.2.1: 762–766; 2.2.2: 809–811).
[263] Badian (1980: 99–100), Ameling (1994: 26).
[264] Lobur (2008: 26–27).
[265] Badian (1980: 104–105), Ameling (1994: 25 – 27).

*universorum*, confirms the public's acceptance of their joint political agenda. Augustus' endorsement functioned not only as personal commendation but as a formal recognition of Agrippa's imperium as co-extensive and constitutionally equivalent to his own. Within this arrangement, Agrippa did more than reinforce Augustus' position—he occupied a defined role within an institutionalized diarchy, in which both men exercised supreme authority and leadership at the highest level of the state (*summum imperium auspiciumque*).

Overall, the reassessment of the *laudatio funebris* fragments confirms that Agrippa's imperium was independent, not derivative of Augustus' superior authority, and was established through deliberate constitutional design. He was granted the exceptional privilege that any imperium conferred upon him would be *aequum*, if not *maius*, relative to that of all provincial governors. Although scholars continue to debate whether the imperium granted to Augustus and Agrippa was technically *aequum* or *maius*, such distinctions do not alter the broader constitutional reality: both held imperium of equal rank and exceptional scope, surpassing that of all other magistrates and standing outside the traditional Republican hierarchy. This arrangement, devised in response to the political tensions of 23 BCE—when Augustus' temporary withdrawal from the consulship and redefinition of his powers required a credible partner to share imperial function—provided a stabilizing structure for the regime by formalizing shared power at the apex of Roman governance. In this light, the *laudatio* reasserts Augustus' supremacy following Agrippa's death, while simultaneously commemorating a period of shared rule that depended on a carefully constructed parity of imperium, confirming Agrippa's role as an indispensable partner in the founding and administration of the Principate.[266]

[266] Ameling (1994: 27–28).

## CONCLUSION

If Agrippa exercised the powers and responsibilities, and held the honours that later came to define the office of Emperor, why has he not been remembered as one? Drawing on only a fraction of the available evidence, Gaius Stern reached a conclusion that aligns with the central argument of this thesis. During a visit to the Riga History and Navigation Museum, he encountered a Roman *denarius* featuring Augustus and Agrippa, labelled by curators as depicting Rome's "second Emperor."[267] Initially amused by what seemed an anachronism, he reconsidered: Agrippa had, in fact, received every constitutional prerogative later conferred upon Tiberius—tribunician power, *imperium maius*, multiple Consulships, priesthoods, triumphs, dynastic affiliation, and a coinage programme openly proclaiming his elevation. That such recognition could arise from numismatic evidence alone only strengthens the central claim of this study: Agrippa was the co-ruler of an emerging dynastic system, and by every meaningful constitutional measure, the second *princeps* of the Roman Empire.

According to Stern, the only reasons Agrippa is not conventionally regarded as Rome's second emperor are that he died prematurely and, more significantly, did not outlive Augustus. It was this sequence of deaths—rather than any disparity in authority—that created the conditions for imperial memory to evolve around a narrative of singular rule. The evidence presented in this study confirms that Agrippa did not merely carry out Augustus' personal will. By every available constitutional measure, he was the first man to govern the Roman Empire alongside Augustus as *socius imperii*—a partner in law, representation, and public memory. His later marginalization does not reflect his actual standing, but rather the retrospective recasting of a co-authored regime

[267] Stern (2015: 63ff.).

into a narrative of solitary rule—an account shaped by the systematic erasure of diarchic leadership in favour of a monarchical paradigm imposed by later historiography.

This study set out to interrogate the ideological and constitutional frameworks that have contributed to the obscuring of Agrippa's status, and to recover the contours of the political partnership that shaped the early Principate. Its findings complicate the dominant scholarly narrative that centres imperial power exclusively on Augustus, and it raises important questions about how power, legitimacy, and memory were constructed and retrospectively distorted in Roman historiography. Challenging the prevailing assumption that Agrippa's authority was provisional or derivative, the cumulative evidence—from his tribunician power and *imperium maius*, to his symbolic funeral, architectural patronage, and prominent inclusion on the Ara Pacis—demonstrates that he occupied a role of enduring constitutional and ideological significance. Following the consolidation of the Principate—particularly after Agrippa's elevation to co-regency in 23 BCE—the regime initially operated not as a veiled monarchy, but as a diarchy: a dual system of authority intentionally structured in both form and function.

While Stern correctly identifies Agrippa's early death and failure to outlive Augustus as a contributing factor in his historiographical marginalization, this thesis has exposed a more fundamental distortion—one embedded in the reluctance of Roman historiography to recognize modes of power that did not conform to narratives of singular succession. The interpretive framework that retroactively rationalized Tiberius' elevation by imposing a narrative of linear succession, has obscured the prior reality of diarchic governance. Agrippa's constitutional status after 23 BCE was not transitional or preparatory, but paradigmatic: his powers reflected what was intended to be a deliberately designed and enduring framework of shared imperial authority. By

uncovering this distortion, the study repositions Agrippa as a foundational model for collaborative rule—one briefly revived under Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus.

The broader implications of this reinterpretation are threefold. First, it invites a reappraisal of the Principate's constitutional fluidity in its formative decades—a regime that initially grounded its legitimacy in consensus and collaboration before later coalescing into autocracy. Second, it stresses the need for closer scholarly attention to the mechanisms of historical erasure in Roman political culture—particularly how coinage, ritual, architecture, and epigraphy, preserved Agrippa's prominence during his lifetime, only for posthumous narratives to minimize or subsume it. Third, it opens new comparative avenues for analyzing power-sharing, both within Roman imperial history and across other dynastic and imperial traditions—where the retrospective privileging of singular authority often conceals more complex, and sometimes deliberately collaborative, arrangements of governance.

Through a systematic review of the various surviving ancient evidence, this study has demonstrated how processes of memory, omission, and appropriation influenced both ancient narratives and modern interpretations. In doing so, it contributes to Roman political history by bringing into clearer focus non-canonical (non-Western) Roman and Eastern sources—Josephus, Nicolaus of Damascus, and epigraphic and material evidence—that offer critical correctives to the biases embedded in Latin senatorial historiography and biography. Agrippa's prominence extended beyond Rome and was acknowledged across the Mediterranean, particularly by non-Roman communities who perceived his authority as autonomous and substantive. This broader evidentiary lens, together with attention to symbolic language and performative governance, highlights the extent to which institutional reality and ideological reception often diverged in constructing imperial memory.

Agrippa's rejection of traditional honours, his deliberate inversion of the *cursus honorum*, and his *recusationes* of triumphs, constituted not acts of self-effacement, but a critique of Republican value systems and a conscious redefinition of civic virtue. As proposed in the Introduction, his career invites comparison with Pompey the Great: both rose to prominence as young generals with extraordinary command while subverting the standard trajectory of Roman political life. Yet whereas Pompey's ambition (not to mention significant character flaws) precipitated rivalry and civil war, Agrippa consistently chose *concordia*. This ethos—manifested through shared *fasces*, joint magistracies, and dual appearances on coinage and monuments—reflected a political model founded on collaboration. Agrippa's authority was no accident of circumstance; it was embedded in the constitutional and ideological foundations of the Principate. His conscious rejection of triumphs and preference for lower offices after higher ones marked a strategic critique of Republican honours—demonstrating that the Principate no longer needed the symbolic trappings of the Republic to justify legitimacy.

The 21 BCE marriage between Agrippa and Julia marked not merely a personal alliance, but a symbolic reconciliation of the Republic's fractured legacy. Whereas the earlier union of Julia, daughter of Julius Caesar, and Pompey the Great failed to secure lasting peace, this second Julia's marriage to Agrippa functioned both as an evocation of that past and as a deliberate corrective to its collapse. It invoked the memory of that earlier alliance while deliberately inverting its outcome: Augustus and Agrippa reimagined themselves not as rivals doomed to repeat the past, but as co-founders of a regime grounded in lasting concord. The union, sealed by shared honours and the birth of heirs, publicly affirmed Agrippa's status not only as co-ruler, but as a foundational figure in the very bloodline of empire.

This study necessarily acknowledges its limitations. The absence of a surviving autobiography, the ideological distortion of our principal sources—particularly Dio—and the fragmentary nature of key evidence such as the *laudatio funebris*, constitute lamentable and significant gaps in knowledge. Yet these absences reinforce the stakes of the enquiry, inviting the historian to ask not only what can be known about Agrippa, but why that knowledge remains so limited, and what this concealment reveals about politics of memory in Rome. Future research might extend this reassessment by further investigating Agrippa's enduring prominence in the Eastern Mediterranean, where inscriptions and civic honours suggest sustained provincial recognition. Such studies could illuminate the perception of power outside the capital, and how regional variations in commemorating Agrippa can offer insight into the negotiation of imperial ideology and legitimacy in the provinces. Likewise, further analysis of Agrippa's funerary architecture and commemorative presence—particularly his interment in the Mausoleum Augusti and monumental legacy in the Campus Martius—could offer deeper insight into the material articulation of co-regency. Finally, a critical examination of the historiographical mechanisms that diminished his legacy—especially in Dio and later epitomators—might clarify how the Principate's original collaborative governance was overwritten by retrospective narratives of dynastic and singular rule. Together, these lines of future inquiry offer a path toward deepening and extending the restoration of Agrippa to both the lived reality and remembered structure of early imperial power in the Principate.

Ultimately, this thesis affirms that Agrippa was not a marginal agent, subordinate executor, or transient figure eclipsed by Augustus. He was the indispensable partner in constructing a new political order—one that redefined legitimacy through consensus, collaboration, merit, and constitutional innovation. Although his sons Gaius and Lucius did not survive to inherit the

Principate, Agrippa's dynastic legacy endured through his daughter Agrippina the Elder—also born of his marriage to Julia—who became the mother of Emperor Caligula and grandmother of Emperor Nero. In this way, the Julio-Claudian line descended as much from Agrippa as from Augustus, affirming their partnership not only in governance but also in the dynastic fabric and bloodline of the empire itself. Agrippa and Augustus were therefore more than co-rulers of their own time; they were co-founders of the dynasty—and the Roman Empire—that followed. His legacy was eclipsed but not erased; it remains firmly embedded in the Principate's earliest structures, preserved in stone, inscribed in law, and—at last—restored to the centre of the imperial narrative.

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