

## AN OVATIO FOR OCTAVIAN?

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DID OCTAVIAN RECEIVE an *ovatio* after Mutina? There is a great deal of disagreement among scholars on this point. One group confidently asserts that he did,<sup>1</sup> another, with equal assurance, believes he did not,<sup>2</sup> while a third expresses varying degrees of doubt.<sup>3</sup> Since such diverse views occur even in standard works it would seem timely to look at the evidence anew. The enquiry, we believe, will show that the weight of ancient authority is firmly behind those who hold that no ovation was awarded.

We begin with Cic. *ad Brut.* 1.15. Two points are to be borne in mind here. Brutus was worried about Cicero's partiality to Octavian. It therefore follows that the mere fact that Cicero made a proposal in his favour would be sufficient to alarm and annoy Brutus. It would not necessarily have to have been successful.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, *decernere* can mean "propose" as well as "decree."<sup>5</sup> Nor was it in Cicero's power to grant an honour; this rested with the senate. So, when Cicero uses the verb *decernere* it does not necessarily mean his proposal was accepted. The contrasting meanings of *decernere* are well illustrated by sections 7 and 8. In 7 it is used of honours granted in the session which opened on 1 January 43 (Holmes 37–40). In 8 the mention of *malevolos* seems to indicate quite clearly that this is a proposal which failed (cf. *ad Fam.* 11.10.1).

Now, what of the crucial passage, *ad Brut.* 1.15.9? When Cicero says, *ut ovanti introire liceret Caesari decreverim* does he mean, "I carried a resolution conferring upon Caesar the right of a joyous entry" (Loeb) or is he saying, "another proposal of mine ... namely that Caesar be granted leave to enter Rome in ovation" (Shackleton Bailey)? There are arguments for both views. *Decrevi* is used of Brutus and Plancus in the same

<sup>1</sup>R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford 1968) 177; D. Stockton, *Cicero, a Political Biography* (Oxford 1971) 319; T. Petersson, *Cicero, a Biography* (New York 1963) 669; W. E. Heitland, *The Roman Republic* (Cambridge 1923) 3.402; R. Y. Tyrrell and L. C. Purser, *The Correspondence of Cicero*<sup>1</sup> (Dublin 1899) 6.259.

<sup>2</sup>A. H. M. Jones, *Augustus* (London 1970) 20; T. R. Holmes, *The Architect of the Roman Empire* (Oxford 1928, cited below as "Holmes") 55 n.3; Tyrrell and Purser<sup>2</sup> (Dublin 1933) 307–308; M. P. Charlesworth, *Cambridge Ancient History* 10.15.

<sup>3</sup>E. Rawson, *Cicero* (London 1975) 287; D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Cicero's letters to Quintus and Brutus* (Cambridge 1980, cited below as "Shackleton Bailey") 249; *RE* 10.1 "Julius (Augustus);" Syme (above, n. 1) 177 n.2 (compare with text).

<sup>4</sup>Cf. sect. 3: *in honoribus decernendis ... prodigus*.

<sup>5</sup>See *OLD* s.v. (6) and Tyrrell and Purser<sup>2</sup> (above, n.2) 308.

paragraph and we know that they got their honours (Holmes 55). However, the mention of disapproval from Brutus' friends (*a tuis familiaribus ... non probatur*) is strongly reminiscent of what we have just seen in section 8 so that it is possible that we have here a proposal which failed. Thus, this evidence is equivocal and, on its own, the letter offers no solution.

One other letter has a bearing on this matter, *ad Brut.* 1.17. Its authenticity (and that of *ad Brut.* 1.16) has been questioned (Shackleton Bailey 10–14) and even if it is genuine it is of no real help since it too presents ambiguous evidence. Brutus here complains to Atticus about Cicero's attitude to Octavian. Among the complaints is one (sect. 2) that Cicero gives him *triumphus et stipendium* and that *omnibus decretis* he is encouraging him to aspire to Caesar's position.<sup>6</sup> Against the view that this shows that an *ovatio* was given several arguments may be deployed. First, we may emphasize the ambiguity of *decretis* and recall that encouragement, in any form, from Cicero for Octavian was bound to enrage Brutus. We may also point to the fate of the *stipendium* which was obviously the money to be paid to Octavian's troops after Mutina. M. Brutus urged the senate to take its time over it and his advice seems to have been followed, for the money was distributed in a tardy and partisan fashion.<sup>7</sup> If this is an indication of the senate's attitude, is it likely it would grant Octavian an *ovatio* at this time? Finally, Octavian's subsequent behaviour is that of a man slighted in every way (cf. Holmes 58). Nevertheless, it is possible to argue, on the basis of this passage, that an *ovatio* was granted. After all, *decretis* could refer to a decree. Moreover, if the senate was niggardly with the *stipendium* it could have been equally half-hearted about the honour. It could very well have voted the *ovatio* and then, repenting of what it had done, taken steps to prevent Octavian from celebrating it. Such a slight would account just as easily for Octavian's subsequent actions as would the notion that he got nothing at all.

So we must conclude that Cicero does not provide a clear-cut answer and must look elsewhere. When we turn to the evidence of Augustus himself we obtain an unequivocal statement. He says (*Res Gestae* 4) that he celebrated two ovations. He does not specify what these were for, but Suetonius tells us that one was celebrated after Philippi and the other after victories in Sicily.<sup>8</sup> There is no mention of an *ovatio* after Mutina. Nevertheless, although these sources indicate that no ovation was celebrated, they do not necessarily imply that none was voted. Given the circumstances under which he had entered Rome in 43, it is not straining credulity to suggest

<sup>6</sup>By *triumphus* an *ovatio* is meant. See Tyrrell and Purser<sup>2</sup> 307–308 and Shackleton Bailey 253.

<sup>7</sup>Cic. *ad Fam.* 11.20.3, App. *B.C.* 3.86, Dio 46.40.4–6.

<sup>8</sup>Suet. *Aug.* 22. The first of these was actually to celebrate the peace of Brundisium. See Shuckburgh *ad loc.*

that Augustus might have preferred to forget about it. An *ovatio* decreed but not celebrated might be easily suppressed. However, the rest of our evidence would seem to be firmly against this view. Appian (B.C. 3.74, 80, 82, 89), Dio (46.40), and Velleius Paterculus (2.62.4–5) indicate quite clearly that when honours were voted Octavian got no *ovatio*. It may, of course, be urged that the Augustan version of history would tend to represent the senate's behaviour as worse than it was and that, in consequence, we are not obliged to accept this version of events. Would it, though, actually have been worse to refuse a deserved honour outright than to grant it and then renege on the undertaking? We would suggest the latter. The first shows ingratitude, the second both ingratitude and treachery. It would, therefore, seem reasonable to assume that our authorities have not misrepresented the senate's actions by suppressing conduct which it would have been in their partisan interest to report.

One relatively minor detail in the accounts of Appian and Velleius is open to question. They both represent Octavian's name as being absent entirely from the senatorial decrees. In itself this circumstance is highly improbable, for it is unlikely that the senate would have made no appreciative mention at all of Octavian. Indeed, it would appear to be contradicted by both the Livian Epitomator and by Dio. The former says (119) that, while D. Brutus was voted a triumph, the senate made *mentionem non satis gratam* of Octavian and his troops. This would appear to mean that some casual and passing reference was made to Octavian and his men. Likewise Dio 46.40.1 says of the senate, τὸν ... δὴ Καίσαρα οὐχ ὅτι μεγάλου τινὸς ἔτ' ἡξίωσαν: here *μεγάλου* seems to contrast with an unexpressed but implicit *μικροῦ*—some slight tribute of thanks which Octavian did get. Had he been ignored entirely, a negative alone would have sufficed. However, we believe that there is no serious contradiction between the Epitomator and Dio on the one hand and Appian and Velleius on the other. They may disagree on the comparatively minor point of a mention but they are in accord on the major issue. None of these authorities has anything to say about an *ovatio* being granted.<sup>9</sup>

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