

XXI.—Aeneas-Augustus of Prima Porta¹

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It is suggested in the following paper that a passage in the *Aeneid* (12.331 ff.) inspired the design of the Augustus from Prima Porta, and that the Princeps appears in the portrait with the costume and attributes of Aeneas.

A full generation after the defeat at Carrhae, we find Horace (*Odes* 3.5) expressing the sense of disgrace still rankling in the Romans. He and other writers of the time repeatedly remind Augustus that the settlement of this old score is one of the services expected of him, if he is to receive that *immortalitas virtute parata* of which Livy speaks (1.7.15). The divinity they offer him is strictly on the basis of value received,² as Horace states with business-like clarity in the poem cited (lines 2–4):

praesens divus habebitur
Augustus adiectis Britannis
Imperio gravibusque Persis.

Even the devoted enthusiasm of Vergil recalls the duty unfulfilled, Auroramque sequi Parthosque reposcere signa (*Aen.* 7.606). But it is Propertius, less discreet than Horace or Vergil, who boasts with boyish enthusiasm of what his chieftain will do. The poem is the fourth of his third book, written apparently in 21 B.C. when Augustus was cautiously planning his expedition to the east, planning a show of strength in the presence of Tiberius and the legions in Armenia, but hoping that the suggestion of potential force would be enough.³ The sentiments of Propertius are by no means lofty, but are such as might be expected from the ordinary Roman who did not feel

¹ Studniczka in an admirable study of the Prima Porta Augustus sums up the voluminous literature up to the date of his writing (*Röm. Mitt.* 1910, page 27, note 1); to this should be added Müller, *AJPh* 62 (1941) 496–99 with references there given; Alföldi, *Röm. Mitt.* 1937, 48 ff.; Oltramare, *REL* 16 (1938) 121–138; Patroni, *Atti Reale Accademia d'Italia*, Ser. 7, 3 (1941) 90–102. (Miss Doris Taylor has kindly sent me from Rome a summary of Patroni's article to which I did not have access.)

² L. R. Taylor, *The Divinity of the Roman Emperor* (Middletown, Conn., 1931) 164. The whole of Chapter VI provides a helpful background for the study of the statue.

³ J. G. C. Anderson in *CAH* 10.262 ff.; Oltramare (*op. cit.*, especially 138) supposes that Augustus intended to avoid war but encouraged the poets to keep up a war scare at home to stiffen public morale. The tone of Propertius seems to contradict this.

the remote Asiatic frontier as a menace and, too ignorant of the risks involved to admit the possibility of failure, was in no mood for a negotiated peace. He expresses no doubts or fears, only eager anticipation of spoil and the satisfaction of turning the tables on a troupe of insolent barbarians.

Arma deus Caesar dices meditatur ad Indos,
et freta gemmiferi findere classe maris.
magna, viri, merces: parat ultima terra triumphos,
Thybris, et Euphrates sub tua iura fluet;
sera, sed Ausoniis veniet provincia virgis;
assuescent Latio Partha tropaea Iovi.
ite agite, expertae bello date lintea prorae,
et solitum armigeri ducite munus equi!
omina fausta cano. Crassos clademque piate!
ite et Romanae consulite historiae!
Mars pater, et sacrae fatalia lumina Vestae,
ante meos obitus sit precor illa dies,
qua videam spoliis oneratos Caesaris axes.
ad vulgi plausus saepe resistere equos,
inque sinu carae nixus spectare puellae
incipiam et titulis oppida capta legam,
tela fugacis equi et bracati militis arcus,
et subter captos arma sedere duces!
ipsa tuam serva prolem, Venus: hoc sit in aevum
cernis ab Aenea quod superesse caput.
praeda sit haec illis, quorum meruere labores:
mi sat erit Sacra plaudere posse Via.⁴

Clearly the hope and expectation are for a triumph following a military victory and complete with every possible solace to wounded pride in the humiliations heaped upon the enemy. What actually came to pass was very different. Augustus never fought the Parthians at all, but recovered the standards by negotiation, a sensible and effective method, but one difficult to present to people who were anticipating a fine military show. The Parthian Phraates had rendered unto Caesar the things that were Caesar's and nothing more. There were no chariots heaped with spoils, not even a bow and arrow, much less a disarmed Parthian king to exhibit on the Sacred Way: only the standards which ought never to have left Roman hands, and a small proportion of those Romans (Horace's *Marsus et Apulus*) who had in his view eternally disgraced themselves by surrender and had grown old in a foreign land.

⁴ Prop. 3.4, ed. H. E. Butler (Loeb, 1912).

Augustus must have been aware of the flatness of his announcement after the long clamouring for vengeance and the confidently boastful threats of his admirers. There was time on the journey home to ponder these things. On that journey he met Vergil in Greece and spent some hours in his company. That meeting was a memorable one, since it was highlighted by the almost immediate death of the poet and the release of his *Aeneid* with its unparalleled advance publicity. Augustus himself, or some one close to him, had the inspiration of using a fine passage in the poem to clothe the Parthian success in the necessary glamour and glorify the use of peaceful means. It seems possible that the lines directly inspired the Prima Porta Augustus which was set up to commemorate the return of the standards, with the actual scene of surrender adorning the breastplate. The passage is *Aeneid* 12.311 ff. where, after the treaty with Latinus, Aeneas steps forward to halt a threatened renewal of bloodshed.

At pius Aeneas dextram tendebat inermem
nudato capite atque suos clamore vocabat:
Quo ruitis? quaeve ista repens discordia surgit?
O cohibete iras: ictum iam foedus et omnes
compositae leges; mihi ius concurrere soli;
me sinite atque auferte metus; ego foedera faxo
firma manu. . . .

The Prima Porta statue, stepping forward with head unhelmeted and right hand raised, is a literal enough illustration of this description to suggest a connection. A study of the details of the figure confirms the general impression.

As Aeneas comes to the place appointed for the treaty meeting, he wears the splendid armor made for him by Vulcan (12.167). The magnificent cuirass of the Prima Porta portrait, more sumptuous and carefully executed than any other known, has always attracted attention. In the eighth *Aeneid* we note that, while the familiar description of the armor pictures the shield in full detail with its prophetic scenes in polychrome inlay of different metals, the breastplate is dismissed with a general impression of size, stoutness, and splendour (8.621 ff.):

loricam ex aere rigentem
sanguineam ingentem, qualis cum caerulea nubes
solis inardescit radiis longeque refulget.

This leaves our designer with a free hand and he has happily contrived on the cuirass a continuation of the shield's prophecy (which ends with Actium) by showing the Parthian surrender of the standards. The impression of a red glow and the suggestion of Vergil's sun-kindled cloud he has faithfully carried out in the upper design by means of the chariot of the morning sun and a flush as of dawn on the red mantle which Father Sky is spreading above the scene in a gesture of blessing and protection. This is doubly appropriate because the treaty of Book XII is struck at sunrise. Granted that marble statues were painted, it would be normal to represent a piece of bronze armor as a monochrome yellow, brown, or gold. The traces of paint still showing on the statue when it was found show that the bas-reliefs of this breastplate were brilliantly colored,⁵ however, and this unusual feature relates its effect with that of the shield where white foam caps the blue waves (8.672), the Gauls wear striped cloaks, and their golden collars encircle white necks (659 ff.). The actors in the scenes on the shield are definite individuals — Lars Porsenna, Catiline, Augustus, Agrippa, etc. In conformity with this, the figures of Roman and Parthian should be, as Studniczka felt convinced for other reasons, not the god Mars and an abstract Parthia,⁶ but literally the king Phraates and a Roman general. Logically, this last should be Augustus himself, who is surely the focus of this scene as he is of the battle of Actium on the shield. The Parthian wears on his brown hair a white circlet, perhaps to indicate his royal rank. His curious, upward-reaching pose may be carried over into this design from the arch of Augustus where the barbarians stand on the low side arches and look up toward the Princeps in his chariot upon the higher central section.⁷ The Roman is in complete field uniform, with helmet and military boots such as the statue should be wearing if Augustus were appearing here in his proper person. Those who advocate a late date for the statue begin from the bare feet ("a feature which proves heroization")⁸ as an indication that the portrait was executed

⁵ Studniczka, *op. cit.* 28, has marked this peculiarity and considers it one reason for thinking this a marble original and not a copy of a bronze, on which elaborate enamel work would be very surprising.

⁶ To judge from coins and reliefs, an abstract figure would be female, like those of the provinces on the breastplate.

⁷ H. Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum* (London, 1923-40) Plate 3, no. 4. Cp. a less accurate Spanish coin, Plate 10, no. 2.

⁸ Müller, *op. cit.* 497.

after the death of the subject. If the emperor here impersonates his divine ancestor, the argument is meaningless, since Aeneas would not include Roman boots in his uniform. The presence of the dog is still unexplained. He is not a likely companion either for a Roman general or for the god Mars, to whom some determined partisans have tried to adapt him by seeing in him the traits of a wolf⁹ — traits which this creature certainly does not possess. Perhaps the artist saw in his threatening snarl the best means of suggesting, "The Roman extends to you the right hand of peace, but he is prepared to show a different spirit if necessary." The associations of the dog in Persian religion, especially his uses in tearing the bodies of the dead before they could be buried, give him a grim appropriateness.

While the main actors should be historical personages, the surrounding figures which form the setting for the event need not be. On the shield a literal Cleopatra flees from Actium, but the personified Nile spreads his blue cloak to offer sanctuary to his panic-stricken child (8.707-13). So the abstract figures of the grieving provinces¹⁰ and the visible presence of divinities on the breastplate are not out of keeping with the shield or with the realism of the central scene. The divinities are among those invoked as witnesses of the treaty oath (12.175 ff.):

Tum pius Aeneas stricto sic ense precatur:
 Esto nunc Sol testis et haec mihi Terra vocanti,
 quam propter tantos potui perferre labores, etc.

Latinus (197 ff.) calls upon the same earth and sea and heavenly bodies, but adds *Latonaque genus duplex*, thus accounting for the presence of Apollo and Diana in the half figures at the sides of the breastplate. The earth goddess with the children playing around her and the horn of plenty in her lap is surely Italy which naturally represents the earth to Italians. About the time of the surrender Horace writes to his friend Iccius in Sicily and closes with a budget of the latest news from the capital (*Epist.* 1.12.25-29). He men-

⁹ Alföldi, *op. cit.* 54.

¹⁰ The identity of the provinces is disputed. See Alföldi, *op. cit.* (48-63). Attributes suggesting Dacian or German have been recognized as well as Spanish or Gallic (Alföldi, 49). It may be that the designer intentionally used a medley of elements because more than two places are associated with the recovery of standards and the subjection of territory at this time (Spain, Gaul, Germany, and Dalmatia are cited in the *Res Gestae* 28 f.). Space and balance forbade more than two figures in the design. This type of telescoping is a common trick of Vergil's composition.

tions the success of Agrippa in Spain, of Tiberius in Armenia, the submission of Phraates, and then adds: aurea fruges Italiae pleno defundit Copia cornu. It seems almost as if he had seen the combination of Phraates with Italia and her horn of plenty.¹¹

There is no certainty about the attribute in the left hand of the statue, but the Vergilian context makes it probable that the old restoration of the scepter is correct, rather than the spear favored by the Vatican catalogue and Mrs. Strong.¹² The Servian commentary on this passage (12.206) says that the scepter belongs to the ceremonial and that Latinus carries one, not as king, but as *pater patratus*. It is fitting that Aeneas carry this badge of office when taking the treaty oath for his people, though Vergil in line 175, it must be noted, makes him swear on his drawn sword.

The statue prop necessary for the marble figure is in the shape of a dolphin with an Eros-rider, a motif familiar to us in this very use. The dolphin is the standard support for Hellenistic Aphrodites.¹³ There is, however, something special about this case, though its small scale has reduced it to an ornamental attribute not noticeable enough to distract attention from the stately figure it supplements. Studniczka recognized the Cupid as a portrait and suggested that it was Gaius, Julia's son, whose birth in the same year as the Parthian episode had supplied Augustus with a natural heir.¹⁴ Even before his adoption by his grandfather, Gaius was marked as the Julian hope and stay. It was desirable to introduce the child into the intricate allegory of the portrait both because he is the focus of great public interest and because he forms a striking counterpart to Ascanius who accompanies Aeneas at the treaty meeting, and is there described as *magnae spes altera Romae* (12.168). The ingenious artist has succeeded in introducing the baby without incongruity by presenting him in the form of an accepted artistic convention. The dolphin-riding Cupid had been a Julian symbol since it had appeared on Caesar's coins a quarter of a century

¹¹ The combination of elements in this Horatian passage militates against the idea of Von Domaszewski, *Abhand. zur Röm. Relig.* (Leipzig, 1909) 53 ff. (followed by Mrs. Strong and others) that the figure at the bottom of the cuirass represents Orbis Romanus.

¹² Amelung, *Skulpt. Vatikan. Mus.* 1.19 ff.; Strong, *Scultura Romana* 2.358; Studniczka, *op. cit.* 49, proposes a standard.

¹³ E. B. Stebbins, *The Dolphin in the Literature and Art of Greece and Rome* (Menasha, Wisconsin, 1929) 117-120.

¹⁴ Studniczka, *op. cit.* 55.

earlier.¹⁵ Gaius, being a Julian with the ichor of Venus in his veins, can exchange places with his brother Cupid as easily as Ascanius at Dido's feast. If there were any question of bad luck in showing an ordinary mortal child in such a form,¹⁶ there would be none in his case. The baby has retained his own somewhat unfortunate features and ill-shaped cranium. With his blurred and unfocussed look of infancy he seems far younger than the two years Studniczka attributes to him and his appearance lends support to those who would date the work soon after the Parthian surrender, when Gaius was only a few months old.

The artist has welded into an acceptable design a complex as heterogeneous as the stuff of Vergil's poems — real and unreal, actual and symbolic. We have the human features of Augustus and his grandson, the confident stance of the living man secure in his *auctoritas* without the need of violence, the symbolic presence of the heavenly powers that watch over his manifest destiny, the mystic fusion of his own personality with that of his heroic ancestor. The statue seems a fulfillment of that strange passage in the third *Georgic* (34 ff.) where Vergil dreams of the adornment of a temple and, after an allusion to the Parthians and their subjection, says:

Stabunt et parii lapides, spirantia signa,
Assaraci proles demissaeque ab Iove gentis
nomina Trosque parens et Troiae Cynthius auctor.

No competent observer has missed the Vergilian quality of the Prima Porta Augustus,¹⁷ though some have misinterpreted its poise and ideality as too "neo-classical" and "abstract" to fit the spirit of Augustan art before the Ara Pacis. The subject of this portrait

¹⁵ Grueber, *Coins of the Roman Republic in the British Museum* (London, 1910) Plate 51.13, from 46 B.C.

¹⁶ Hohl (*Klio* 31 [1938] 269 ff.) argues that the Romans regarded cupids as symbols of dead children and would not use the form for a living baby. He cites examples of sepulchral connections, but all from a later period than the last possible date of the statue, and their association with more cheerful themes in Hellenistic art can hardly be denied. Cp. the House of the Vettii and other wall paintings. Livia's dedication of the later Gaius, Caligula's brother, in the form of a cupid may have been inspired by an existing imperial prototype in the Prima Porta baby, and not vice versa. There seems to be no good reason for abandoning the identification of the dolphin rider as the grandson of Augustus. The portrait looks too young to be described as *iam puerascens*, the phrase used by Suetonius of the later Gaius (*Caligula* 7).

¹⁷ All who know both Augustan poetry and Augustan art recognize their unity. Mattingly goes so far as to suggest an intention to honor Vergil in coin types of the years following his death, *op. cit.* (above, note 7) ciii. Vergil and Horace pervade the Ara Pacis. Taylor, *op. cit.* (above, note 2) 178-80.

calls loudly to his people (*clamore*), but though he speaks with epic volume, he speaks calmly, as one who is sure that his voice will be heeded, as a well-bred father recalls his own children to a sense of their duty. If the statue is late, many passages in the *Aeneid* must be Claudian interpolations. The association of Augustus with Aeneas was already familiar before the publication of the *Aeneid*. The occasional (though only occasional) identity of the two in the poem is obvious to all. It seems particularly happy in the Parthian context to represent the Princeps as Aeneas, the peace-maker, the advocate of negotiation rather than bloodshed: *O cohibete iras! . . . ego foedera faxis firma manu*.

It has been suggested that the Prima Porta statue is a later copy of a bronze set up to commemorate the Parthian success soon after the event.¹⁸ No final proof has been produced either for or against this theory. However, the stylistic arguments in favor of a later date are vague and subjective and only advanced by those already convinced for other reasons (e.g. because of the famous bare feet or the funeral associations of Cupid). Studniczka has more definite support for taking the statue as an original in the inappropriateness of the polychromy to a bronze, in his answer to the question raised by the incomplete victory on the back of the cuirass, and in the dolphin-prop (unnecessary for a bronze) as an essential feature of the original design.¹⁹ Besides this, the execution of the statue shows more care than is usually lavished on a copy.²⁰ To be sure, it would seem that the original of such a work would be placed in a conspicuous place in Rome itself, rather than in Livia's suburban villa where this was found. It is at least possible, however, that with the evolution of the final attitude on the Parthian question the statue may have declined in interest and been removed from its first position — perhaps even by deliberate policy. For as propaganda it had failed. The Romans preferred to forget the peaceful aspect and treat the episode as the military victory they had desired. Propertius expresses thinly veiled disappointment (4.6.81 ff.) where he apologizes for Augustus:

Sive aliquid pharetris Augustus parcat Eois,
differat in pueros ista tropaea suos.

¹⁸ See Loeschke's theory revived by Müller, *op. cit.* (above, note 1) 498.

¹⁹ Patroni, *op. cit.* (above, note 1) 90–96, argues that the support is necessary to the balance of the composition.

²⁰ See Mrs. Strong's eloquent description, *Scultura Romana* 2.359.

The arch in the Forum (which, whatever its first intention,²¹ certainly came to be inseparably associated with the *signis receptis* of the coins) represents the emperor in a quadriga with palm and scepter, the full regalia of the military triumph, when as a matter of fact he entered the city on horseback in a kind of compromise celebration.²² Within a year of the surrender Horace speaks of Phraates as *genibus minor* (*Epist.* 1.12.27), an abject pose by no means like the upstanding Parthian of the breastplate.²³ For the coins between 19 and 16 we have both standing and kneeling representations of Parthia and Armenia, the grovelling figures from the Roman mint, and more dignified types from the eastern.²⁴ In the *Res Gestae* (29) Augustus uses the word *coegi* from which the reader is free to draw a conclusion not strictly in accord with the facts. Altogether, it would not be surprising if the Prima Porta portrait had been quietly retired to Livia's villa there to be rediscovered in the nineteenth century — and to remain, in spite of our efforts, as much of an enigma as the *Aeneid* which inspired it.

²¹ Leicester B. Holland, *AJA* 50 (1946) 52 ff.

²² Dio 54.8.1, where we learn that Augustus chose to treat the affair as a military victory.

²³ It does not seem likely that there would be a return to the standing figure after the kneeling type which flattered Roman vanity had become current. This seems to suggest an early date for the design of the cuirass.

²⁴ Mattingly, *op. cit.* (above, note 7) nos. 10–21, 43 (Roman mint), 676–678 (eastern).