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The Political Nature of Ovid's Error

Abstract: *In his libellus of self-defence, Ovid admits that he has been driven to ruin by duo crimina, carmen et error. While he defends himself with regard to the carmen, which can be identified with the Ars amatoria, he prefers saying nothing about the error: in fact as a careful observer of political events and aware of the people's repercussions that the disclosure of his criminal act would cause, he prefers to live silently his culpa, aligning with Augustus's behaviour, who, before political attacks, reacts either preventing the disclosure of the news or downgrading them to crimes against morality, which are punished under the proper regulations.*

Key-words: Ovid, error

Let's deal immediately with the question related to the second *crimen* (*Trist.* 2, 208: *alterius facti*), whose cause the poet says he can't reveal (*ibid.*: *culpa silenda*) both because everybody knows it and because the grief caused to the *princeps* must not be mentioned (*Pont.* 3, 3, 73: *neque enim debet dolor ipse referri*) not to reopen other wounds in him (*Trist.* 2, 209: *renovem tua vulnera*), as - the poet suggests - it is already too much for him having suffered once (*Trist.* 2, 210: *quem nimio plus est indoluisse semel*). From these words it is easy to deduce that the poet seems to have rejected any possibility of investigation of the causes of his relegation to Tomi.

However it is possible to speculate such causes on the basis of some scattered hints introduced by the poet in his exile distichs. It is a quite complex reconstruction, made intricate by the poet himself, who - in my opinion - doesn't speak frankly not to

¹ The reason why Ovid uses *silenda* and not *tacenda culpa* is dealt by L. Heilmann, *Silere-tacere*, "Quad. Ist. di Glott. Univ. di Bologna" 1, 1955-56, 5 ss.

compromise powerful friends who tried to reconstruct the patchy plot of Augustus' succession under the line traced by the *princeps* himself in 4 AD. The new line favoured a successor belonging to the *gens Claudia*, in contrast with the previous line completely in favour of the *gens Iulia* which, supported by the people, considered the succession legitimate.

Preliminarily it is necessary to explain some questions which seemingly wouldn't have a satisfactory answer. For example: what was Ovid doing in Elba with such an important political man in the month of October of 8 AD? He certainly wasn't there on holiday considering that the autumn was well advanced and moreover the sea was *clausum* to public boats. Furthermore, how can one explain the centurion's hurry to deliver the deportation order to Ovid right on the island? It would have been fairer and more convenient to wait for the poet's return to Rome and bring him regularly to trial; on the contrary he was informed about the charges contained in Augustus' heavy deliberation through an order given to a centurion.

Let's try to solve these two questions by delving into the verses written by the poet when he was in Tomi.

It's the poet himself who in *Pont.* 2, 3, 83-84 (*Ultima me tecum vidit maestisque cadentes / excepit lacrimas Aethalis Ilva genis*) says that he was in Elba in the middle of October 8 AD when he received Augustus' *edictum* which interned him in Tomi, a very far place in *Scythia minor*, on the western coast of the Eusinus Pontus², a place not known to Romans. He was with Aurelius Cotta

² *Aethalis Ilva* (*Pont.* 2,3,84) is replaced with *Italica ora* by E. Ripert, *Ovide, les Tristes, les Pontiques, Ibis, le Noyer, Halieutiques*, Paris 1957 (= 1937), 8. Ripert's lesson is considered interesting by D. Marin, *Ovidio fu relegato per la sua opposizione al regime augusteo?*, "Acta Philologica" I, Societas Academica Daco-romana, Roma, 1958, 222. J. Carcopino, *Ovide à l'Île d'Elbe?*, "MEFR" 74, 1962, 519-528, too, thinks that the island in question is not Elba, but *Aletium*, i.e. the ancient *Aletha*, *Calabriae situm inter Uzantum et Neretum*, whose inhabitants are called (*Nat.* 3, 105) *Sallentinorum Aletin* by Plinius. Two French scholars, Ripert e Carcopino, assert, inexplicably, that Ovid read the *edictum* of the *princeps* in Brindisi and not in Elba. In this way the two scholars cancel at once Ovid's account of the last night before leaving to the city where he had to board, in *Trist.* 1, 3.

³ A. Rădulescu, *Ovidio nel Ponto Eusino* (Sulmona 1990), 53-70; F. Della Corte-S. Fasce, *Opere di Publio Ovidio Nasone*, II, *Tristia, Ibis, Ex Ponto, Halieuticon liber* (Torino, 1986), 21-24 e 27-30. The translation of some passages in this chapter are taken from this book.

Maximus⁴, a close friend belonging to one of the most noble families of that time, who, incredulous, (*Pont.* 2, 3, 85: *num verus nuntius esset*) asked the poet, already in tears, if the accusation contained in the *edictum* and formulated against him was true. The poet didn't answer, unsure whether to confess or to deny (*Pont.* 2, 3, 87-88): *inter confessum dubie dubieque negantem / haerebam*.

The reason why the poet was in Elba might be that his presence was required for a specific purpose. In fact, at a distance of only 12 kilometers from Elba there was the island of Planasia that had been hosting Agrippa Postumus for a year (since 7 AD). Agrippa Postumus had been transferred there from Sorrento where he had been exiled by Augustus at the instigation of Livia, as Tacitus points out (*Ann.* 1, 34: "she dominated Augustus so much that she induced him to relegate to Planasia his only nephew, Agrippa Postumus, without any education and stupidly proud of his physical strength, but guilty of nothing").

It is likely that Ovid, known people's spokesman, and so close to their aspirations, had been appointed to approach Agrippa, the single male heir of the *gens Iulia*, to plan his liberation. At the same time, other men such as Lucius Audasius and Asinius Epicadus (Svet. *Aug.* 19, 2) had been appointed to free Julia Major, who lived in exile in Regium.

Everybody knows that Suetonius mentions two attempts related to Agrippa preceding that of Clemens in his *Vita Augusti*; speaking about the conspiracies repressed by Augustus in chapter 19, he mentions that of L. Audasius and Asinius Epicadus and says (*ib.* 19, 2) *Audasius atque Epicadus Iuliam filiam et Agrippam nepotem ex insulis, quibus continebantur, rapere ad exercitus... destinarant*. Everyone agrees that the attempt of L. Audasius and A. Epicadus is to be dated after 7 AD: in fact at that time Agrippa was already in Planasia. However Suetonius speaks of liberation of Agrippa and Julia "Augustus' daughter" from their *islands* and thinks that the conspiracy performed by Audasius and Epicadus to free Agrippa and his mother had been organised by Iulia Minor before her relegation in 8 AD.

According to Suetonius, the conspiracy was performed by two men of low social status, a maimed forger L. Audasius, and a man of foreign origin, A. Epicadus, *ex gente Parthina ibridae*,

⁴ Rohden, *RE* II², s.v. *Aurelius* (11 1), 2490; Della Corte-S. Fasce, *Opere di Ovidio* ref., 45. The third letter of the second book of the *Pontica* is address to him.

who, based on his *nomen*, seems to be a freedman of the *gens Asinia*, the *gens* of *Asinius Pollio* and *Asinius Gallus*.

The two coordinated liberation acts of the exiles were solicited by the group close to Julia Minor, who had inherited from her mother the defence of the *gens Iulia*, legitimate aspirant to Augustus' succession.

Julia Major and her sons had always relied on the support of the *plebs urbana*: in 6 BC the *plebs urbana* had asked for the consulship of Agrippa's brother Gaius, too, who at that time was fifteen, causing – Dio says (55, 9, 2) – the indignation of Augustus, concerned about the adulations whose object were Gaius and his younger brother Lucius and persuaded that nobody could take power before being able to resist the people's pressure. In 6 BC the *plebs urbana* was certainly manoeuvred by Julia Major, still powerful, and by the circle of noblemen who surrounded her. In 2 BC Augustus exiled Julia to an island (Pandataria) and five years later (in 3 AD) in Regium (cf. Tac. *Ann.* 1, 53, 1; Suet. *Aug.* 65, 3). In reporting this transfer Suetonius adds: *nam ut omnino revocaret, exorari nullo modo potuit, deprecanti saepe populo Romano et pertinacius, instanti tales filias talesque coniuges pro contione imprecatus*. So the people had insistently asked Augustus for Julia's return and Augustus had harshly rejected that request. In the end the *princeps* surrendered allowing Julia's transfer to a nearer place: Julia was, in fact, sent to Regium (Tac. *Ann.* 1, 53, 1).

So, going back to Audasius and Epicadus' act, it is easy to deduce that they relied on the loyalty of the armies, composed of *vernacula multitudo*, to Iulia's party, and that a possible arrival of Agrippa and his mother Julia, idols of the *plebs urbana*, to the armies might cause a military revolt which would have forced Augustus to change his succession plans and to favour the dynastic line in contrast with his adoptive choices.

In short, Audasius and Epicadus were only the perpetrators of a plan which had been arranged cleverly by the upper class. I am more and more convinced that the person responsible for inspiring and coordinating the subversive plot was Julia Minor, most interested in putting her brother Agrippa at the top of the succession list.

The liberation acts should have happened simultaneously, but the two exiles were in diametrically opposed zones: Julia was in Regium and his son Agrippa was in Planasia, in Tuscany. It is reasonable to think that Audasius and Epicadus focused on Julia,

whereas another group, which involved Ovid, focused on Agrippa. Both conspiracies were then repressed by Augustus.

This supposition might be corroborated also by the presence, in Elba, of Cotta Maximus, whose family was very devoted to the *gens Iulia*, as Ovid reports in *Pont.* 2, 2, 21: *quaeque tua est pietas in totum nomen Iuli*, writing to Messalinus, Cotta Maximus' elder brother in 13 AD. It might be interesting to remember that Cotta and Messalinus' father, Valerius Messalla Corvinus, died in 8 AD and in that circumstance Ovid composed an *epicedium* in his honor (*Pont.* 1, 7, 27-29) as a memorial to the time spent in his literary circle, that he joined when he was young, but also to thank him for his suggestion and encouragement to follow the path of poetry (*Pont.* 2, 3, 75-78). It is therefore appropriate to reassemble the pieces of this complex plot by saying that in 8 AD Cotta Maximus was the closest literary man to Ovid, but also the most convinced and regarded leading aristocratic figure (besides the interested parties) with relation to the defence of the *gens Iulia*. As they were both literary men, not publicly exposed from a political point of view and therefore less monitored, they could carry out a special mission such as the approaching of Agrippa Postumus, whose liberation was being planned by the group depending from Julia Minor. This supposition is supported by other evidence, such as the fact that when Cotta was treated harshly by Tacitus (*Ann.* 6, 7, 1: *egens ob luxum, per flagitia infamis*, "because of his living in luxury despite his misery, discredited because of his immorality"), and was brought even to trial (*Ann.* 6, 5), he attested his contrasting position with Livia and the approach to the *gens Iulia*, just as happened with his elder brother Messalinus. During an official dinner for Livia's birthday, Cotta had cracked a bad joke saying that the dinner was a real funeral, alluding to the fact that Livia wasn't included among the divinities yet, despite the presence of priests, and in the same circumstance he had put Caligula's virility in doubt. So it seems that for a long time Cotta had been professing political ideals close to those of the two Julias and in tune with the tendencies of the group joined by Ovid.

The second question concerns the centurion's hurry to deliver the deportation order to Ovid right on the island. From *Trist.* 1, 3, 11: *Iovis ignibus ictus* it is possible to catch Augustus' fast decision to block the planned meeting and foil Agrippa's possible flight. The

⁵ Cotta recited poems (*Pont.* 3, 5, 37), was an author of *carmina* and *orationes* and appeared in the list of poets and orators (*Pont.* 4, 16, 42).

centurion carried out an order which should have immediate solution. It couldn't be otherwise, considering that the Agrippa's probable liberation would have implied the transfer of the young man to the army without going to Rome. Only blocking the group on its mission and preventing the contact, the conspiracy could have been considered suppressed. Ovid's strict punishment is the confirmation of my supposition. In fact the poet was sent in the farthest zone from Rome to avoid new possible contacts with Agrippa. Exiling Ovid to a place within Italy might be dangerous; on the contrary, sending him to Tomi was a good way to put an end to possible meetings with the party followers but also to keep Ovid far from the people for whom he was the spokesman. The urgency of the execution of the sentence is particularly evident in the account of the last night spent in Rome, that the poet includes in *Trist.* 1, 3.

The edict ordered the peremptory and immediate sending away of the poet from Italy, although the autumn season wasn't favourable to navigation (*Trist.* 1, 3, 5-6): *Iam prope lux aderat, qua me discedere Caesar/finibus extremae iusserat Ausoniae.*

Ovid hadn't even the time to bring the bare necessities (*Trist.* 1, 3, 7: *nec spatium nec mens fuerat satis apta parandi*), nor did he worry about his servants and what he would need during the long journey (*Trist.* 1, 3, 9-10: *non mihi sevorum, comites non cura legendi, / non aptae profugo vestis opisve fuit*): in fact it was necessary to take care of the *viduli* and the *manticae* which at that time should contain, in addition to clothing and supplies, everything needed to cook, eat, wash and sleep; however Ovid wasn't able to completely take care of them. His heart was in a turmoil (*Trist.* 1, 3, 8: *torpuerat pectora nostra*), his mind was totally confused (*Trist.* 1, 3, 7: *nec mens satis apta parandi*), so much that he thought about committing suicide (*Pont.* 1, 9, 12: *quae (tempora) vellem vitae summa fuisse meae*). He could say goodbye only to some friends; Celsus, in particular, who was present at the time of his departure, comforted and dissuaded him

⁶ Ovid was obliged to leave Rome immediately not to incur an increase in sentence, under the rule mentioned in Marcian, *dig.* 48, 19, 4: *si quis non excesserit in exilium intra tempus, intra quod debuit, sive etiam alias exilio non obtemperaverit: nam contumacia cius cumulat poenam.*

⁷ Of the many friends, (*de multis*) - Ovid says - only few remained faithful to him: one or two (*Trist.* 1, 3, 16), two or three (*Trist.* 1, 5, 33; 3, 5, 10; 5, 4, 36; *Pont.* 2, 3, 30).

from committing that insane act: (*Pont.* 1, 9, 21-22: *O quotiens vitae custos invisus amarae / continuit promptas in mea fata manus*) ; he hugged his beloved wife Fabia many times (*Trist.* 1, 3, 17: *uxor amans flentem flens tenebat*) and with the greatest sadness in his heart he parted from his family. In *Trist.* the poet says: *Dividor haud aliter, quam si mea membra relinquam, / et pars abrumpi corpore visa suo est*.

Not that we have solved the two questions discussed before, it is possible come back to the one related to Ovid's *error* and understand what this *error* is.

In 4 AD Augustus was obliged to change his succession policy¹⁰. The premature death of the two Cesares, Lucius in 2 AD (*ILS* 139) and Gaius in 4 AD (*ILS* 140), forced the *princeps* to adopt Tiberius and Agrippa Postumus, Julia's last son; in this way it was possible to guarantee the *novus status* and at the same time preserve the hegemony of the *gens Iulia*. In fact, if Augustus had adopted only Tiberius automatically, he would have to adopt Drusus Minor, Tiberius' son, and this would have somewhat thrown off the inner balance, tipping the scales in favour of the Claudii, instead of the

⁸ In *Trist.* 1, 5 he doesn't speak openly about Celsus, but dealing with the topic of friendship, at verse 5, he offers a *signum* which brings back to Celsus: *qui mihi consilium vivendi mite dedisti*.

⁹ Ovid's third wife, belonging to the *domus Fabia*, which depended on *Paullus Fabius Maximus*, one of Ovid's best friends and one of the most important representatives of the political world in the Augustean era; cf. D. Marin, *Ovidio fu relegato per la sua opposizione al regime augusteo?*, "Acta Philologica" I, Societas Academica Daco-romana, Roma 1958, 190-201. Fabia remained in Rome to act more easily in favour of her husband, imploring Augustus' forgiveness; however she didn't succeed in this and Ovid himself in *Trist.* 2, 11, 13 e 3, 3, 15 shows a certain mistrust towards her wife's act. From this behaviour some scholars drew conclusions on the relationship between Ovid and Fabia. According to G. Boissier, *L'opposition sous les Césars*, Paris 1875, 159 the poet from Sulmona married Fabia only because she was related to Fabius Maximus, so they married only out of self-interest; according to P. Fargues, *Ovide, l'homme et le poète*, "Revue des Cours et Conférences" 41, 1940, 353 ss. Fabia preferred remaining in Rome not to help her husband, but to continue enjoying the pleasures of the big city; S. D'Elia, *Ovidio*, Napoli 1959, 393 and R. Argenio, *La più bella elegia ovidiana dell'esilio*, "Riv. Stud. Class." 7, 1959, 145 ss. have found emphatic and false tones in Ovid's odes to Fabia; this topic is fully dealt with in F. Corsaro, *Sulla relegatio di Ovidio*, "Orpheus" 15, 1968, 125 ss.

¹⁰ For Augustus' political decisions in 4 AD, cf. D. Kienast, *Augustus. Prinzeps und Monarch*, Darmstadt 1982, 110.

Julii. The balance was restored by the adoption of Agrippa Postumus, Augustus' nephew .

Surprisingly, the *princeps* compelled Tiberius to adopt Germanicus, who had been designated as Agrippina Major's (Julia's daughter) husband, to prevent the Claudii from taking power. It should be noted that Germanicus, as Antonia Minor and Drusus Nero Claudius' son, not only restored Antonius' descendants, but he ensured also the Claudia ones and, finally, preserved the Julia ones, as Agrippina's husband and Augustus' nephew.

It seems a chaotic plot but in reality it is the description of the relationships among the families Julia and Claudia to consolidate alliances and defend their interests. To complete the pattern of relationships among the families, it should be remembered that Drusus, Tiberius' son, married in 5 AD - the same year of the wedding between¹² Germanicus and Agrippina - Julia Livilla, Germanicus' sister .

At this point Augustus' strategy appears clear: the concurrent adoption of Agrippa Postumus and Tiberius was made owing to the tricky inner situation, but maybe Augustus' aim¹³ was to gradually emarginate Tiberius in favour of Germanicus , a compromise figure to be preferred to the impetuous Agrippa, troublesome and possible destabilizing element for the State.

The first person to leave this succession program was Agrippa Postumus, vulgar and depraved according to Tacitus' report (*Ann.* 1, 3). In fact in 6 AD, two years after his adoption, Agrippa Postumus was disadopted and relegated to Surrentum, where he stayed only one year, before being permanently transferred to Planasia, a Tuscan island.

On the contrary, Tiberius, Germanicus and Drusus¹⁴, all belonging to the *gens Claudia*, proceeded with the *cursus honorum*: Tiberius became consul when he was twenty-nine, whereas Germanicus became consul in 12 AD, when he was twenty-seven.

In 8 AD a new scandal broke, which involved Julia Minor, charged with adultery with D. Iunius Silanus (Tacitus, *Ann.* 3, 24):

¹¹ S.A. Jameson, *Augustus and Agrippa Postumus*, "Historia" 24, 1975, 287-314.

¹² *PIR*, IV, p. 221; cf. also R.A. Birch, *The settlement of 26 June A.D. 4 and its aftermath*, "CQ" 31, 1981, 443-458.

¹³ B. Gallotta, *Germanico* (Roma, 1987), 23.

¹⁴ B. Levick, *Drusus Caesar and the adoptions of A.D. 4*, "Latomus" 25, 1966, 217-244.

the same charge had been brought against her mother. According to Tacitus (*Ann.* 4, 71, 4) Julia Minor was relegated to a deserted island, too. According to Suetonius (*Aug.* 19, 1), in this circumstance, L. Aemilius Paullus, Julia's husband, was condemned to death for conspiracy: "after that, he had to repress, in different moments, seditions, revolutionary attempts and a lot of conspiracies, discovered at birth through information even before they became dangerous...afterwards, that of Lucius Paulus, his niece's husband, and also that of Lucius Audasius and Asinius Epicadus. Both of them wanted to abduct his daughter Julia and his nephew Agrippa from the islands where they were confined to put them under the protection of the armies"¹⁵.

Suetonius information is very reliable: Paullus couldn't have died for committing adultery with his own wife Julia but for another crime, maybe that of *laesa maiestas*. This supposition is confirmed by an inscription in *CIL* 6, 4499 where the *erasio* of his name from public inscriptions is mentioned.

The analogies between the two scandals are evident, not only because mother and daughter, involved in similar charges, are often cited together by authors, but also because the relationships among the supporters of the two conspiracies were similar, too: it is possible to find elements of continuity between the circles and the friends of the two Julias¹⁶.

Iunius Silanus, adulterer of Julia Minor, was related to the Appi Claudii¹⁷, the Sempronii Gracchi and the Quinctii Crispini, in their turn involved as adulterers of Julia Major¹⁸. Aemilius Paulus himself was related to Julia Major and to her adulterer Cornelius Scipio.

¹⁵ M. Pani, *Tendenze politiche della successione al principato di Augusto*, Bari 1979, 37; the news of the scholiast to Giovenale is interesting, too, 6, 158: *cum is maiestatis crimine perisset ab avo relegata est, post revocata, cum semel vitiis addixisset, perpetui exilii damnata est supplicio. huius frater propter morum feritatem in Siciliam ab Augusto relegatus est*. So it seems that Paullus' conspiracy preceded Julia's exile in 8 AD. This supposition is corroborated by R. Syme, *History in Ovid* (Oxford 1978), 209.

¹⁶ M. Pani, *Il Circolo di Germanico*, "AFMB" 7, 1968, 109-127; Gallotta, *Germanico* cit., 62.

¹⁷ *PIR*, II², 985 e 987, 239 ss. Cf. G.W. Bowersock, *Augustus and the Greek world*, Oxford 1965, 28 ss; T.P. Wiseman, *Pulcher Claudius*, "HSPH" 74, 1970, 207 ss.

¹⁸ M. Pani, *Potere e valori a Roma fra Augusto e Traiano* (Bari 1993²), 250-255.

Even if there are few elements available, it is possible to find an anti-Augustan political plan in the circles attended by the friends of the two Julias. According to Pani this plan was “neither pro-republican, nor traditionalistic, not subject neither to legality nor to *mos maiorum*”. The popularity gained by Julia Major¹⁹ and the adulterers, although they were exposed to public condemnation by Augustus, would suggest a political line followed by the masses, which maintained anyway a “not traditionalistic” conception of the principate. The population didn’t have any political party to follow, but was attracted by single characters, to whom it looked for the answers Augustus’ government hadn’t given yet. On the other hand the *princeps* was less favourable to the lower and marginalized classes; his uncooperative behaviour and the scant initiatives in their favour would cause the people's protest, as in the case of the people's request for Julia Major’s return to Rome, which Augustus never granted, except for a transfer to a nearer place: she was transferred from Sicily to Regium. The step between the people's disorders and famine and revolts about famine and taxes and the palace revolution and the attempted crime of *maiestas* is certain very brief.

Iullus, son of Antonius, the triumvir, was involved in the conspiracy of Julia Major, whereas in that of Julia Minor there was Aemilius Paulus, who was close to the group of the former Antonians through Julia Major, as he had married her daughter. So, it is possible to see a certain continuity of relationships in these two conspiracies, which would affect the circle of Germanicus, son of Drusus and Antonia Minor²⁰. It should be noted that all the members of the *domus Augusta* had in common their popularity. Their circles appeared less close to the respect for tradition and moderate mores and more favourable to an Eastern Hellenistic “monarchical” line of the principate. In conclusion, the main aim of Julia Major, and then of her daughter, was to reach the highest authority for the *gens Iulia* and marginalize the the *gens Claudia* from the centers of power, *i.e.* Tiberius, but, consequently, this affected Livia, too, as she sponsored only her son Tiberius.

The sending away of Agrippa Postumus in 6 AD marked the end of the dream of seeing a successor belonging to the *gens Iulia* ruling the principate. This couldn't be accepted by Julia Minor, who, having inherited in the meanwhile her mother’s aspirations,

¹⁹ ID., *Tendenze politiche della successione al principato di Augusto*, 41.

²⁰ R. Gaggero, *La madre di Germanico*, “Riv. It.” 30.2, 1927, 145-168.

fomented vigorously political discontentment looking for approval among the aristocrats who were still loyal to the Antonian idea. Ovid, who had already defended Julia Major in the *Ars*, not condemning her adultery, certainly supported Julia Minor, by sharing the political line of succession in favour of the Julii. His disruptive literary action, which used Homeric expedients and references, didn't pass unnoticed; the collection of his writings in favour of the Julia line, begun eight years before, but unwelcome and hostile to the Claudi, was enough to unleash Livia, who saw Tiberius' accession compromised. Augustus, instigated by his wife, took measures to relegate anyone gravitating around Julia Minor's *entourage*, where people shared Antonian-inspired projects and political ideals.

The Eastern-Hellenistic "monarchical" line of the principate included also a broader propensity to a divinizing conception of the *princeps*, at least after the Hellenist manner, but sometimes also with an Iranian oriental and "redeeming" fascination. The debate on this topic was very heated in Rome and there were also political struggles: just remember Tacitus' passage (*Ann.* 2, 87) on the speech of Tiberius in the Senate, determined to put the brakes on people who called his work divine and himself *dominus*; in the same occasion Tiberius intervened with regard to the position of Fabius Maximus, Asian proconsul under Augustus and Germanicus, who acknowledged explicitly a form of divinity of the *princeps* in the Eastern countries²¹. The key role carried out by Fabius Maximus in the last few months of Augustus' life needs to be further studied. Fabius was certainly the inspirer of the reapproaching between Augustus and Postumus. At this point one may legitimately think that the representative of the *gens Fabia* was interested in the circle close to Postumus so much that he went with Augustus to Planasia to visit Agrippa; according to Tacitus (*Ann.* 1, 5) these were only *rumores*, but this episode is cited in other sources (cf. Dio Cass. 56, 30; Plin. *Nat.* 1, 149). The travel was certainly made and evidence of this may be found in the *Acta Fratrum Arvalium* (I, p. XXIX Henzen) which report Augustus' and Fabius' absence from Rome on May 14th 14 AD, few months before the *princeps*' and Fabius Maximus' death. With regard to the death of the latter, Tacitus says that it is not clear if he was murdered or committed suicide: *dubium an quaesita morte* (*Ann.* 1,

²¹ M. Pani, *Potere e valori a Roma fra Augusto e Traiano* (Bari 1993²), 244-245 and relevant notes.

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5, 2). The doubt remains, but there is no uncertainty in the fact that, thanks to Fabius' mediation, Augustus showed himself more conciliatory towards the exiles of 7 and 8 AD, those who were close to Agrippa Postumus and Julia Minor.

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