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# Animus after Actium? Antony, Augustus, and Damnatio Memoriae

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*Damnatio Memoriae*

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Historians of ancient Roman memory – most notably Harriot Flower and Eric Varner – offer strong evidence that the Augustan regime sought to rehabilitate the legacy of Mark Antony after his death. They argue that given Antony’s geographically diverse and relatively numerous visual and epigraphic remains, Antony could not have been fully subject to the dishonoring of memory, or *damnatio memoriae*, typically inflicted upon deceased political pariahs through the erasure of their name and image from public and private spaces.<sup>1</sup> While the archaeological and textual signs of Antony’s post-mortem preservation are surprisingly numerous, the reasons for such clemency remain comparably unexplored. Why would Augustus have impeded the *damnatio memoriae* of his most hated rival?

I argue that the perplexing preservation of Antony’s memory in the late 1st Century BCE may have actually corresponded with the values projected by the Augustan regime and its ideological revolution. I will explore three central themes of the Augustan revolution – (1) its focalization of *auctoritas*, (2) its departure from Hellenistic values, and ultimately, (3) its emphasis on the virtues of *pietas* and *clementia* – to demonstrate that each of these three revolu-

1. Flower, Harriet. *The Art of Forgetting: Disgrace and Oblivion in Roman Political Culture*, *Studies in the History of Greece and Rome* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006), 117-121; and Varner, Eric. *Mutilation and Transformation: Damnatio Memoriae and Roman Imperial Portraiture*, *Monumenta Graeca Et Romana* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 19.

tionary pillars would reject the *damnatio memoriae* of Antony as an ideological violation because of the sanction's communicative implications. In the bigger picture, a comparison between known Augustan values with the researched visual repercussions of *damnatio memoriae* not only exposes a number of reasonable theories about Antony's preservation, but also materially informs our understanding of Augustan censorship and its effect on the memory sanctions of the later Principate.

Augustus' meteoric rise to power followed no constitutional precedent: after the victory at Actium, the man who would become Augustus declared himself as the empire's supreme leader, bypassing republican laws and the judgment of the Senate. He projected that such superiority was legitimized by *auctoritas*, or as Karl Galinsky defines it, material, intellectual, and moral superiority justified by moral rectitude.<sup>2</sup> *Auctoritas* is highly individualistic in nature. An *auctor*, from its initial use in the Twelve Tables, is a guardian who guarantees or stamps approval upon a certain proposal, considering whether or not to accept or reject it with his own judgment and then taking responsibility for the consequences.<sup>3</sup> Such controlling and paternalistic overtones project that for the regime, the burden of authority depended not on the constitution of the Republic or the judgment of the Senate, but on the prudence of a single person with a (supposedly) superior moral vision. Thus, the way Augustus presented his ascendancy to the public via imagery and literature was predicated not simply on being the last warlord standing after a decade of civil conflict. Instead, it hinged upon a self-righteous belief that he had survived his rivals through his superior vision for Rome's salvation.

A complete and total erasure of Mark Antony would superficially seem to serve *auctoritas* well; it would eliminate the memory of another who had challenged Augustus' morally-driven, sole rule. Recent research, however, reveals

2. Galinsky, Karl. *Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1996), 12.

3. Galinsky, 13.

4. Hedrick Jr., Charles. History and Silence: Purge and Rehabilitation of Memory in Late Antiquity (Austin: University of Texas, 2000), 93. Emphasis added.

5. Varner, 1.

6. Zanker, Paul. The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1990), 3.

7. Zanker, 2.

8. Zanker, 2.

that the process of *damnatio memoriae* may not have had this effect. As Charles Hedrick Jr. describes, *damnatio memoriae* paradoxically draws attention to the fact that the individual suffering censure is not represented, for silence and absence are themselves overtly conspicuous.<sup>4</sup> Complete eradication of Antony's memory, even after his death, would have drawn more attention to the fact that another had threatened Augustus' own *auctoritas*, proving that it was not infallible. On the other hand, keeping Antony's image around would avoid such conspicuousness and strengthen Augustus' *auctoritas* by conveying how it was unthreatened by the lingering shadow of its greatest challenger. Attention to Antony created from the memory sanction would have been widespread because sculpture and imagery functioned as a communicative medium in Roman society. As Varner suggests, most people were largely illiterate and depended upon imagery to convey ideas.<sup>5</sup> In his discussion of Augustan imagery, Paul Zanker concurs, arguing through the proliferation of art during the Augustan revolution that imagery was a new "visual language" through which Augustus was able to pass down his moral judgments.<sup>6</sup> Hence, a total censorship of Antony in art would have been perceived by all regardless of class differences, circulating Antony's memory and presence throughout society more than if his image were left unviolated.

In addition to considering its implications for *auctoritas*, it is also worth noting that *damnatio memoriae* fell under a Hellenistic cultural tradition, and the Augustan revolution emphasized a deliberate moral departure from Hellenistic values. During the death throes of the Republic, many conservatives felt that the luxury, debauchery, and decadence of the Greek East imposed a degenerating, corrupting influence upon Roman society which precipitated moral decline.<sup>7</sup> As Zanker describes, this view was particularly amplified because the civil war unevenly distributed spoils into the hands of the wealthy.<sup>8</sup> Given this fear of moral

decline, Augustan revolutionary art frequently entailed a Roman re-adaptation of certain Hellenistic archetypes to break away from the luxury of the Greek East and focus instead on religious revival and familial obligation.<sup>9</sup> The Augustan revolution thus entailed a deliberate departure from the Hellenic influence associated with excess.

9. Zanker, 1-4.

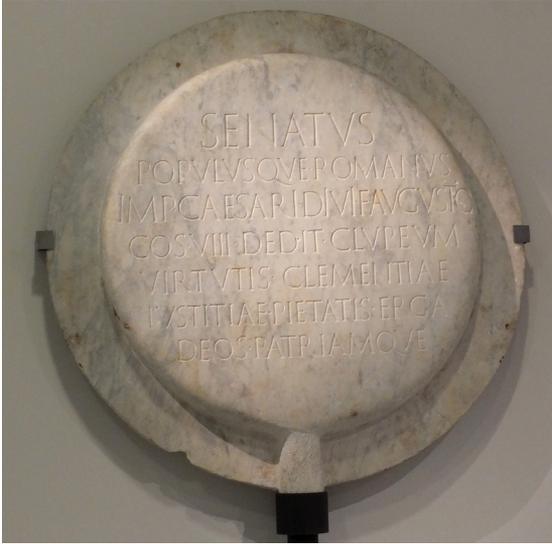
*Damnatio memoriae* itself has obvious Hellenistic roots – the Greeks too censored political pariahs from their past, and it was likely that the Romans knowingly adopted the practice from them. Roman memory sanctions contained a known Greek precedent; Varner outlines several instances of Greek memory sanctions which bear striking resemblance to their future Roman counterparts both in practice and in description by ancient historians. Most notable are the *damnationes memoriae* of Hipparchos in the 5th Century BCE, the orator Demetrios of Phaleron in the 4th, and of Philip V of Macedon in the 3rd; all are accounted for by archaeological evidence (statue remnants, both bronze and marble).<sup>10</sup> Such repeated behavior across several consecutive centuries suggests that these memory sanctions were an ingrained Hellenistic cultural practice. Moreover, memory sanctions were fundamental components of ancient Greek laws designed to preserve the stability between warring Hellenistic city states and their rulers; traitors who shifted from city to city and were condemned to *damnatio memoriae* to intimidate others against doing the same.<sup>11</sup> Given the repeated legal use of *damnatio memoriae* in the Greek East that would mirror the Senate's later use of the process against political exiles, Flower goes so far as to conclude that "in an analysis of the function of memory and punitive sanctions the Greeks provide the essential background to later Roman practices."<sup>12</sup> In short, *Damnatio memoriae* had verifiable Greek origins which the Romans would have recognized since they adapted them for their own use. Although the process exhibits none of the perceived excesses or debauchery of the Hellenistic world, it would have been counter-revolu-

10. Varner, 14-15.

11. Flower, 18-19.

12. Flower, 18.

tionary for Augustus to use a Hellenistic process to condemn Antony when his entire movement for greater moral legitimacy was grounded in a deliberate departure from Greek culture.



Marble copy of the *clipeus virtutis*.

13. Galinsky, 80.

14. Galinsky, 85.

15. Galinsky, 85. Also Virgil *Aen.* 8.653. Trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library Edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

Finally, like *auctoritas* and a general departure from Hellenistic practices, the centrality of the Roman values of *pietas* and *clementia* to the Augustan Revolution likely contributed to the decision not to subject Mark Antony to *damnatio memoriae*. The importance of both *pietas* and *clementia* is reinforced by their inscription upon the *clipeus virtutis*, a monumental shield immortalizing the central

themes of the Augustan cultural program, erected by the Senate when Octavian became Augustus in 27 BCE.<sup>13</sup> Their centrality within works of Augustan literature – most notably the *Aeneid* – and their prominent personification in sculpture suggest that they were both boldly-advertised, propagandized virtues representative of the emperor’s new “Golden Age.”

The virtue of *clementia* is the appropriate expression of mercy towards a conquered people who submit to Roman authority, and this mercy appears to have been an accepted standard of ideal Roman behavior.<sup>14</sup> Consider how Vergil, through the speech of Aeneas’ father Anchises, describes the optimal behavior of future Romans as “to spare the conquered and to crush the proud.”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Augustus had a

clear precedent for *clementia* from his uncle, Julius Caesar; the link between Augustus and the deified Julius Caesar as promoters of *clementia* followed naturally from Augustus's claim to divine status as *divi filius*, the son of the deified Julius Caesar.<sup>16</sup> Virtue was associated with Caesar's projections of superlative leadership whose strength resided in the "fair" treatment of enemies during his foreign wars, and therefore later projected upon Augustus and his regime.<sup>17</sup>

16. Zanker, 33-37.

17. Galinsky, 84.

The virtue of *pietas* – or loyalty to gods, family, and country – is perhaps the most important value on the *clipeus virtutis* because of its overtones of social responsibility and inherent "Romanness."<sup>18</sup> Because this value had long been considered as uniquely Roman even before the Augustan era, it was focalized as the central figurehead of the Roman revolution personified in various images throughout the empire. The most notable examples, as Galinsky suggests, are perhaps images of Aeneas carrying his father Anchises out of burning Troy, like the image carved on the Altar of the Gens Augusta found at Carthage.<sup>19</sup> Augustus advertised that he had shown piety to his "father" Julius Caesar in the same way that Aeneas had for Anchises, and that he expected his subjects to treat him similarly as *pater patriae*.

18. Galinsky, 86.

19. Galinsky, 86-87.

Clearly, *clementia* and *pietas* were central to Augustus's cultural program, and the communicative implications of *damnatio memoriae* would have constituted flagrant violations of both of them. Beginning with *clementia*, *damnatio memoriae* evidently evoked the mutilation of a corpse as an extreme form of punishment for a condemned elite.<sup>20</sup> The similarities between the corpse mutilation and *damnatio memoriae* extend beyond how both were typically inflicted upon members of the elite postmortem as an especially abusive form of punishment.<sup>21</sup> The punitive mutilations of statues are analogous to those of corpses: both modes of mutilation strategically lacerate sensory organs like the eyes, ears, nose, and tongue.<sup>22</sup> Pliny's *Panegyricus*, in which Pliny describes

20. Varner, 3-4.

21. Varner, 3-4. Note that Varner's list spans for half a paragraph; it has been truncated here for reasons of scope.

22. Varner, 3-4.

the statues of Domitian during his *damnatio memoriae* as if they were bodies that could feel pain and leak blood, is especially demonstrative.<sup>23</sup> It was, to use Varner's phrase, "anthropomorphic rhetoric" which treated the condemned images as if they were actual bodies.<sup>24</sup>

23. Pliny Pan. 52.4-6. Trans Betty Radice, Loeb Classical Library Edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969).

24. Varner, 3.

As it entails inflicting further violence on a helpless opponent, the desecration of a corpse ipso facto would be an outright violation of *clementia*. Sufficient textual evidence from Augustan literature contextualizes such mutilation as such. Consider Virgil's treatment of the mutilation suffered by Deiphobus, a son of Priam, described in Book VI of the *Aeneid*.<sup>25</sup> During the fall of Troy, Deiphobus is savagely mutilated by a condemnable Odysseus, in turn portrayed negatively for inflicting unnecessary harm on an enemy whom he has already subdued.<sup>26</sup> Given the analogy between corpse mutilation and defacing statues, and because of his extensive cultural emphasis on *clementia*, it would have been overtly hypocritical for Augustus have to inflicted *damnatio memoriae* upon Antony.

25. Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.509-35.

26. Varner, 4.

In addition to defying *clementia*, *damnatio memoriae* would also have violated *pietas*, or loyalty to gods, family, and country. In an effort to strengthen his former political alliance with Antony at the height of the Second Triumvirate, Octavian offered him in marriage to his sister Octavia, transforming Antony into his brother in law.<sup>27</sup> The loyalty towards family implied by *pietas* would expressly forbid a war between two brothers – it is likely for this reason that Octavian declared his war as against the foreign Queen Cleopatra, and not Antony himself.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Octavian represented his triumph at Actium as a victory against Egypt and its queen; Antony was not overtly portrayed to disguise the stain of civil war.<sup>29</sup>

27. Plutarch Antony 31. Plutarch, *Parallel Lives: Life of Antony*. Trans. B. Perrin, Loeb Classical Library Edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920).

28. Flower, 131.

29. Flower, 119.

Clearly, the notion of two brothers fighting was shameful, perhaps even conjuring imagery within Roman consciousness about the previous civil wars between Marius

and Sulla, Caesar and Pompey, or even Remus and Romulus. The implications of inflicting *damnatio memoriae* upon the closest possible form of sibling by marriage, a brother-in-law, would have been perceived equally indecorous as it too represented one brother harming another. As Flower concludes, Augustus' position was linked to both consensus and harmony, so the *damnatio memoriae* of Antony would, as a clear violation of *pietas*, conflict with a key propagandistic element of the Augustan revolution.<sup>30</sup>

30. Flower, 131.

In conclusion, perhaps Augustus avoided invoking *damnatio memoriae* against Mark Antony due to conflicts with several key elements contained in his program of cultural renewal. The process of *damnatio memoriae* violated the Augustan principles of (1) *auctoritas*, (2) departure from Hellenism, and ultimately, (3) *pietas* and *clementia*. The erasure of Antony would have been hypocritical, and therefore counterproductive, to promoting the propagandized morality of the new regime. In the bigger picture, given the ideological conflicts between *damnatio memoriae* and the Augustan revolution, it seems that the Augustan censorship (or lack thereof) in regards to Antony specifically did not appear to serve as a precedent for the frequent use of memory sanctions that would become so common later in the principate and beyond. In line with Tacitean cynicism, the future usage of *damnatio memoriae* against Piso, Messalina, Agrippina the Younger, and countless other eventually reviled members of the imperial household may only reflect how distant the core ideals of the ephemeral Golden Age had become after Augustus passed.

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