

The Augustan Program in Propertius 4.6

Scholarship on Propertius IV is divided on whether Propertius is writing in support of or against the Augustan program. Some have argued that the praise is so over the top that it can't possibly be taken as pro-Augustan while others have called it undiluted Augustan propaganda (Little 1982, 304). Once Augustus took sole control of Rome, Augustus' program began to shift public perception, not through an official propaganda machine, but through the combination of the image the emperor himself presented, and through the spontaneous images created by the Roman people (Zanker 1988, 1-4). Using Zanker's understanding of the Augustan program, I will argue that Propertius' narration of the dedication of the Temple of Palatine Apollo and the Battle of Actium can be read as a part of the overall image being formed in support of Augustus during his reign. I will discuss how various aspects of poem 4.6 promote the Augustan program through the narrative framing of the story, through parallels to the divine, and through comparison of Augustan Rome with the Rome of the past.

I will argue how Propertius heaps praise upon Augustus in the description of the battle, highlight his connection to the Trojan past. By calling Augustus Caesar (*Caesaris in nomen ducuntur carmina*; "this song is lead out in the name of Caesar," 4.6.13) and his ships Julian (4.6.17), emphasizing Augustus' role as Caesar's heir, Propertius allows Augustus to adopt a pretext of an avenging son's pietas as the cause of the Battle of Actium. Similarly, Apollo's exhortation in the poem points out Augustus' ties to Alba Longa, recalling his connection back to Aeneas and the Trojans through Ascanius, and foretells him succeeding where Hector failed (*Hectoreis cognite maior avis*; "recognized as greater than the fateful birds of Hector," 4.6.38). Augustus' connection to the Trojan past allows him to be seen as the founder of a new Troy.

Propertius characterizes the battle as a battle with a foreign enemy, highlighting Cleopatra's role as a monarch and her threat to Roman prosperity. Throughout the poem Antony is never mentioned or even alluded to; rather, the sole enemy of Augustus in the poem is Cleopatra. Apollo tells Augustus that it is a shame for the Romans that the tides must endure Cleopatra's regal sails with him as their princeps (*pro turpe Latinis principe te fluctus regia vela pati*; "it is shameful for the Latins, with you as princeps, that the sea endures regal sails," 4.6.45-46), recalling the Roman hatred of a monarchy, and predicting how Augustus will go on to protect Rome from turning into a monarchy.

Finally, I will discuss how the poem concludes with Apollo returning to his poetic aspect and a banquet scene, celebrating Augustus' more recent victories and the arrival of a Pax Romana. Once Antony and Cleopatra were defeated, Apollo takes off his armor and picks his cithara back up (*citharam iam poscit Apollo*; "now Apollo requests his cithara," 4.6.69-70) so that the banqueters can sing the praise of Augustus too. This banquet scene signals Augustus' assumption of the savior role prophesied in line 37 and a return to peace for the poem's warlike Apollo and the beginning of the Pax Romana for Rome overall.

Propertius joined Maecenas' circle after the publication of his first book of poetry, which marks the beginning of Propertius' shift to more political themes as it was expected that the poets show deference and respect to his patron's request (Cairns 2006, 323-324). Propertius' ties to Maecenas' circle have raised questions about where Propertius fits into the idea of Maecenas' poets promoting the Augustan program. My discussion of Propertius 4.6 provides further evidence to the side arguing for a pro-Augustan reading of the poem and sheds important light on the ideological perspectives on the new program that the poets formed with their 'Augustan discourse'.

Bibliography

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