

## The End of Fakes: Impostors in Valerius Maximus

In the preface of his *Factorum et Dictorum Memorabilium (FDM)*, Valerius Maximus defines Tiberius' role as being, by the consensus of human beings and gods, the ruler of sea and land (*maris ac terrae regimen*), the welfare of the homeland (*salus patriae*), and one who both encourages virtue in a most kindly way and punishes vice most strictly. In writing of Tiberius as judge of virtue and vice, Valerius sets up a programmatic connection between Tiberius' role and the content of his work. The virtues Tiberius rewards will be mentioned in the *FDM*: "the virtues regarding which I am about to speak" (*virtutes de quibus dicturus sum*). Accordingly, Valerius organizes large portions of his work by virtue and vice in that order. Books 3-6 contain *exempla* of virtue, and Book 9, the final one in the text, consists of various *vitia*. Imposture, where a person assumes the identity of someone else, who is either an elite or at the very least wealthy, is the last of Valerius' vices, and his last anecdote of imposture concerns the execution of an impostor pretending to be Ariarathes X, deceased former monarch of the client kingdom of Cappadocia (9.15 *ext.* 2).

Very little has been written about Valerius' accounts of impostors (Bloomer 209). This paper seeks to illuminate the ideological and historical rationale behind Valerius' decision to end his work with accounts of impostors ranging in time from the end of the second century BCE to the time of Augustus. One of the payoffs of this investigation is the tempering of the notion that in Valerius' exemplary regime time is essentially irrelevant (Mueller 258). Instead, one finds that Valerius' arrangement of impostors strongly reinforces a Tiberian-era sense of history and imperial ideology wherein the emergence of the impostor phenomenon is tied to the onset of Roman civil war and the task of suppressing impostors is an integral part of the emperor's role as

a judge of vices. The paper will thus also argue that Valerius portrays the suppression of impostors, a characteristic of civil disorder, as a vital function of the Principate, much as Augustus makes the suppression of pirates a feature of Augustan rule in the *Res Gestae* (25).

Valerius' interest in impostors may also reflect concerns of Tiberius and his court regarding perceptions of familial integrity and legitimacy in the *domus Augusta* and lingering tension over the absence of a blood tie between Augustus and Tiberius. Numerous sources point to Roman unease regarding the choice of Tiberius as heir, despite evidence of Augustus' confidence in Tiberius' abilities. The third of Valerius' impostors, claiming to be a child of Augustus' sister Octavia Minor, seeks, in Valerius' words, to rob the imperial house of the memory of the true blood (*veri sanguinis memoria spoliarentur*), a striking passage from an author who is often viewed as a sycophant of Tiberius, and one that reminds us of continuing problems with imperial impostors during the reign of Tiberius (9.15.2).

If the murder of Agrippa Postumus, son of Agrippa and Julia, stoked anxieties about the possibility of an end to the bloodline of Augustus, the False Agrippa served as a reminder of the challenge that blood descendants of the first emperor posed to a reigning emperor who lacked that attribute. Valerius' story of the False Marcellus, son of Octavia, is sufficiently similar to Tacitus' account of the False Drusus, who pretended to be the son of Germanicus and Agrippina in 32 CE, places the composition date of the end of Book 9 of the *FDM* to the aftermath of the imposture. Indeed, it may be the case that in the aftermath of Sejanus, who was suspected of fathering Livilla's twins, and the arguably related appearance of the False Drusus (Tuplin 784), imposture and other threats to the blood of Augustus were timely themes demanding an ideologically reassuring treatment such as Valerius provides. For Valerius, the *numen divi Augusti*, which continues to rule the lands (*etiam nunc terras regentis*), in other words at the

time he is composing his work, stands as a bulwark against imposture. As Augustus' choice of successor, Tiberius, although lacking the *verus sanguis*, protects its *memoria* by continuing the task of suppressing imposture, be it in the form of Sejanus' failed coup or other forms.

### Bibliography

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