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**CONTINUITY THROUGH CHANGE:
AUGUSTUS AND A CHANGE WITHOUT A BREAK**

BY ALESSANDRO RONCAGLIA

Abstract: “Everything needs to change, so everything can stay the same”: this sentence, overstepping the borders of its novel (the famous G. T. di Lampedusa’s “The Leopard”) and the context of the reaction of local nobles to Garibaldi’s Sicilian expedition, has entered in a sort of timeless dimension, becoming appropriate for several ages and events. It effectively depicts the case of the “Augustan Revolution” – recalling Ronald Syme – when the birth of the new regime brought with it a pivotal change and the need to hide it under the cloak of continuity. Augustus’ absolute pre-eminence was by itself the proof of a completely new situation; the will and the need to show continuity was instead evident in his flaunted adherence to republican laws, according to which he assumed only the powers prescribed by the Roman “constitution”, but exceeding them in virtue of his superior “*auctoritas*”. In this continuous dualism between persistence and rupture, I shall attempt to consider what in actual fact changed and what did not. I think that behind the idea of a complete transformation it is possible to see a politics that was still working in accordance with the same guide-lines and in the same ways.

Keywords: Augustus, Roman Revolution, Principate, Continuity/rupture

This report starts very faraway the ancient age and exactly in an uchronic but plausible Southern Italy, in Sicily, during the second half of the eighteenth century. Garibaldi, one of the heroes of the “Risorgimento”,¹ went ashore on May 11th 1860 at Marsala; he was moving forward across the island, marching over the ruins of the collapsing Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. It was one of the most important steps in the path to the conquest of the South of Italian mainland and its annexation to the Kingdom of Sardinia, the “father” of the modern Italy. This is the background of the historical novel “Il Gattopardo” by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, one of the masterpieces of the last century Italian literature: it narrates the events of Fabrizio Corbera, the prince of Salina, and his aristocratic family facing the fall of the society that has until then existed. While struggling to save its status, the Sicilian aristocracy faced the rise of popular uprising (the people were confident that a new lead could bring even an improvement of their

¹ The “Risorgimento” was the social and political movement that lead to the consolidation of the Italian peninsula into the kingdom of Italy in the nineteenth century.

living condition), but above all the emergence of a new social class, the bourgeoisie, whose system of beliefs was completely extraneous to the ideals of the prince of Salina and his equals.

In this context Tancredi, prince Fabrizio's nephew, who tried to ride the wind of changes, exclaimed a sentence that has become an aphorism: "Se vogliamo che tutto rimanga com'è, bisogna che tutto cambi" – "Everything needs to change, if we want that everything can stay the same". It entered the common language until it obtained an entry in the dictionary, being summarized in the word "gattopardismo", a term that defines the understanding of those who are favourable to ostensible transformations in the society to save their privileges.² If "Gattopardismo" is the word that fits suitably with the Sicilian context of the end of the 19th century, we can recall and employ a similar term – if not a synonym – "trasformismo": it indicates a system whereby a government attempts to hold on in the leadership by forming coalitions to prevent the formation of any credible opposition.³

How these events, this novel and especially this concept could deal with ancient ages and with the timeframe between the end of the civil wars and the first part of Augustan principate? Are there any analogies?

It is time to step back to 31 B.C., beyond every doubt a turning point in Roman history: on September 2nd, Octavianus⁴ defeated Antonius and Cleopatra and inaugurated the so-called "imperial era" by asserting his authority.

The first and main innovation or variation towards the past is obviously the presence of a lonely leader at the head of the State. Octavianus held every power in his hands, both politically and military, by collecting under his *insignia* the remnants of Caesar's murders and Antonius' defeated armies; he was on the top of a chain of command and of a society that looked at him as the only possible solution to the plague of the civil wars.⁵ He was, finally, the only warrantor of

² Garzanti Italiano 1998, 904, s.v. Gattopardismo: *concezione e pratica politica di chi è favorevole a innovazioni più apparenti che reali della società, per evitare di compromettere i privilegi acquisiti.*

³ Garzanti Italiano 1998, 2374, s.v. Trasformismo (2): *metodo politico che consiste nel formare maggioranze parlamentari assorbendo uomini e gruppi di tendenze diverse, con accordi di tipo particolaristico estranei agli orientamenti ideali e politici.*

⁴ In the course of this paper I will employ "Octavianus" and "Augustus" alternatively depending on the historical reference context: if we are dealing with a moment prior to the granting of the honorific title in 27 B.C., the choice will fall on "Octavianus"; otherwise, if subsequent, on "Augustus."

⁵ Tacitus emphasizes Octavianus' pacifying role (and the inevitability of the monarchy) since the opening of his *Historiae*: [...] *postquam bellatum apud Actium atque omnem potentiam ad unum conferri pacis interfuit* [...] (Tac., *Hist.* I 1). The same judgment is stated in the beginning of the *Annales*, where he declares [...] *non aliud discordantis patriae remedium fuisse quam ut ab uno regeretur* (Tac., *Ann.* I 9, 4).

the recreated relationship between Romans and the gods: beyond the institutional dimension, indeed, this one-man leadership marked clearly the start of a new age insofar this restored harmony was, as Octavianus clarified, one of the ideological bases of his pre-eminence itself. He understood and perceived the widespread sense of anxiety and the fear that the civil wars entailed and, after carrying them out, he offered an explanation for this plague. Internal conflicts were originated indeed – in Octavianus’ propagandist re-enactment – by a man linked with the Marian faction during the conflict with Sulla, at the beginning of the first century B.C., and called Quintus Valerius Soranus. By unveiling the secret name of Rome (it was kept concealed to avoid that it could be evoked in rituals by the enemies of the State) he committed a dangerous sacrilege: he broke the existing bond between Romans and Gods and he exposed the city to the risk to be the prey of its own army.⁶ When everything seemed to be lost and the city was about to fall because of its own citizens, Caesar’s adoptive son intervened to halt the ruin and to revive the sort of the *Urbs*, presenting himself even as its new founder. It is not a coincidence – or a tyrant whim – that at the time of making the choice of an honorary title for his own credits, the first proposal by the Senate was “Romulus” and Octavianus himself ἐπεθύμει μὲν ἰσχυρῶς (D.C. LIII 16, 6-8), ‘he desired deeply’, to be called in this way. By his *augurium Augustum* it has been possible to halt the civil wars and to start a new age: again, more than seven hundred years later, Octavianus was hailed at its entrance in Rome by the presence of twelve vultures, the same *omen* that allowed Romulus to prevail over his brother Remus.⁷

⁶ Quintus Valerius Soranus was tribune of the Plebs in 82 B.C. (for his career see Broughton 1952, 68) and a well-known scholar if Cicero declared that *nemo est quin litteratissimum togatorum omnium, Q. Valerium Soranum* (Cic., *de Orat.* III 11, 43; in *Brut.* 46, 169 Cicero defines his field of specialization, saying that Quintus Valerius Soranus and his brother Decimus were *docti et Graecis litteris et Latinis*). According to the account of Plutarch (*Pomp.* 10, 7-8), Pompey sentenced cruelly to death a Κοίντος Ουαλέριος φιλόλογος ἀνὴρ καὶ φιλομαθῆς that has been long-since identified as our character (Cichorius 1906, 59-67). As stated by Pliny the Elder (Plin., *Nat.* XXVIII 18), a tradition dating back to the Augustan age scholar Valerius Flaccus refers that, during the sieges, the Romans used to evoke the patron deity of the enemy city by promising a more solemn worship in Rome: this is the reason why the secret name of Rome’s tutelary deity should be hidden, to avoid that the *Urbs* was doomed to the same fate. In another passage of his *Naturalis Historia* (III 65) Pliny connect explicitly this fault with a Valerius Soranus: [...] *Roma ipsa, cuius nomen alterum dicere nisi arcanis caerimoniarum nefas habetur optimaque et salutari fide abolitum enuntiavit Valerius Soranus luitque mox poenas* [...].

⁷ This idea was first expressed in Brizzi 1997, 439-440: in this passage the attention is stressed over the *virtus*, the requested warranty by the Gods, and one of the virtues that were celebrated on Augustus’ honorary shield placed in the *Curia Iulia* (Aug., *Anc.* XXXIV 2: *virtutis clementiaeque et iustitiae et pietatis causa testatum est per eius clupei inscriptionem*). The tradition concerning Q. Valerius Soranus and his fault has another testimony in Plutarchus’ *Quaestiones Romanae* (61). The continuity and the link between Octavianus and Romulus are underlined in Suet., *Aug.* XCV

A re-foundation is a new beginning and a new beginning is clearly a break with the past: it is hard in this context to see nothing but a discontinuity marking the post-Actium ages. This feeling is so rooted that every action conceived by the new lord of Rome to stress a substantial absence of interruptions in political practice is perceived as a travesty, an awkward attempt to deny the reality. It is the case, e.g., of the reception and the evaluation of the passage in the *Res Gestae*, where Augustus declares to excel everyone in influence (*auctoritas*) without having no powers more than the other magistrates or of the alleged untrue and fictional resignation or rediscussion of his prerogatives in 27 and 23 B.C.⁸

At this point two questions may arise. First, we seem to be faced with a short circuit in which the emperor, by insisting publicly and propagandistically both on continuity and on break, created a double track, that threatens to cloud the issue. Secondly, we still need to put in the right context the *Gattopardo*'s sentence: where can a continuity be seen.

The first aspect to shed light on is the nature of Octavian's powers and their public perception: it is certainly not a theme that can be completely, or at least in depth, examined in these few lines, but we can deal with it from another perspective. By asserting his extraordinary character with a superior influence (*auctoritas*), Octavian shifted the focus of the issue in a constitutionally undefined field: he was moving in a legal ground, but he made it immediately and unequivocally clear that he was not subject to the same laws.⁹ Nothing suggests, from this point

2: *Primo autem consulatu et augurium capienti duodecim se vultures ut Romulo [...]*. The debate on the honorary title ended with the choice of *Augustus: Romulus* had too strong monarchical echoes – as it is usually said – and the final option prevailed on a proposal of Munatius Plancus, a character that will be recalled later in this paper.

⁸ *Aug., Anc. 34: [...]* *Post id tempus auctoritate omnibus praestiti, potestatis autem nihilo amplius habui quam ceteri qui mihi quoque in magistratu conlegae fuerunt*. On January 13th 27 B.C., Octavianus announced the renunciation of all his extraordinary powers and the will to give back the provinces under his control in the hands of the Senate and the people of Rome. He was, on the contrary, implored to stay at the lead of the State and he accepted a ten-years *imperium proconsulare* on a *provincia* composed by *Hispania, Gallia and Syria* (C.D. LIII 11-15; Dio suggests in this passage the idea of Augustus' insincerity: [...] βουλευθεις δὲ δὴ καὶ ὡς δημοτικός τις εἶναι δόξα [...], LIII 12, 1). Dio (LIII 32, 5) is the only source for the reform of 23 B.C.: on this occasion Augustus gave up the consulship, but he received a lifetime *tribunician potestas* and an *imperium maius et infinitum* over every province of the empire.

⁹ Given the difficulty of transposing the term *auctoritas* (as in Cassius Dio, LV 3, 5: [...] ἐλλήνισαι γὰρ αὐτο καθάπαξ ἀδύνατόν ἐστι [...]), even the use of ἀξίωμα in the Greek version of the text suggests the intention to stress a different rank or degree of value, more than a simple superior influence. The *auctoritas*, furthermore, was not part of a «para- or superconstitutional terminology» (Galinsky 1996, 12) and for this reason «potentially unlimited in scope» (Cooley 2009, 998-99 and 271-272). The constitutional settlements of 27 B.C. and of the 23 B.C. are at the forefront of a long-lasting debate that cannot be considered here. One of its topics concern the possible ties

view, that any form of persistence remains in the aftermath of Actium. In this supposed judgment, however, the continuity-theory has some further strings in his bow: there is, as a matter of fact, a kind of continuity that is necessary to consider. We will call it “operational continuity” and we can observe it in the concrete political activity.

I would like to start this short reflection from the *Fasti consulares*:¹⁰ it is evident that, beside Octavian, who held the consulship without interruption until 23 B.C., the first post-Actium years feature a list of consuls strictly connected with him or long-time members of his “party”,¹¹ i.e. the *homines novi*, who followed and helped the adoptive son of Caesar in his climb to the power.

Among them we list Sextus Appuleius in 29 B.C., whose father got married with Octavia the Elder, the daughter born from a previous marriage of Octavianus’ father and, so, half-sister of the emperor:¹² the Appulei were considered so close to the *princeps* to be defined, still in 12 B.C., Octavianus’ συγγενεῖς (D.C. LIV, 30, 4).

In 28 and 27 B.C. Vipsanius Agrippa was consul along with Octavianus: the relevance, the acknowledged and long-standing relationship between them allow us to not spend time to realize that we are faced with a loyal member of the leading party. A similar argument concerns the *homo novus* T. Statilius Taurus, consul in 26 B.C.: today he would be considered as a businessman – it should be remembered that he built at his own expenses the first permanent amphitheatre

with the contemporary political contest and wider events: this is the necessary starting point for an analysis that will be shortly outlined later.

¹⁰ Reference should be made to Degraffi 1952.

¹¹ In the course of the study that I am proposing, I will employ the term “party”, a very disputed word, especially in the field of antiquity. It usually indicates, nowadays, a voluntary association of citizens that share a common social and political system of values and that try to prevail by participating in public life; here “party” will be employed to indicate the agreements and the alliances of people and familial groups organized together to further a common political aim, whether the conquest of the power or only the political survival. The ideological perspective appears, hence, a secondary issue: some of these groups could endorse and promote new ways to manage the power or to rule the foreign policy, but these ideas were not, in an autocratic government system, the basis and the standard to evaluate each faction.

¹² Octavia the Elder (Octavianus’ half-sister, to not be confused with Octavia the Younger, his natural sister; see *PIR*², O 65) was born from a former marriage of C. Octavius, the father of the *princeps*, with a woman called Ancaria (Suet., *Aug.* IV, 1). As part of an extraordinary career and as a clue of the tie with the core of the power, Appuleius obtained two important provincial commands: between 28 and 27 B.C. he was *proconsul* of Hispania Citerior, between 23 and 22 B.C. he was *proconsul* in Asia and even in 8 B.C. he was *legatus Augusti pro praetore* in Illyricum (Thomasson 1984, 13, 87-88, 205-206; Szramkiewicz 1975, 109-110, 170-171).

of Rome to contribute to the glory of his master – and he was part of Octavianus’ party since the beginning of his rise to power.¹³

The list is completed with C. Norbanus Flaccus, *consul* in 24 B.C., and lastly by Aulus Terentius Varro Murena, *cos.* 23 B.C. The exact identification of this last character is still an extremely debated issue and it is connected with the troubled events of the two-year period 23-22 B.C. In this timeframe, Marcus Primus, the otherwise unknown governor of Macedonia, was accused of having started a military action in Thracia against the people of the Odrysii without any permission from the government and of having crossed the limits of his mandate. The lawsuit – during which Primus was defended by a Licinius Murena and accused Augustus and Marcus Claudius Marcellus, the nephew of the emperor, who since 25 B.C. was married with his daughter Julia, of having given the order to proceed – ended with the predictable conviction for Primus. The trial was followed by a conspiracy led by a certain Fannius Caepio and the former lawyer Licinius Murena. As quoted above, a long debate about the figure of Murena have not contributed to shed definitely light on this character: it is still not possible to know if the consul of 23 B.C., the lawyer and the conspirator, are the same person or two different people.¹⁴ From the information provided by Cassius Dio, Murena is presented as brother of Proculius (on which we will come back later) and brother-in-law none the less than Maecenas. Postponing a debate that deserve a more appropriate paper, it can be observed the close affinity to the regime for one of the two Murena, but probably both of them if we accept the idea of a kinship between them, as Syme and other did.¹⁵

¹³ For an account of his long and rich political career see *PIR*² S 853. Just to stress the solidness of his ties with Octavianus, it should be remembered that he was *consul suffectus* in 37 B.C., he was among the generals in the war against Sextus Pompeius in 36 B.C. and later he acted as governor in Africa and Hispania. For what concerns the construction of the amphitheatre see: D.C., LI 23, 1 and Suet., *Aug.* 29, 5.

¹⁴ Basing on Jos. *BJ* I 398 and *AJ* XV 344-245, someone (Dabrowa 1998, 17-18 and Thomasson 1984, 303) claimed the existence of another Varro, governor of Syria between 24-3 B.C. This hypothesis enriches, but complicates, the identification attempt that we are outlining.

¹⁵ Cassius Dio tale provides the only complete account of these events (D.C. LIV 3-8); their general interpretation is however complicated not only by the lack of information, but also by their unclear nature. The dilemma is, instead, fed by the divergent onomastic elements of the consul and of the lawyer combined with Dio’s narration: we expect that the brother of Maecenas’ wife (Terentia) has “Varro” among his name elements, but, following Dio, we read of a Λικίνιος Μουρήνος. No Varro Murena is stated by Dio among the consuls of 23 B.C., but the traces from the fragmentary and incomplete inscriptions of the *Fasti Consulares Capitolini* seems to confirm his existence: *A. T.[erentius A. f. – n. Var]ro Murena* (Degrassi 1947, 58-59). The extreme vagueness of the reference to this happening contribute to complicate the affair: aside Dio, reporting the conspiracy, other authors refer to a *Varro Murena* (Suet., *Aug.* XIX, 1), to a *L(ucius) Murena* (Vell. II 91, 2), to a simple Μουρήνα (Strabo XIV 5, 4) or *Murena* (Sen., *Cl.* VII, 6), to the simple *Varro* (Tac., *Ann.* I 10, 4) and, probably, to the Licinius of Horace (*Carm.* II 10). To have an idea of the extreme

Regarding Norbanus Flaccus, he was doubly tied with the leading group: he was the son of the pro-Octavian consul of 38 B.C. and he was married with a Cornelia. The name of the younger son of the couple (Lucius Norbanus Balbus) suggests the existence of a connection with one of the main exponent of Octavianus' party, L. Cornelius Balbus.¹⁶

To sum up, we can observe that six out of seven consuls were certain members of the Augustan party: only M. Iunius Silanus seems extraneous to alliances or to parental dynamics with it.¹⁷

In this moment, however, something was totally changing: in 23 B.C. – the last year for Augustus in charge in the consulship, as mentioned above – Cnaeus Calpurnius Piso was *consul*: he was part of a diametrically opposed group compared to all those we have considered so far. He was indeed a steady republican and he had fought previously alongside the murders of Caesar; he obtained the forgiveness by Octavianus at the end of the civil wars, but he remained nevertheless in the shadow and away from political life for about ten years.¹⁸ It is extremely interesting that – as reported by Tacitus by inserting a brief excursus in the narration of the events of A.D. 17¹⁹ – Augustus called back and persuaded

complexity we are dealing with, see: Syme 1993, 572-578; Atkinson 1960, 440-473; Stockton 1965, 18-40; Levick 156-163; Arkenberg 1993, 471-491.

¹⁶ About C. Norbanus Flaccus see *PIR*²N 167. The possible link between him and L. Cornelius Balbus (*PIR*²C 1331) is supposed in *PIR*²C 1475.

¹⁷ M. Iunius Silanus' career presents several grey areas (for an hypothetical tree see Settipani 2000, 68). The first reference about him comes from Velleius Paterculus, who includes him among the followers of Sextus Pompeius after Miseno's treaty in 39 B.C. (II 77, 3). We do not know if he remained with Pompeius or joined Antonius, to which he seems to be connected from 35 to 34 B.C. (Ferriès 2007, 423-424); Plutarch reports his disagreement with Cleopatra, the following desertion from Antonian's faction and the final alliance with Octavianus (Plut., *Ant.* LIX, 4). Problems arise if we consider the initial stages of Silanus' career. Syme observed that a M. Silanus appears as *legatus Caesaris* in Gallia in 54 B.C. (*Caes., Gal.* VI 1, 1) and that, on occasion of the battle of Modena in 43 B.C., M. Silanus is *στρατιάρχος* for Lepidus (D.C. XLVI 38, 6): being *legatus* already in 54 B.C. (i.e. being more than thirty years old) – following Syme 1993, 284 – he could not have reached the consulship so late in life in 25 B.C. If a late consulship sounds odd, it is anything but an implausible eventuality and some elements suggest that Silanus is an older man. Firstly, the consulship looks like his last relevant office (with the exception of the participation in the preparation of the *Senatus Consultum de ludis saecularibus*, see *CIL*² VI 32324), then the whole family branch struggle to assert itself: still in 21 B.C. L. Iunius Silanus (*PIR*²I 827) tried to be elected in the consulship, but he was defeated (D.C. LIV 6, 2-4).

¹⁸ Cn. Calpurnius Piso (see *PIR*²C 286) fought against Caesar since 46 B.C. (*Ps.-Caes., Afr.* III 1; XVIII 1). No political activity is attested in the period following his alliance with the murders of Caesar (see n. 20).

¹⁹ Tac., *Ann.* II 43, 2: *Sed Tiberius [...] praefecerat Cn. Pisonem, ingenio violentum et obsequi ignarum, insita ferocia a patre Pisone, qui civili bello resurgentes in Africa patres acerrimo ministerio adversus Caesarem iuvit, mox Brutum et Cassium secutus concessa reditu petitione honorum abstinuit, donec ultro ambiretur delatum ab Augusto consulatum accipere.*

Piso to have again an active role. He was not, furthermore, only involved again in politics, but he had again a key role in the hierarchy to the point that he received, along with Agrippa, the proxy to govern in case of a premature death of the *princeps*, an event that looked extremely possible in the first part of 23 B.C., when Augustus fell seriously ill.²⁰ Even Piso's colleague in the consulship, the *consul suffectus*, Lucius Sextius Albanianus Quirinalis, although a peripheral and less relevant figure, appears undoubtedly as a supporter of the republican faction and above all a supporter of Brutus, whom he followed until the end. He had no political responsibility for long time, since the defeat of his part at Philippi in 42 B.C. It should be noted, to highlight that this appointment was something more than a coincidence and to ascertain how the general atmosphere was changing, that Augustus even praised publicly Sextus' devotion to one of the murders of his adoptive father, whom he had persecuted and fought until a few years before.²¹

The censorship of 22 B.C. as well can be included in a trend which assume increasingly the shape of a reconciliation with part of the opposition: then, two more character that were part of the groups of those who had been excluded from the most relevant positions were involved again to be censors. They are Paullus Emilius Lepidus and Munatius Plancus: they were both members of the aristocracy that was defeated in the Civil wars and they both had been away from politics again for nearly a decade.²²

²⁰ D.C. LIII 30, 1-2: 'Ο δ' Αὔγουστος ἐνδέκατον μετὰ Καλπουρνίου Πίσωνος ἄρξας ἠρρώστησεν αὐθις, ὥστε μηδεμίαν ἐλπίδα σωτηρίας σχεῖν· πάντα γούν ὡς καὶ τελευτήσων διέθετο, καὶ τὰς τε ἀρχὰς τοῦς τε ἄλλους τοῦς πρώτους καὶ τῶν βουλευτῶν καὶ τῶν ἰππέων ἀθροίσας διάδοχον μὲν οὐδένα ἀπέδειξε, καίτοι τὸν Μάρκελλον πάντων προκριθήσεσθαι ἐς τοῦτο προσδοκῶντων. Διαλεχθεὶς δὲ τινα αὐτοῖς περὶ τῶν δημοσίων πραγμάτων τῷ μὲν Πίσωνι τὰς τε δυνάμεις καὶ τὰς προσόδους τὰς κοινὰς ἐς βιβλίον ἐσγράψας ἔδωκε, τῷ δ' Ἀγρίππᾳ τὸν δακτύλιον ἐνεχείρισε.

²¹ See *PIR*² S 611. D.C. LIII 32, 4: καὶ ὅτι Λούκιον ἀνθ' ἑαυτοῦ Σήστιον ἀνθείλετο, αἰεὶ τε τῷ Βρούτῳ συσπουδάσαντα καὶ ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς πολέμοις συστρατεύσαντα, καὶ ἔτι καὶ τότε καὶ μνημονεύοντα αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰκόνας ἔχοντα καὶ ἐπαίνους ποιούμενον· τό τε γὰρ φιλικὸν καὶ τὸ πιστὸν τοῦ ἀνδρὸς οὐ μόνον οὐκ ἐμίσησεν ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐτίμησε.

²² Paullus Aemilius Lepidus is usually considered a loyal ally of the regime (see e.g. Weigel 1985, 183-184: *Augustus' relationship with Paullus was apparently one of patronage through the bestowal of political and religious distinctions and through marriage ties in return for loyal service and the active and visible support of a man with Republican credentials and the name of one of Rome's greatest families. Paullus' life serves as a good example of the role played by many Roman nobles under the principate*). These assumptions can be resized if we consider the fact that – with exception of the debated proconsulship of Macedonia – *contra* Syme 1962, 304; *pro* Thomasson 1984, 179, 189) and the admission among the *augures* – Paullus did not receive further honors and roles until 22 B.C.; the possible command in Macedonia was, in addition, changed with the *proconsulatus* of Achaia since 27 B.C., when Greece was separated from Macedonia (Luzzato 1985, 231). Even the marriage with Cornelia, Octavianus' stepdaughter (she was the daughter of Scribonia, one of the former wives of the *princeps*), cannot be seen as a recompense, since the

This evident shift is often considered as the sign of the will of the emperor, as a wholly personal initiative: I think, instead, that observing the inner political dynamics of this only apparently calm ten-year period is the proper path to follow in order to have a deeper knowledge of the events.

As previously stated, since 30 B.C. the men that lead the revolution – to use a well-known term introduced by Roland Syme with his *The Roman Revolution*²³ – took control over the State; this control was less solid than we could expect: several problems and urgencies rose since the early Augustan era and the new regime had to face them very early.

In 27 B.C. Marcus Licinius Crassus, the former consul of 30 B.C., created embarrassment by requesting the special honour of the *spoliae opimae* as reward for his military accomplishment.²⁴ His request was considered exaggerated – it was said – and he met the end of his political career²⁵.

At the end of the same year, Cornelius Gallus, the first *praefectus* of Egypt and member of Augustan party from the very beginning, was accused of trying to enhance his position by a series of actions all around his province, as elevating statues or carving his deeds and accomplishments even on the pyramids. His behaviour was largely criticized and the Senate voted unanimously for his conviction.²⁶

As observed above, in 23 B.C. a serious state of crisis upset and threatened the regime with the conspiracy led by Fannius Caepio and Licinius Murena. If

familial group of the Scribonii was excluded from the most relevant alliances and Scribonia herself never got married anymore after the divorce with Octavianus. Although Munatius Plancus is considered, after leaving Antonius in 32 B.C., one of the foremost politician of the first Augustan age (so in Ferriès 2007, 443: *Plancus semble être un des hommes importants des premières années du Principat*), again it can be observed that he was not nominated for any office after the consulship in 42 B.C. to the *censura* of the 22 B.C., with the exception of the offices in Bithynia and Pontus, certainly not enough for a man of his calibre. This trend can be confirmed by observing Marcus Titius' similar career (*PIR*² T 261). He left Antonius along with his uncle Munatius Plancus in 32 B.C. and, as him, after an initial collaboration with the regime, he was set aside and disappeared from the political scene until 13 B.C., when he became the governor of Syria: this delay seems at least suspect and certainly not the sign of a privileged position (Dabrowa 1998, 20: *From the sources it appears that Marcus Titius, despite his merits, was not favoured by Augustus. The governorship of Syria is the only known official function he received from him after his consulship*).

²³ Syme 1962.

²⁴ The *spolia opima* were an ancient and Republican age-born honour according to which the Roman commander, who killed on the battlefield the enemy leader, could retain his weapons and effects as a sign of recognition for his enterprise and should consecrate them to Jupiter Feretrius' temple. They were accorded only three times in Roman history: to Romulus, Cornelius Cossus and M. Claudius Marcellus (Plut., *Rom.* XVI, 7).

²⁵ The importance of these facts cannot be underestimated if we only consider the large attention devoted by Cassius Dio to the episode (D.C. LI 23, 2-27,3).

²⁶ The events and the end of Cornelius Gallus are exposed in detail in D.C. LIII 23, 5-24.

we have already spent a few words on Licinius Murena (and the intricate issue about the identity of this man, or these men), we still owe a brief speech on the other people involved in the event: who were Proculeius and Fannius Caepio? Proculeius was a *homo novus*; we only have about him few, but enough information to realize that he was not at all a marginal character. We know indeed that in 27 B.C. he was deeply hostile to the otherwise unknown Valerius Largus (another person on which we will come back later), whom the sources present as the main accuser of Cornelius Gallus; we know, in addition, that later – in 21 B.C. – he was contemplated, as proof of a long-lasting importance in political scene, among the pretenders for Julia after the death of Agrippa.²⁷

Due to lack of traces it is hard, on the contrary, to recreate Fannius Caepio's past, but this man can be reasonably connected with pro-republican circles and then with pro-Antonian groups.²⁸

These three events are the result of an extreme summary of the first Augustan era: they are anyway representative to get an idea of the main political trends and dynamics. If we observe them paying attention, as we have tried, to the protagonists, we can have the idea of a leading party that, while trying to widen its support base, faced the risk to implode. This was the fate that convicted Antonius' faction: the former triumvir gathered several different people and groups without a real common point or ideological sharing, if not the hostility towards Octavianus.²⁹ Likewise, Augustus, with the aim to establish roots for his group and to make it a real ruling party, tried (and he was in a sense obliged to do so) to include in his ranks even some of the fringes of the traditional aristocracy. This was not

²⁷ Proculeius (*PIR*² P. 985) did not perform any official political position, but he enjoyed Augustus' *amicitia* (Plin., *Nat.* XXXVI 183) and he had a relevant role in the wars against Sextus Pompeius (Plin., *Nat.* VII 148) and Antonius (Plut., *Ant.* 78-79). Referring Tiberius' reply at Seianus' matrimonial demands, Tacitus informs us that Proculeius was considered, despite being a member of the equestrian order, for Julia's new marriage (Tac., IV, 40, 6).

²⁸ Cassius Dio informs that the Fannius Caepio's father survived after his son's conviction, but the historian does not add any further information concerning Fannius' political affiliation (D.C. LIV 3, 7). It would be interesting to establish a tie with the republican commander and *propraetor* in Sicily and Asia C. Fannius and with the Fannius that fought with Sextus Pompeius and, after Naulochus, with Antonius. C. Fannius was *praetor* in 54 or in 50 B.C. and *propraetor* in Sicily and Asia between 49 and 48 B.C. (Broughton 1952, 222, 262, 277; Cic., *Att.* VII 15, 2; VIII 15, 3); Fannius is told to have taken part in a diplomatic mission in favour of Sextus Pompeius in Cicero's *Philippicae* (XIII 13). In *RE* VI, 2, 1992, s.v. *Fannius*, an identification of these two characters in one person is proposed, while in Hinard 1985, 465-466, they are tied in a father-son relation. In Ferriès 2007, 399-400 the kinship should be extended to the Fannius Caepio, who conspired in 23 B.C.: he would be, in this way, the son of Sextus' ambassador and the *praetor* and *propraetor*'s nephew. However that may be, it is interesting to observe that the likely familial group to which Fannius can be inscribed tends to Republican orientation.

²⁹ For an accurate and complete review of the members of Antonian party see Ferriès 2007, with special attention to the final summary tables (309-315).

a complete novelty and this process started long-since, when he got married with Livia Drusilla, continued with the “drainage” of Antonius’ allies before Actium and culminated with the integration of the part of the defeated or the neutrals.³⁰

These parts and factions were so forced to coexist with those *homines novi* and predictably ended up clashing with each other.

Initially Crassus raised his voice against Marcus Claudius Marcellus with the pretext of *spoliae opimae*, showing how the aristocracy was not an uniform group, but was internally divided.³¹ Later, Cornelius Gallus was eliminated by an occasional conjuncture between the aristocracy and a part of Octavian’s party: this unprecedented and ephemeral alliance was probably aimed, by the nobles, at limiting the rise of the *homines novi*, that were still the core of the leading group. Nevertheless, we mentioned the obscure Valerius Largus, who certainly was not an aristocrat, and we acknowledged that Gallus’ conviction was decided by a unanimous Senate: this could be, indeed, the proof of the fact that this action was not exclusively led by the higher classes. Cassius Dio reports in addition that those who used Largus as a puppet were ready to get rid of him.³²

³⁰ The process is noticeable, e.g., with the already quoted Marcus Licinius Crassus – see *PIR*² L 186 – which, after siding with Sextus Pompeius and Antonius, was awarded with the consulship in 30 B.C. (D.C. LI 4, 3: [...] οὗτος γάρ, καίπερ τὰ τε τοῦ Σέξτου καὶ τὰ τοῦ Ἀντωνίου πράξας, τότε μὴδὲ στρατηγήσας συνυπάτευσεν αὐτῷ. [...]). The marriage between Augustus’ daughter Julia and Marcus Claudius Marcellus in 25 BC. should be considered in the same way: he was another illustrious member of the Roman aristocracy and he was born from the union of Octavia and C. Claudius Marcellus, cos. 50 B.C. The importance of the tie with the Claudii Marcelli is stressed by the plan of Julius Caesar: he was, instead, interested in such union to win the favour of one of his most obstinate enemies. The consequence of this wedding was strongly explanatory: if C. Claudius Marcellus (cos. 50 B.C.) showed himself, if not an ally, at least neutral towards Caesar (and later to the rise of Octavianus) after the initial hostility, his brother M. Claudius Marcellus (cos. 51 B.C.), on the other hand, was not involved in similar familial alliances and he always remained hostile to the dictator (Broughton 1952, 240-241, 247; Syme 1962, 42, 64, 114, 166-167).

³¹ Crassus’ request and the issue of the *spolia opima* offer so much food for thoughts to deserve a special analysis. As matter of a forthcoming paper, I can anticipate an idea – that has been outlined, although with some dissimilarities, by Flower 2000, 34-64 and by Rocco 2003, 45-70 – according to which this myth was recovered and reintroduced by Augustus with the aim to celebrate the family group of Claudii Marcelli. They were in the orbit of Julio-Claudian group since the marriage between Octavia and C. Claudius Marcellus (see n. 30), but then they were strengthening the ties with the union between Julia and M. Claudius Marcellus. Requesting such honour can be seen as a provocation by Crassus, who tried to enter the propagandistic system that Augustus had created for the renovated Julio-Claudian partnership.

³² D.C. LIII 24, 1. The idea of a specious indictment is supported in Cresci Marrone 1993, 154-160. This idea is accepted even by Rohr Vio 1998, n.202, 231, but I think it is too simplistic to look at Gallus’ affair only as a revenge of the aristocrats after the refusal of the *spolia opima* for Crassus: the unanimous Senate suggest, instead, a more widespread agreement between nobles and *homines novi*. From their point of view, the aristocrats exploited the discords in Augustus’ party, were personal reasons, envy and the internal struggle for the key positions (as we can perceive

Finally, the Primus-Murena-Caepio *affaire*: it entailed initially a straight attack to the *princeps* in the form of the accusation of Augustus and Claudius Marcellus; then an insurgent cross faction, hard to pinpoint, menaced the regime, in a climate in which the party was collapsing, even close to the vertex. Cassius Dio reports, indeed, the disagreement that arose between Claudius Marcellus and Agrippa: this quarrel had its roots in the already quoted choice by Augustus, in 23 B.C., of Agrippa and Calpurnius Piso as his possible successors, but even Agrippa complained with the *princeps* for having been before postponed to Marcellus in the choice for Julia's husband.³³

The situation had come so close and to the verge of the everyone against everyone. We witness an escalation of tension and anxiety within the leading party: starting from the essentially solitary rebellion of a member of the aristocracy and passing through a more organized reaction of the nobility that involved some – maybe dissatisfied – elements of the original supporters (namely the *homines novi*), the parabola is completed with the widespread, agreed and planned participation in a large protest against the regime. Everyone desired a place in the sun in the new government. These events had, probably, an influence in the new political settlements and lead to Marcellus' exclusion from the hierarchies: the idea that Julia's husband was out of game for the succession (and even for a relevant role) before his death is dawning upon us. It should be noted, indeed, that he was still alive when he was set aside:³⁴ to mend the breach with the basis of his party

from Largus' accusations and from the ensuing bad relations between him and Proculcius) were undermining the internal cohesion.

³³ See D.C. LIII 30, 1-2 (n. 22) for the already quoted Augustus' decision to nominate Agrippa (and Calpurnius Piso) ruling of the empire in case of his death. In D.C. LIII 32, 1 Marcellus' hostility towards Agrippa is reported: his Eastern mission is consequently considered, by Dio, a way to avoid that skirmish might arise between them by being together. Suetonius reports that the Agrippa hardly endured that Marcellus had been preferred to him for the marriage with Julia: *Desideravit enim nonnumquam, ne de pluribus referam, et M. Agrippae patientiam [...] cum ille ex levi frigoris suspicione et quod Marcellus sibi anteferretur, Mytilenas se relictis omnibus contulisset* (Suet., *Aug.* LXIV, 6). That Caepio' conspiracy featured a larger group is attested by Dio, who refer that together with Caepio and Murena ἑταῖροι were involved (D.C. LIV 3, 3-4).

³⁴ Marcellus was certainly still alive and active in his role of *aedilis* on the first days of August 23 B.C.: (Plinius the Elder (*Nat.* XIX 6, 4) refers that [...] *Marcellus Octavia Augusti sorore genitus in aedilitate sua, avunculi XI consulatu, a kal. Aug. velis forum inumbravit, ut salubrius litigantes consisterent* [...]) while he is surely dead between 4 and 19 September 23 B.C. when, following Dio, his place was occupied by an image representing and commemorating him (D.C. LIII, 30, 6). Calpurnius Piso was *consul ordinarius* and started the year on charge, Sextus Albanianus Quirinalis replaced Augustus probably on June 23 B.C.; Dio states that Marcellus fell ill no long afterward his uncle, who was ill in the first part of the year and then chose Agrippa and Piso: this information seems converge to the awareness that Marcellus had already lost his position before dying. Concerning Marcellus death see also: Jameson 1969, 212-218; in Badian 1982, 22 *the death of Marcellus occurred late in 23, apparently between the ludi Romani [...] in mid-September and*

Augustus decided to sacrifice Claudius Marcellus on the altar of the internal harmony. The opening of the key position to the aristocrats should be considered in the same vein: they requested to participate in the *Res Publica* management and they were struggling for that. This new openness is evident for 23 B.C., but it is confirmed in 22 B.C.: together with Claudius Marcellus Aeserninus,³⁵ in 22 B.C. Lucius Arruntius was *consul*. As Munatius Plancus, Calpurnius Piso, Aemilius Lepidus and Lucius Sextius Albanianus Quirinalis, even Arruntius had been long-since far from the limelight:³⁶ the coincidences begin to be too many...

By these appointments and by dividing his powers with Agrippa and Calpurnius Piso – the leaders of two different factions, the one of the *homines novi* and the one of the aristocrats – Augustus aspired to a government reshuffling that was no longer possible to postpone. The long-time members of the party wanted, however, to keep the majority shareholder position: the marriage between Julia and Agrippa in 21 B.C. can be seen, consequently, as the way to strengthen the existing bonds and to smooth the recent disagreements.³⁷

One last clarification is needed: we still owe a brief consideration over the two main constitutional changes of 27 and 23 B.C. The existence of a direct and cause-effect link between these reforms and the above outlined political events has been nowadays rejected.³⁸ If they are not the direct consequence of these unrests, they could be, however, the reflection and one of the parameter to evaluate the solidity and the level of control of the State by the ruling group. In 27 B.C. Augustus was strong enough to place his men in key positions, home and abroad in the provinces.³⁹ The changes that the reform of this year entailed, albeit

the end of the year, but – given Dio's former statement – the basis for Badian's assumption are not clear.

³⁵ It is an uchronic curiosity to wonder what would have happened if Marcellus had survived; maybe Aeserninus' appointment can be considered as a sort of compensation, but it is evident that the group had lost large part of his relevance.

³⁶ Arruntius was proscribed by the triumvirs in 43 B.C. and he joined Sextus Pompeius until Misenus' pact in 39 B.C.; he later fought along with Octavianus at Actium (Plut., *Ant.* LXVI, 3 and Vell. II 85, 2), but he was nevertheless excluded for years from the offices.

³⁷ Agrippa divorced from his wife Marcella the Elder (another sign of the fall of Claudii Marcelli) to marry Julia (see D.C. LIV 6, 5). Agrippa was not only one of the leader of Augustan party; he was furthermore at the head of group that included members of the Roman aristocracy, members of the Italic *élite* and foreign kings: for this reason, it was essential to maintain good relations with him (Roddaz 1984, 541 refers to this group as *le parti d'Agrippa*).

³⁸ Badian 1982, p. 38, thinks that the reforms of 27 and 23 B.C. were not connected with the contemporary events, but they were part of a constitutional plan well in advance prepared.

³⁹ *Hispania Terraconensis* is a clear example of the control exercised by Augustus. It was strategically relevant for the presence of strong armies and it was governed by the most loyal members of the party, i.e. C. Calvisius Sabinus (*PIR*² C 352, 30/29 B.C.), T. Statilius Taurus (*PIR*² S 615, 29/28 B.C.) and Sex. Appuleius (*PIR*² A 961, 28/27 B.C.); see Thomasson 1984, 13.

limited, were not a fiction: firstly, the existence itself of rules and limits represents a sort of warranty against an absolute practice of the power; secondly, this reform is the proof of an ongoing and uninterrupted debate between Augustus and his party and between Augustan party and other factions. There are several footsteps of this discussions: it is not possible here to go deep with a general survey of the political dynamics, but we can refer to the honorary context and the awarding of the “Augustus”: we used to stare only at the celebratory dimension, but if we recall the plausible alternative “Romulus” and that it was the first and most desired option by the emperor, “Augustus” can be seen as the sign of a compromise between commemorative needs and absolutist motions. It should not be forgotten that the proponent of the final motion was not a member of the party, but a former Antonius’ supporter who, as noted, recovered a role, not by chance, in 22 B.C. The reform of 23 B.C. is a different case. Augustus saved his pre-eminence from the centrifugal tendencies, but he was forced to open the doors of the government to the aristocrats: the patricians supported his govern in exchange of a role in it.

The Augustan party, to conclude, was something similar to a powder keg, even at a first glance, as we have tried to show.⁴⁰ This paper was, first of all, focused on contesting a common, but too reductive, idea of the principate, i.e. a context in which a lonely lord governs alone with an almost absolute power. Conversely, Augustus had to hold on with an accurate work, with a constant effort intended to maintain the acquired position, as in a chess game, even in the period in which he had recently succeeded in the Civil wars. We started wondering whether we are facing continuity or rupture after Actium: in this perspective, the initial parallelism with the eighteenth century Sicilian events become clearer. When the local aristocrats faced a great and epochal change, they understood that the only way to carry on in their role and in their leadership was to join the wind of change, without blindly opposing to it. The same seems to happen at the end of the first century B.C. and Tacitus later noticed it: the peace was the starting point for an aristocracy that had already been decimated by too many years of war.⁴¹ To maintain their role, they not only accepted the novelty; they decided furthermore to embrace the monarchy and participated in the new political life in the same manner and according to the same dynamics as before. They decided that everything should change so that everything could stay the same.

⁴⁰ For evident reason, we have not taken in account the whole of the prosopographical dynamics: it should be remembered that familial ties – as marriages, betrothals and adoptions – were the starting point for establishing alliances.

⁴¹ See n. 5.

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