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AUGUSTUS' ANNOYANCE WITH ATHENS

Ian Worthington*

In 21 BC Augustus visited Greece. After going to Sparta, he moved to Athens, where he imposed a series of punitive measures on the Athenians, ending their control of Aegina, Eretria and probably Oropus, and banning the selling of Athenian citizenship (a practice going back to the Lycurgan era).[1] His actions unsurprisingly led to reduction in city revenues, while the loss of Oropus impacted Attic border security with Boeotia.[2] Possibly at this time Augustus also prohibited the minting of bronze coinage, and, so Dio 51,2, limited the powers of the Assembly, although how so is not known.[3] Augustus' treatment of Athens was markedly different from the honours he bestowed on the Spartans for their support of Livia, her first husband Ti. Claudius Nero, and their son, when they had fled Rome in 40 to Greece.[4] However, why he punished the Athenians, and even

* I thank the two anonymous referees for their excellent comments on the original version of this article; responding to their hard questions improved the content substantially. I also thank my erstwhile colleague T. Hillard for his response to some earlier ideas on the chronology of Augustus' second visit to Greece.

[1] Dio 54,7,2–4 (selling citizenship), with P. Graindor, *Athènes sous Auguste*, Cairo 1927, 5–8; A. N. Oikonomides, "Defeated Athens, the Land of Oropos, Caesar and Augustus. Notes on the History of the Years 49–27 B.C.", *Anc. World* 2 (1979) 102–3; D. J. Geagan, "Roman Athens: Some Aspects of Life and Culture. I. 86 B.C–A.D. 267", in H. Temporini (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* 2.7.1, Berlin 1979, 378–9; M. C. Hoff, "Civil Disobedience and Unrest in Augustan Athens", *Hesperia* 58 (1989) 267–76; G. C. R. Schmalz, "Athens, Augustus, and the Settlement of 21 B.C.", *GRBS* 37 (1996) 381–98.

[2] Removing Aegina from Athens' sphere of influence may have been to restore its historical independence: Schmalz (above n. 1), 384–9.

[3] Coinage: J. H. Kroll, "The Eleusis Hoard of Athenian Imperial Coins", *Hesperia* 42 (1973) 323–7, Hoff (above n. 1), 269.

[4] Cf. Dio 48,15,3–4.

when he did so, deserve further consideration; the reason and the timing shed light on his earlier relations with Athens, and by extension on the veracity of a passage in Plutarch on the emperor's dealings with the city.

Plutarch quotes a letter purportedly written to the Athenians by Augustus on Aegina in which he makes his outrage plain: "when, as it appeared, the Athenian people had committed some offence, he wrote from Aegina that he supposed they could not be unaware that he was angry; otherwise he would not have spent the whole winter in Aegina" (*Mor.* 207f; Loeb trans.).[5] In other words, he chose to snub the Athenians by remaining on Aegina and not in Athens as we might expect. There is no clear evidence in the letter as to its date; it was commonly assigned to 31 after Actium, but Bowersock, in a succinct discussion of Augustus' policy towards Athens in 21, argued that it should be associated with the emperor's punitive acts of 21, and Bowersock's view has been followed since.[6] The problem with Bowersock's argument, and hence the date of 21, is that after quoting this letter Plutarch goes on to say: "But he (Augustus) neither said nor did anything else to them". However, the punitive measures show the reverse was true – that Augustus did indeed do other things to the Athenians. That being the case, as I shall go on to argue, we have little choice but to reassign the letter to 31 after Actium.

First, what was the Athenians' offence? Dio, in the context of events of 21, implies it was their support of Antony (54,7,2–4). Yet it seems extraordinary, if the letter belongs to 21, that Augustus was still holding this resentment a decade after Actium.[7] The time for anger would have been after that battle, surely: instead, he went to the city and treated it and the rest of Greece favorably: he "became reconciled with the Greeks and distributed the army's remaining stores of grain to the cities, for they were in great need and had suffered heavy losses of money, slaves, and teams of horses", so Plutarch (against Dio, who claims he punished the Greeks, but there is no other evidence to support Dio).[8] In this he was

[5] Dio 54,7 claims that Augustus spent the winter on Samos, but Plutarch's account is commonly preferred.

[6] G. W. Bowersock, "Augustus on Aegina", *CQ*[2] 14 (1964) 120–2; cf. G. W. Bowersock, *Augustus and the Greek World*, Oxford 1965, 106. In 31: Graindor (above n. 1), 17–18; J. Day, *An Economic History of Athens under Roman Domination*, New York 1942, 134–6; Schmalz (above n. 1).

[7] Graindor (above n. 1), 17–18, Hoff (above n. 1), 268.

[8] Dio 51,2, Plut. *Antony* 68,4,6–8, with Day (above n. 6), 132–8.

no different from, say, Caesar, who did not hold Athenian support for Pompey against the city, nor Antony, who did not punish the people for championing Brutus – we do not hear of Caesar or Antony sulkily refusing to stay in Athens. The offence, then, must be something else.

Dio also gives the story (in relation to Augustus' visit of 21) that the statue of Athena (perhaps Athena Polias) on the Acropolis had been turned from facing eastwards to westwards, towards Rome, and was spattered with blood to make it look as though the goddess was contemptuously spitting blood on Rome.[9] Hoff has argued that this subversive act was a sign of anti-Roman feeling brewing since the Sullan sack in 86.[10] The slaughter of Athenians at that time, followed by various Romans imposing their wills on the Athenians and the widespread looting of art works throughout Greece over the decades must obviously have caused discontent. Thus the incident involving Athena shows that the Athenians did not merely harbor an anti-Roman stance but made it public, and it was this act that motivated Augustus to act as he did.

But why the Romans would allow a hawkish faction (if indeed there was such a thing) to remain in existence is hard to fathom. Since they would have been well aware of the Greeks' attitude to them, as no one likes to be conquered, why would an earlier ruler, such as Caesar or Antony, not stamp out anti-Roman feeling before it got to the level (if we follow Hoff's thesis) of the open act of defiance with Athena's statue? Again, we must turn to some other misconduct, though we will not take our leave of Athena's statue.

Here we can return to the letter in Plutarch. It has been assumed from it that Augustus heard of some sort of Athenian move that rubbed him up the wrong way and decided to castigate the city by wintering instead on Aegina. In that respect, the letter has added the most confusion to this whole episode. To begin with, it does not follow that he intended to spend the entire winter in Greece before hunting down Antony and Cleopatra: as Schmalz has pointed out,

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[9] Dio 54,7.2–4; cf. Bowersock 1965 (above n. 6), 106; Hoff (above n. 1), 269; D. Kienast, "Antonius, Augustus, die Kaiser und Athen", in K. Dietz – D. Hennig – H. Kaletsch (eds.), *Klassisches Altertum, Spätantike und frühes Christentum*, Würzburg 1993, 199 n. 5, but Schmalz (above n. 1), 385–386 contends that the anecdote about Athena's statue may belong to the earlier triumviral period (comparing it to Dio's anecdote about the wind toppling the statues of Antony and Cleopatra before Actium).

[10] Argued by Hoff (above n. 1), 269–76, repeated in M. C. Hoff, "The Early History of the Roman Agora at Athens", in S. Walker – A. Cameron (eds.), *The Greek Renaissance in the Roman Empire*, London 1989, 4–5.

the wording of the letter is opaque, for the Greek could simply mean that he decided to leave Aegina and the whole province of Greece that winter.[11]

More important is the assumption that the emperor never went to Athens but only Aegina, in which case the letter seems suited to the events of 21 and not 31. But that does not follow. Insufficient attention has been paid to Plutarch's statement after quoting the letter: "But he neither said nor did anything else to [the Athenians]". There is a simple solution that reconciles letter and statement in Plutarch: Octavian went to Athens after Actium, where something happened that caused his indignation, prompting him to leave for Aegina; from there he reproached the Athenians in a letter, but did not do anything else against them. It was thus up to them to regain his goodwill.

The likeliest explanation for his reaction was not what the Athenians did but what they did not do. Octavian did not remain in Athens very long after he settled his affairs with the Greeks; he made a careful visit back to Rome, and thence to Egypt to hunt down Antony and Cleopatra. If because of his short stay the Athenians had dallied in expressing their gratitude for his benevolent treatment, we should not be surprised he was vexed and laid the blame on them. Indeed, given the lavish honours they had heaped on Antony – calling him a "new Dionysus" for example[12] – it was in their best interests to revere Octavian (in 31) all the more.

This scenario explains the flurry of activity that can now be dated more precisely. To begin with, we have a lead token with the head of a youthful Apollo on it, along with a six-rayed star and the inscription "Kaisar"; it must predate 27, after which time the Greeks called Augustus *Sebastos*.[13] This type of token was given to someone making a generous donation to the city: Octavian's much-needed gift of grain after Actium gives us that context.[14] The association with Apollo is significant. All emperors identified themselves with traditional divinities; for Augustus Apollo stood out.[15] The Athenians began to call him a *new*

[11] Schmalz (above n. 1), 389–92.

[12] *IG* II^2 1043, 22–23.

[13] M. C. Hoff, "Augustus, Apollo, and Athens", *MH* 49 (1992) 223–32; cf. D. Peppas-Delmousou, "A Statue Base for Augustus *IG* II^2 3262 + *IG* II^2 4725", *AJP* 100 (1979) 125–32.

[14] Graindor (above n. 1), 37–8 n. 2 and 118, Hoff (above n. 13), 225.

[15] L. R. Taylor, *The Divinity of the Roman Emperor*, Middleton 1931, 118–20, 153–5; D. J. Geagan, "Imperial Visits to Athens: The Epigraphical Evidence", *Praktika*, *8th Congress for Greek and Latin*

Apollo to echo his ties with the god and distance themselves further from Antony the new Dionysus.

Further, the people likely now initiated Octavian into the Eleusinian Mysteries, holding them at a different time so as to accommodate his visit and as part of a reconciliation.[16] Doing so would also distance themselves further from Antony, whom they had not inducted.[17] Since Octavian favored ancient cults in Greece, his initiation may have taken on special meaning for him.[18] Then at Eleusis the Athenians dedicated a large monument to his wife Livia (calling her Livia Drusilla on it) and him as savior and benefactor of the people, perhaps also in acknowledgement of the grain he gave the city after Actium.[19]

These gestures make perfect sense as the Athenians scrambled to win the emperor's favour in 31. Nor did they end there. In the years following Actium, they continued to pay Augustus honours, including altars around the city, as well as other members of the imperial family.[20] Thus in 27, for example, they set up a monumental statue of Agrippa in a chariot drawn by four horses as

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Epigraphy, *Athens 1983*, Athens 1984, 75–8; Hoff (above n. 13), 226–9; J. Poccini, "Man or God: Divine Assimilation and Imitation in the Late Republic and Early Principate", in K. A. Raaflaub – M. Toher (eds.), *Between Republic and Empire*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1993, 344–65; G. W. Bowersock, "The New Hellenism of Augustan Athens", *ASNP* 4 (2002) 4–5.

16 Dio 51,4, with P. Graindor, "Auguste et Athènes", *RBPhil* 1 (1922) 429–34; Grandor (above n. 1), 20–3; R. Bernhardt, "Athen, Augustus und die eleusinischen Mysterien", *Ath.Mitt*. 90 (1975) 233–7 (arguing for the reconciliation); K. Clinton, "The Eleusinian Mysteries: Roman Initiates and Benefactors, Second Century B.C. to A.D. 267", in W. Haase (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* 2.18.2, Berlin 1989, 1507–9; Kienast (above n. 9), 198; A. J. S. Spawforth, *Greece and the Augustan Cultural Revolution*, Cambridge 2012, 167–8.

17 Bowersock (above n. 15), 5.

18 Spawforth (above n. 16), 159–68 and 192–206.

19 Dio 51,4, *IG* II^2 3238 (Livia), with K. Clinton, "Eleusis and the Romans: Late Republic to Marcus Aurelius", in M. C. Hoff – S. I. Rotroff (eds.), *The Romanization of Athens*, Oxford 1997, 163 and 165. See too K. Clinton, *Eleusis. The Inscriptions on Stone. Documents of the Sanctuary of the Two Goddesses and Public Documents of the Deme* 1A: *Text;* 1B: *Plates,* Athens 2005, and vol. 2*: Commentary*, Athens 2008.

20 Graindor (above n. 1), 45–53; A. Benjamin – A. E. Raubitschek, "Arae Augusti", *Hesperia* 28 (1959) 65–85; Geagan (above n. 15), 72–5; M. Torelli, "L'immagine dell'ideologia augustea nell'Agora di Atene", *Ostraka* 4 (1995) 9–32; see too G. C. R. Schmalz, *Augustan and Julio-Claudian Athens: A New Epigraphy and Prosopography*, Leiden 2009, 92–9 and D. J. Geagan, *Inscriptions: The Dedicatory Monuments. The Athenian Agora* 18, Princeton 2011, H274–H282 on pp. 157–9.

their "benefactor".[21] But by 21 they had clearly done *something* that led to Augustus' punitive measures. Here we return to the symbolic blood spattering of Athena's statue: in particular, why her statue? The exploitation of the patron deity of Athens in this way is important; it suggests something beyond simple discontent with secular Roman rule, and here Whittaker's argument connecting the defiant act to Augustus' cult on the Acropolis gives us the most plausible explanation.[22] His cult had been spreading throughout the East for some time, and was probably established in Athens in 29, especially as there was already a cult to Roma in the city.[23] That date suggests that Octavian had forgiven Athenian nonchalance after Actium, and in relief the people introduced his cult on the Acropolis.[24]

Octavian stressed that his cult was to be connected to that of the goddess Roma.[25] The Athenians were long used to venerating rulers, going back to the Antigonids in 307, but not ones intimately attached to foreign gods. Roma, the personification of the Roman state, now had a home in Athens and on the Acropolis no less, the dwelling place of Athena. Their attitude may well explain why the imperial cult started off slowly in the city and why buildings associated with it were marginalized – even as late as Claudius' reign, when the people rededicated the temple of Nemesis in Rhamnus to Livia, the location was "about as far from the sight of most Athenians as it was possible to get".[26] Several years

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[21] IG II^2 4122 and 4123 = Geagan (above n. 20), H417 on pp. 227–8; cf. Graindor (above n. 1), 48–9.

[22] H. Whittaker, "Some Reflections on the Temple to the Goddess Roma and Augustus on the Acropolis at Athens", in E. N. Ostenfeld (ed.), *Greek Romans and Roman Greeks: Studies in Cultural Interaction,* Aarhus 2002, 30–1, F. Lozano, *La religión del Poder. El culto imperial en Atenas en época de Augusto y los emperadores Julio-Claudios*, Oxford 2002, and M. Kantiréa, *Les dieux et les dieux Augustes. Le culte impérial en Grèce sous les Julio-claudiens et les Flaviens. Etudes épigraphiques et archéologiques*, Athens 2007.

[23] Whittaker (above n. 22), 27–30; on the spread: Benjamin – Raubitschek (above n. 20), Bowersock 1965 (above n. 6), 116. Thus it predates the temple of Roma and Augustus on the Acropolis, most commonly connected to a cult of the emperor: for example Graindor (above n. 1), 149–52; T. L. Shear, Jr., "Athens: From City-state to Provincial Town", *Hesperia* 50 (1981) 363–5; Bowersock 1965 (above n. 6), 112–21; Clinton (above n. 19), 165–7.

[24] Cf. Hoff (above n. 1), 275 n. 45.

[25] Suet. *Augustus* 52; cf. Tac. *ann.* 4,37, Bowersock 1965 (above n. 6), 116.

[26] A. J. S. Spawforth, "The Early Reception of the Imperial Cult in Athens: Problems and Ambiguities", in M. C. Hoff – S. I. Rotroff (eds.), *The Romanization of Athens*, Oxford 1997, 194, and see

later, when news arrived of Octavian's next visit to the city (in 21), we might well imagine a group of aggrieved citizens mixing politics and religion by scorning Rome for making the Acropolis, the sacred centre of Athens, home to Roma as well as their own patron deity. Octavian did not take the slight lightly, and retaliated with the sanctions that we discussed above. Not saying or doing anything else (so Plutarch) in no way fits that context.

In 19 when Augustus returned to the city, having successfully retrieved the standards lost by Crassus at Carrhae, there was no frostiness between him and the people, and probably at that time he donated money to complete the Roman Market.[27] What had led to the thawing in strained relations? The answer lies in the diplomacy of Herod the Great, who had become a close friend of Augustus and Agrippa, and acted as a mediator in disputes between them and various communities.[28] Herod was with Augustus in the East in 20/19, hence the Athenians may have appealed for his help in reconciling themselves to Augustus. Herod was successful, which explains the grateful Athenians' setting up a statue to him and describing him as a benefactor.[29] Again in relief that they were back in Augustus' good books, it may be now that the hoplite general Antipater of Phlya proposed they celebrate Augustus' monthly *dies natalis*.[30]

The Athenians had backed a number of Romans over the second half of the first century, all of whom turned out to be on the losing side until Octavian. Instead of rushing to shower him with honours for his generosity after Actium and in acknowledgement of a new ruler, they may well have been caught on the back foot. Their previous support of Antony, who was still at large (albeit in Egypt), exacerbated the situation, prompting an aggrieved Octavian to leave the

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passim for the slowness of the cult and Athenian responses to it. On the cult throughout Achaea: S. E. Alcock, *Graecia Capta: The Landscapes of Roman Greece*, Cambridge 1993, 181–91, M. Kantiréa, "Remarques sur le culte de la domus Augusta en Achaie de la mort d'Auguste à Néron", in O. Salomies (ed.), *The Greek East in the Roman Context,* Helsinki 2001, 51–60, and especially Kantiréa (above n. 22).

[27] Hoff (above n. 10), 3–5, Hoff (above n. 13), 231; cf. Shear (above n. 23), 360–1.

[28] See M. Toher, "Herod, Athens and Augustus", *ZPE* 190 (2014), 127–34.

[29] IG II^2 3441 = Geagan (above n. 20), H316 on pp. 170–1, with Toher (above n. 28), 127 and 133.

[30] IG II^2 1071. Since he is referred to as Sebastos on the inscription (line 5), it cannot predate 27: see Graindor (above n. 16), 434–40; Graindor (above n. 1), 25–32, 101, 113, 142; Stamires in B. D. Meritt – A. G. Woodhead, – G. A. Stamires, "Greek Inscriptions", *Hesperia* 26 (1957) no. 98 on pp. 260–5; Benjamin – Raubitschek (above n. 20), 74–5; Geagan (above n. 1), 383.

city for Aegina, from where he made his feelings known, causing the Athenians to move swiftly to appease him.

This article has proposed a reconstruction of the events of 31–19 concerning the relationship between Athens and Augustus, which aligns with what we are told in the accounts of Dio and Plutarch; in the process, I have rejected Bowersock's dating of Augustus' letter in Plutarch to 21. The proposed historical background thus restores Octavian's letter to the aftermath of Actium in 31, and removes the inconsistency in Plutarch's account. In doing so, I hope to have provided a vivid insight into the Athenians' somewhat turbulent early relations with Octavian and during his 'transition' to the *princeps* Augustus.

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