MAECENAS' RETIREMENT

In recent years Gordon Williams and C. O. Brink have propagated a belief, particularly in Britain, that shortly after the year 20 B.C. Augustus eased Maecenas into retirement and took over the management of literary patronage himself. This idea is partly founded on the evidence of late poems by Horace and Propertius, on which Maecenas appears to have left little imprint. But it would not have gained the currency it has if its advocates were not confident that sources independent of the poems also pointed to a rift between Augustus and Maecenas. It is these nonpoetic sources I wish to reexamine here. My argument will be that they furnish no corroboration for the belief that Maecenas' position in Roman literary society deteriorated during the last fifteen years of his life.

The modern view of Maecenas' retirement rests on foundations laid fifty years ago in Sir Ronald Syme's *Roman Revolution.* Syme pieced together the disjointed testimony of the sources about an abortive conspiracy, a near-fatal illness of Augustus, and the machinations of would-be successors in such a way as to revise completely the history of the year 23 B.C. It became the story of a "secret struggle" within Augustus' entourage: Augustus was leagued with his minister Maecenas to secure the succession for his nephew Marcellus; Agrippa and Livia resisted and ultimately thwarted the attempt; and during the struggle Maecenas' influence was broken.[1]

The part ascribed to Maecenas here was almost purely conjectural, since no source connects him with the behind-the-scenes maneuvering of the year 23. He was brought into it with the help of a remark by Tacitus that Maecenas ultimately enjoyed more the appearance than the reality of influence with Augustus (*Ann.* 3. 30. 4, to be discussed below), and by folding into the events of 23 an incident from the following year. When a certain Murena was implicated in a conspiracy against Augustus in the year 22, Maecenas passed information to his wife, Terentia, the conspirator's sister, which gave Augustus reason to "regret the breach of confidence."[2] By tracing Maecenas' decline to Augustus' displeasure over the Murena affair, and by transposing the Murena affair to the year 23 and making it the catalyst of a constitutional crisis, Syme was able to establish a complete scenario for the loss of influence to which Tacitus had alluded.[3]

The main difficulty with this reconstruction is well known. The only source that clearly dates Murena's conspiracy (Cass. Dio 54. 3) puts it a year later than the

Short though this note is, it has reached its present form only with the help of advice and criticism from R. Kaster, A. Ward, A. J. Woodman, and the journal's referee.

1. *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford, 1939), pp. 333–43; cf. p. 409.

2. Suet. *Aug.* 66. 3 *desideravit . . . Maecenatis taciturnitatem.* The fullest account of the conspiracy is given by Cass. Dio 54. 3; isolated details are supplied by Strabo 14. 5. 4 (670), Vell. Pat. 2. 91. 2 and 2. 93. 1, Suet. *Aug.* 56, *Tib.* 8, and Macrob. *Sat.* 1. 11. 21.

3. Here as in some other parts of *The Roman Revolution,* Syme's contribution was rather to have forged a potent synthesis out of existing source materials and suppositions than to have introduced fresh arguments. As early as 1863 Henzen had assumed that the consul and the conspirator were the same and had accordingly backdated the conspiracy (*CIL,* 1:450); it had long been a commonplace that the Murena affair cost Maecenas his friendship with Augustus (cf. M. Beulé, *Auguste: Sa famille et ses amis*[2] [Paris, 1867], pp. 275–77); and it had even been suggested that the conspiracy led directly to the constitutional reorganization of 23 (D. Vaglieri, "Augusto e Varrone Murena," *Rendiconti della reale Accademia dei Lincei,* Classe di scienze morali, storiche, e filologiche, ser. 5, vol. 6 [1897]: 551–58).

succession struggle with which Syme merged it. The conspiracy was backdated because the conspirator was identified with a like-named consul whom the Capitoline Fasti for the year 23 show to have vacated his position under mysterious circumstances. But in recent years this identification has come to seem increasingly dubious in light of the case made against it by Michael Swan in 1966.[4] Neither the exact name nor the family affiliation of the conspirator has been settled to everyone's satisfaction, but he appears to have borne the praenomen Lucius, whereas the man registered in the Capitoline Fasti was certainly an Aulus. More important, Swan showed that the entry in the Fasti follows a pattern which implies that the Murena in question was a *designatus* who never acceded to office rather than a sitting consul. Whatever happened to him must therefore have happened in 24, months before the crisis which the Murena incident is supposed to have precipitated. Even Syme finally came to harbor doubts that the consul manqué and the conspirator were the same man, and without that nexus, there is no reason for removing the conspiracy from the year in which Dio puts it.[5]

If the Murena episode is disconnected from politics relating to the succession and constitutional reorganization in 23, all evidence for Maecenas' eclipse in that year vanishes, since the conspiracy is the sole context in which the sources mention his name. Even in the following year, when Maecenas did give offense by passing information on the conspiracy to his wife, no source suggests that the incident created a breach with Augustus. On the contrary, Suetonius mentions it precisely to illustrate the point that Augustus "most steadfastly held on to his friends," who "flourished in wealth and power (*potentia*) to the end of their lives, even where grievances (*offensae*) intervened."[6] In the same passage, Maecenas' indiscretion is coupled with a grievance between Augustus and Agrippa that prompted Agrippa to withdraw from Rome, yet wrought no significant alteration in that relationship.[7] That Maecenas did in fact retain Augustus' confidence is shown by his role soon afterward. When Augustus left Rome in order to make a tour of Sicily and the eastern provinces, the unrest that had been building in the capital since he laid down the consulate grew worse. Maecenas was consulted, and the situation was resolved in accordance with his advice that Augustus should make Agrippa his son-in-law and put him in charge of Rome (Cass. Dio 54. 6. 5).

4. "The Consular Fasti of 23 B.C. and the Conspiracy of Varro Murena," *HSCP* 71 (1966): 235–47.

5. Cf. *The Augustan Aristocracy* (Oxford, 1986), p. 389. By 1986 Syme had also renounced other elements of the reconstruction offered in *Roman Revolution:* he no longer believed that the Licinius of Hor. *Carm.* 2. 10 was to be identified with the conspirator (*Augustan Aristocracy,* pp. 389–92, versus *Roman Revolution,* p. 334), or that "Licymnia" in Hor. *Carm.* 2. 12 was a cover-name for Maecenas' wife Terentia (*Augustan Aristocracy,* p. 390, versus *Roman Revolution,* p. 342). Yet despite this shift of opinion about details, he held fast to his original conclusion: "a concatenation of events can be sustained. There is no call to deviate" (*Augustan Aristocracy,* p. 389). For a vindication of Dio's dating of the conspiracy, see, in addition to Swan's paper, E. Badian, "'Crisis Theories' and the Beginning of the Principate," in *Romanitas-Christianitas: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Literatur der römischen Kaiserzeit Johannes Straub zum 70. Geburtstag am 18. October 1982 gewidmet,* ed. G. Wirth (Berlin and New York, 1982), pp. 19–23.

6. Suet. *Aug.* 66. 1 and 3; the examples of Agrippa and Maecenas immediately follow the thesis statement that introduces this section of the *vita.*

7. It may be worth noting here that there is no hint of trouble with Maecenas in Pliny's famous catalog of Augustus' tribulations at *HN* 7. 147–50, although Pliny cites difficulties and disappointments involving more than a half-dozen others, including Agrippa, Marcellus, and Livia. The absence of reference to Maecenas is the more noteworthy in that Pliny does include a case that involved an exactly comparable breach of security (ibid. 150 "suspicio in Fabium [Maximum] arcanorumque proditionem").

Between 23 and 21 B.C., therefore, historical accounts give no sign that Maecenas' influence with Augustus declined. And in the eyes of historians of literature, there was a still later and more important datum that could not be harmonized with Syme's reconstruction. Horace's first book of *Epistles,* dedicated to Maecenas and containing praise of Augustus, seemed to imply that Maecenas was still promoting the interests of the regime, yet the *Epistles* were published not earlier than the year 20.

But even among literary scholars, *The Roman Revolution* enjoyed too much authority for the notion of Maecenas' eclipse to be simply disregarded, at least in Britain.[8] Instead, Syme's interpretation underwent a metamorphosis. Williams and Brink took the break with Maecenas out of the context of dynastic intrigue and imbedded it in a hypothesis about the evolution of a governmental literary policy. Maecenas was superseded as the arbiter of letters when Augustus found time to take over the direction of literary affairs himself.[9] They also dated the realignment later, Williams to "about 19 B.C." and Brink to "after 19–18 B.C."[10] But even these adjustments fail to bring the interpretation into line with what our sources report about Maecenas.

Seneca the Elder offers us glimpses of his public role at three points after the year 20 B.C. The first comes in a gossipy aside about the rhetor Arellius Fuscus, who made a habit of embellishing his declamations with floscules from Vergil because he hoped that that would earn him points with Maecenas (*Suas.* 3. 5). Since Arellius is said to have borrowed some of his Vergilian tags from the *Aeneid* (*Suas.* 4. 4–5), and since the *Aeneid* was not published until some point after Vergil's death in September of 19 B.C., in Arellius' eyes Maecenas evidently remained a power worth courting at least as late as that year or the next. A second declaimer whom Seneca describes also continued to pay court to Maecenas. Junius Gallio composed an oration in defense of the pantomime Bathyllus, who had been savaged by a perennial critic of the Augustan establishment (*Cont.* 10 *pr.* 8). Since Bathyllus was notorious as Maecenas' freedman and favorite, and since the oration on his behalf was written for declamation purposes rather than for an actual trial, it too must have been inspired primarily by the desire to attract

8. The most vigorous dissent of which I am aware was registered by the American K. J. Reckford, "Horace and Maecenas," *TAPA* 90 (1959): 198–99. In Belgium A. Fougnies (*Mécène: Ministre d'Auguste, protecteur des lettres* [Brussels, 1947], p. 26) had also objected to Syme's position, without referring to him by name.

9. Williams' interpretation, first articulated in "Poetry in the Moral Climate of Augustan Rome," *JRS* 52 (1962): 45–46, was elaborated over the years in *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 4–5, 86–88; *Change and Decline: Roman Literature in the Early Empire* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1978), pp. 56–59; and "Phases in Political Patronage and of Literature in Rome," in *Literary and Artistic Patronage in Ancient Rome,* ed. B. K. Gold (Austin, 1982), pp. 16–21. Brink set out his view in *Horace on Poetry,* vol. 3: *"Epistles" Book II: The Letters to Augustus and Florus* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 526–52, 558–60.

10. Williams, *Change and Decline,* p. 57, and Brink, *The Letters to Augustus and Florus,* p. 526. J.-M. André (*Mécène: Essai de biographie spirituelle,* Annales litteraires de l'Université de Besançon, vol. 86 [Paris, 1967], pp. 98, 124, 138–39) accepted the basic premise of Williams' interpretation, but held that Maecenas' "influence politique . . . paraît solide, jusqu'en 17 au moins." It is not quite clear how the hypothesis that Augustus assumed control of literary policy between 19 and 17 B.C. can be reconciled with sources saying that Augustus had already pressured Vergil to revise the ending of *Georgics* 4 by the mid-twenties (Servius on Verg. *Ecl.* 10. 1 and *G.* 4. 1) and was in direct correspondence with him about the *Aeneid* (Don. *Vita Verg.* 31 Hardie).

Maecenas' favor. This incident probably belongs in or near 18 B.C., when Dio (54. 17. 4–5) reports on disturbances for which a rival of Bathyllus, but not Bathyllus himself, was exiled and then recalled. Finally, Seneca describes a rhetor's performance in 17 B.C. that Augustus, Agrippa, and Maecenas attended together (*Cont.* 2. 4. 12–13); whether he was acting as host or as the emperor's liaison, Maecenas had charge of the event and gave the signal for its conclusion. Although in all these episodes Seneca naturally focuses on contacts with declaimers rather than poets, in each case Maecenas comes across as a personage of unimpaired authority in literary society.

The last item of information about Maecenas' public standing comes from Dio and is later still. During a trial for adultery that Dio dates to 12 B.C., the defendant was assisted by Maecenas and by Augustus' nephew Appuleius. The fact of Maecenas' presence at the trial is noteworthy in itself. Since he had no reputation for either legal or rhetorical expertise, he must have been on hand to support the defendant with his *auctoritas,* which suggests that even at this late date he cannot have been generally perceived as a political has-been. But the rest of the story is even more instructive. The prosecutor evidently imagined that orators of the restored Republic were free to operate by the same ground rules as the orators of Cicero's time. At any rate, he pressed his case against the defendant by launching into an attack on the defendant's advocates as well, whereupon Augustus entered the court, took the presiding praetor's chair, and forbade further insults "either to his relatives or to his friends" (Cass. Dio 54. 30. 4–5). No observer of this incident could have come away with the impression that Maecenas was out of favor at the time.

Against a variety of indications that Maecenas' literary and social authority remained intact, there are two pieces of evidence that appear to admit a contrary interpretation. According to Dio, a strain in the relationship between Augustus and Maecenas did arise as Augustus pursued an affair with Maecenas' wife that had become an open scandal by the summer of the year 16.[11] But we would need more circumstantial information than this to conclude that an amatory entanglement provoked the kind of shake-up which critics have envisioned on the level of policy. Certainly the sequel was not that Augustus involved himself more closely in the literary life of the capital. Dio says that he dealt with the scandal over Terentia by quitting Rome and withdrawing to Gaul, where he remained for three years.

There remains the famous passage in which Tacitus likens Maecenas to another imperial counsellor who "in his advanced years kept up more an image than a reality in friendship with the emperor. And that had happened to Maecenas as well, it being the fate of power that it is rarely everlasting, or because disinterest overtakes the one party when he has bestowed his all or the other when there is nothing left to covet."[12] The cornerstone of every theory of Maecenas' eclipse,

11. Cass. Dio 54. 19. 3–6; cf. 55. 7. 5. Dio, who is our sole source of information about this affair (unless it is hinted at in *Eleg. Maec.* 151–52), says nothing that would fix its duration or the date at which it began.

12. Tac. *Ann.* 3. 30. 3–4 "[Sallustius Crispus] aetate provecta speciem magis in amicitia principis quam vim tenuit. idque et Maecenati acciderat, fato potentiae raro sempiternae, an satias capit aut illos, cum omnia tribuerent, aut hos, cum iam nihil reliquum est quod cupiant."

these lines are typical of Tacitus at his most irritating. The claim is practically impossible to falsify, since every sign of positive relations between Augustus and Maecenas would be readily convertible into proof of the Tacitean counter-position that they sought only to maintain appearances. But if the statement cannot be refuted, at least its value can be called in question. As is well known, Tacitus sometimes betrays an imperfect knowledge of facts and events that fall outside the period which is his primary focus.[13] The Augustan period is peripheral to the argument of the *Annals,* and in recursions to it Tacitus appears to have made at least one slip precisely in regard to Maecenas. At *Annals* 6. 11. 2 he names him "Cilnius Maecenas," against the witness of inscriptions and all other literary sources, in which he bears only the nomen "Maecenas" and no cognomen. It is therefore conceivable that Tacitus penned his comment about Maecenas' loss of influence without benefit of the kind of research he applied to persons and politics of the post-Augustan principate.[14] That possibility becomes stronger if the context of the remark is taken into account. It occurs within a characteristic digression on the phenomenology of power, and it parallels interpretations that Tacitus propounds of other henchmen who were used by the emperors and then discarded: Sallustius Crispus here, Seneca at *Annals* 14. 52–56, and Antonius Primus at *Histories* 4. 80. 3.[15] Yet in contrast to those cases, the statement about Maecenas contains no detail that would fix the circumstances of his fall from favor. Tacitus does not even commit to telling us approximately when it occurred, since formally the phrase "in his advanced years" (*provecta aetate*) attaches to Sallustius rather than to Maecenas.[16] This combination of tendentiousness and generality, taken together with the apparent mistake about Maecenas' name at *Annals* 6. 11. 2, suggests that Tacitus may have been operating with an interpretative schema that was already in place before the data to be interpreted.

Although the lines about Maecenas and Sallustius in Book 3 leave the background of Maecenas' decline completely obscure, another passage may clarify what Tacitus had in mind. In Book 14 of the *Annals,* Seneca and Nero are given complementary orations in which Seneca asks leave to retire to private life and

13. See, e.g., the discussion by Syme, *Tacitus,* vol. 1 (Oxford, 1958), pp. 378–96.

14. Cf. Syme's comment (*Tacitus,* 1:378): "Not having investigated properly the annals of Augustan Rome, Tacitus could sometimes be taken in by a conventional opinion."

15. The idea surfaces also at *Ann.* 4. 71. 1, apropos of Tiberius, who "scelerum ministros ut perverti ab aliis nolebat, ita plerumque satiatus et oblatis in eandem operam recentibus veteres et praegraves adflixit"; and as A. J. Woodman points out to me, it is implicit in the Sejanus narrative that surrounds the Sallustius obituary.

16. It can of course be understood as covering the case of Maecenas as well, but we would need more information than we have to be sure that Tacitus meant it that way. Often in his style, a resumptive *id* or *quod* picks up only the concluding portion of a statement that precedes. So, for example, he writes that when a fire on the Caelian Hill miraculously spared a statue of Tiberius, the senators harked back to a famous precedent: "adduntur sententiae, ut mons Caelius in posterum Augustus appellaretur, quando cunctis circum flagrantibus sola Tiberii effigies, sita in domo Iunii senatoris, inviolata mansisset. evenisse id olim Claudiae Quintae, eiusque statuam vim ignium bis elapsam maiores apud aedem matris deum consecravisse" (*Ann.* 4. 64. 3). The details about the rebaptism of the Caelian and the location of the unscathed statue obviously have nothing to do with the earlier case; all that applies to Claudia Quinta are the words *effigies . . . inviolata mansisset.* (For some other examples of semi-resumptive *id,* cf. *Ann.* 1. 7. 4, 3. 24. 4, 3. 69. 6, 4. 36. 3, 4. 74. 4, 11. 22. 3.) Thus in Tacitus' comparison of Sallustius and Maecenas, it is only the proposition "speciem magis in amicitia principis quam vim tenuit" that necessarily applies to both men.

Nero with exaggerated courtliness refuses him. Both speakers invoke the precedent of Maecenas, whom Augustus had "allowed to claim leisure after his toils."[17] The disputation being thoroughly disingenuous on both sides, it is likely that "leisure" or "retirement" (*otium*) here serves as a specious appellation for the estrangement of which Tacitus had spoken *in propria persona* in Book 3. If that is so, it becomes pertinent that in the later passage the time of Maecenas' "retirement" can be roughly pinned down. His toils are described as coinciding with Agrippa's contributions as Augustus' comrade in arms,[18] and as taking place during Augustus' earlier years (*iuventa Augusti: Ann.* 14. 55. 3). They belong, in other words, to the period of the civil wars, and are identical with the administrative responsibilities that a variety of sources say Maecenas assumed when Augustus was away from Rome.[19] After the civil wars, when Augustus canceled his triumviral acts and attempted to reestablish political normalcy, he evidently decided that it was inappropriate for a knight to wield police authority over the capital. The functions occasionally vested in Maecenas during the war years were henceforth shifted to senators, and Maecenas no longer took any direct role in government or administration, though of course he remained Augustus' confidant.[20] The end of the civil wars must be the point at which his notorious *otium* supervened. And that seems to be what we are told in some anonymous verses written on the occasion of Maecenas' death twenty years later. The (first) *Elegy for Maecenas* is largely devoted to defending him against criticisms of his voluptuous lifestyle, and part of the argument (lines 49–50) is that he had earned his leisure by prior exertions: "Peace came, and new leisure eased the old style. All things befit the victors when war subsides."[21] This positive statement complements the indications of other sources, according to which Maecenas occasionally exerted influence behind the scenes but seems to have held no powers after 29 B.C.[22] If the

17. *Ann.* 14. 55. 2 "Maecenati usurpare otium post labores concessit [Augustus]"; cf. 14. 53. 3 "Maecenati urbe in ipsa velut peregrinum otium permisit."

18. *Ann.* 14. 53. 3 "Alter bellorum socius, alter Romae pluribus laboribus iactatus ampla quidem, sed pro ingentibus meritis, praemia acceperant." Although in fact Agrippa campaigned for, if not alongside, Augustus until the very end of his life, it is clear that Seneca and Nero have in view only those operations that preceded Agrippa's withdrawal to Mytilene in 23 B.C.: i.e., his campaigns down to and including the battle of Actium.

19. Cass. Dio 49. 16. 2, 51. 3. 5, App. *BCiv.* 5. 414 and 470, Vell. Pat. 2. 88. 2–3, Sen. *Epist.* 114. 6, and Tacitus himself at *Ann.* 6. 11. 2.

20. See the Appendix.

21. The *Elegy* is a clumsy, lurching composition with few transitions or particles to point direction even when it abandons chronological order. Since it is often difficult to follow, I should state how I understand the couplet I have quoted in relation to the overall argument of the poem. The subject of Maecenas' dissolute life is first raised in context of his service as Augustus' *custos urbis* at lines 25–30, before the passage dealing with the end of the war against Antony. Though the author does not explicitly say that the *custodia urbis* preceded the end of the war, I take that to be the basis for the order in which he treats them. He talks about Maecenas' self-indulgent temperament twice because he has worked out two lines of defense against criticisms of it. The first is that Maecenas' character did not prevent him from acting effectively as Augustus' deputy in Rome, whereas it did make him proof against the temptation to cling to power permanently (lines 25–38). The other defense is that Maecenas fought strenuously in several campaigns of the civil war, and was therefore entitled to take his ease when the war was over (lines 39–50). Maecenas' embrace of *otium* is at the center of both these arguments, but it is typical of the author that he has made no effort to harmonize or integrate them.

22. It may be worth recalling here that in scholarship, too, it was once taken for granted that Maecenas had retired from public life after the civil wars, as in this passage from one of the early biographies: "Peace reigned everywhere; and Maecenas, having no farther employment in the government of *Rome*

tradition about Maecenas' *otium* is what lies behind Tacitus' comment on his loss of influence, then Tacitus had in view something that happened in about 29, and the passage would have no bearing on Maecenas' literary role a decade later.

In these pages I have argued that testimonia about Maecenas generally represent him as occupying the same position in relation to Augustus and to capital society after 23 B.C. as he occupied previously. Only Tacitus speaks of a definite breach between Maecenas and Augustus, and I have offered reasons for thinking that this pronouncement rests on a tendentious interpretation of Maecenas' withdrawal from administrative functions at the end of the civil war. Whether a case for the waning of Maecenas' literary influence can still be argued just on the basis of Horace's and Propertius' late poems, without the help of extrinsic testimony, is unclear to me. The most critical step would be to decide when a decline begins to manifest itself, since the later it is dated, the less poetry there is to reflect it. By the conventional chronology, Propertius drops out as evidence after the year 16; the only part of Horace's corpus that can be certainly dated after that is the fourth book of *Odes* (which happens to include one compliment to Maecenas at 4. 11. 17–20). But this review of prosopographical sources is hardly a suitable framework in which to try to calculate the Maecenatism or non-Maecenatism of the poems.

APPENDIX: MAECENAS' POLITICAL ROLE AFTER 29 B.C.

Since the entries on Maecenas in *PIR* and *RE* are not as forthcoming as they might be about Maecenas' status during the last two decades of his life, the evidence had best be summarized. (1) With the one exception to be discussed below, no source presents Maecenas as acting in any administrative capacity, officially or unofficially, after Augustus' return to Italy in 29. The argument from silence is bolstered by Tacitus' formulation at *Ann.* 6. 11. 2, which distinctly implies that the administrative role Maecenas had played during the triumvirate ceased with the end of the civil wars: "Augustus *bellis civilibus* Cilnium Maecenatem equestris ordinis cunctis apud Romam atque Italiam praeposuit. *mox rerum potitus* ob magnitudinem populi ac tarda legum auxilia *sumpsit e consularibus* qui coerceret servitia. . . ." (2) At several points after 29, Augustus tried to insure order in the capital by giving police powers to leading senators: Messalla Corvinus in about 26 (Tac. *Ann.* 6. 11. 3, Hieron. *Chron.*, p. 164 f Helm), Agrippa in 21 (Cass. Dio 54. 6), Statilius Taurus in 16 (Cass. Dio 54. 19. 6, Tac. *Ann.* 6. 11. 3). He would not have had to keep experimenting this way if someone else were already exercising those powers. (3) The one source that does ascribe an administrative function to Maecenas in the 20s is demonstrably confused. At Hor. *Carm.* 3. 29. 25–26 (where Horace says to Maecenas "tu civitatem quis deceat status / curas et urbi sollicitus times"), the Porphyrian scholia comment "apparet illo tempore urbis praefectum fuisse Maecenatem"; pseudo-Acro has a similar

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perfectly enjoyed the *otium cum dignitate*, a happy retirement, chiefly consecrated to his pleasure which consisted in study" (R. Schomberg, *The Life of Maecenas* [London, 1766], pp. 62–63). The idea persisted down even into Gardthausen's *Augustus und seine Zeit*, vol. 1.2 (Leipzig, 1896), pp. 766–67. But since it was obviously incompatible with a view of Maecenas as minister of Augustus in the new regime, it tended to disappear as the ministerial interpretation gained ground.

note that derives from Porphyrio. Here as often the scholia transmit a nugget of fact thickly encrusted with dross. During the triumviral period, as we have seen, Maecenas did occasionally exercise powers analogous to those of a *praefectus urbi* under the principate; on that point, the scholiast may well have brushed up against a piece of genuine information. But if so, it is information chronologically skewed, since Horace's poem belongs to the 20s, not the 30s. The note is tainted with another kind of anachronism as well, in that even during the triumvirate Maecenas apparently did not bear the title *praefectus urbi,* or perhaps any official title (see G. Vitucci, *Ricerche sulla praefectura urbi in età imperiale* [Rome, 1956], pp. 23–24). Finally, the inference that the scholiast has drawn from Horace's words at *Carm.* 3. 29. 25–26 is belied by Horace himself in another poem of the same period. In *Carm.* 3. 8 Horace again exhorts Maecenas not to fret over the state of the nation (17 "mitte civilis super urbe curas"), but here adds that Maecenas can afford to relax because he is after all a private citizen (26 "parce *privatus* nimium cavere"). As Heinze noted ad loc., if Maecenas were still acting in an official capacity, Horace would "schwerlich ausdrücklich auf sein Recht als *privatus* hingewiesen haben"; Heinze also noted that *civilis* in line 17 similarly implies a private rather than an official perspective.

What has blurred this reasonably consistent picture presented by the sources is the modern insistence on perceiving Maecenas as a "minister" in Augustus' "cabinet." In the political systems with which we are most familiar, a government minister or secretary is an elected or appointed official who functions not only, and often not even mainly, as a personal adviser to the chief executive, but as the administrator of a government bureau. This is just the reverse of the system under the principate, in which the emperor's *consilium* is an unofficial and fluctuating group made up of confidants who may or may not also be charged with administrative responsibilities; see J. Crook, *Consilium Principis* (Cambridge, 1955), pp. 21–30. Maecenas' continuing role as adviser to Augustus is thus entirely consistent with his having been a *privatus* without official functions throughout much of their long relationship (cf. Crook, p. 36: "retirement from administrative duties might be the beginning of a man's most valuable period as a counsellor").

POSTSCRIPT

As this note was going to press, an article appeared in which Gordon Williams recanted a part of what he has written about Maecenas over the years ("Did Maecenas 'Fall from Favor'? Augustan Literary Patronage," in *Between Republic and Empire: Interpretations of Augustus and His Principate,* ed. K. A. Raaflaub and M. Toher [Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1990], pp. 258–75). Appealing to many of the same passages mustered here, Williams now rejects Syme's reconstruction of events and acknowledges that "Maecenas' relationship with Augustus continued unchanged through 23 B.C. and on to 8 B.C." (p. 262).

The reassessment of Maecenas' status is a welcome development. It is surprising, however, how little it has affected Williams' interpretation of Maecenas' literary role. Whereas Williams previously thought Maecenas had been pushed aside by Augustus, he now holds that Maecenas bowed out by prearrangement ("a new type of literary patronage was planned from the start, to be initiated by

Maecenas and then taken over by Augustus when the time was right," p. 273). Though the circumstances of Maecenas' retirement differ, the outcome is exactly the same: from 18 B.C. on, Augustus deals directly with the poets and vice-versa.

In fact, there is no more sign of Maecenas' planned withdrawal than of his ouster:

(1) As proof of Augustus' new activism after 18, Williams instances his selection of Horace to compose the *Carmen Saeculare,* his request for odes in honor of his stepsons Drusus and Tiberius, and his insistence that one of Horace's poetic epistles be directed to himself. But what about Augustus' earlier interventions? He is said to have forced Vergil to revise Gallus out of the fourth book of the *Georgics* in 27 or 26 B.C. (Servius on *Ecl.* 10. 1, *G.* 4. 1); he corresponded with Vergil about the scope and progress of the *Aeneid* between 27 and 24 (Don. *Vita Verg.* 31 Hardie, Macrob. *Sat.* 1. 24. 10–11); he arranged the command performance in 22 at which Vergil read his eulogy of Marcellus (Don. *Vita Verg.* 32 Hardie, Servius on *Aen.* 6. 861); and in 19 he insisted that Varius and Tucca publish Vergil's unfinished manuscript of the *Aeneid* contrary to the poet's wishes (Pliny *HN* 7. 114, Don. *Vita Verg.* 41 Hardie). All these incidents certainly predate Williams' turning point, and in no case is there any hint that Augustus was acting through Maecenas or anyone else.

(2) Maecenas for his part continued to be active in Roman literary society in 18 and after. He lent his patronage to performances of show oratory put on by rhetors (Sen. *Cont.* 2. 4. 12–13, 10 *pr.* 8) and he vigorously promoted Vergil's posthumous reputation (Sen. *Suas.* 1. 12, 2. 20, 3. 5).

(3) Part of Williams' case is that a shift of literary policy is signaled by a change of focus in late poems by both Horace and Propertius. Under Maecenas' management, the poets practiced a "rhetoric of indirection," addressing themselves to Maecenas rather than to Augustus and focusing on the political program of the regime rather than on the personality of the leader (pp. 267–68). But once Augustus took control in 18, the poets began to address him directly and to celebrate his personal achievements. While this distinction may serve for Horace, it hardly seems to fit Propertius. In the fourth book Propertius never addresses himself directly to Augustus, and if one had to define the focus of that book as being either Augustus' political program or his personality, it would not be the latter.

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AN HEIR OF TRAGEDY: TACITUS *HISTORIES* 2. 59. 3

One of the main problems in the Year of the Four Emperors was the difficulty each contender for the purple faced in establishing a dynasty. The theme bulks large in Tacitus' *Histories,* not surprisingly, since the work is much taken up with the breakdown of legitimacy, stability, and continuity in that terrible year. This accounts, in large measure, for the prominence given to Galba's inept speech on the glories of adoption (1. 15–16), and for the strong emphasis placed by Mucianus