

A NOTE ON OCTAVIAN'S FELICITAS

H. Erkell, in his book *Augustus, Felicitas, Fortuna*, commented that there was no evidence before Suetonius to connect *felicitas* with Augustus. S. Weinstock, however, pointed out that in the period just after Actium the now victorious *imperator* advertised that he had had the help of the deity of good luck and success. Octavian, for instance, dedicated bronze statues to an animal driver named Eutyclus and his donkey Nikon on the site of his camp at Actium because of their lucky appearance just before the battle. In addition a shrine to *Felicitas* in Rome was rededicated on September 23, Octavian's birthday¹). The purpose of this note is to discuss two occasions during the triumviral period when it also may be possible to trace signs of Octavian's claim to *felicitas* in the tradition of Rome's successful *imperatores*.

The evidence of the first occurrence of *felicitas* is a passage in Orosius, the early fifth century Christian historian. This passage may be derived from Livy and ultimately Augustus' own memoirs. I believe we can use this source, although late, to reconstruct a plausible case for the appearance of *felicitas* in propaganda about Philippi. The second case of *felicitas* is an arranged coincidence in the calendar between July 1, the day Octavian chose for his departure to Sicily in 36 B.C. and his final assault on Sextus Pompey, and the *dies natalis* of a temple in Rome to *felicitas*²).

Augustus boasted of a victory at Philippi – *qui parentem meum trucidaverunt, eos in exilium expuli iudiciis legitimis ultus eorum facinus, et postea bellum inferentis rei publicae vici bis acie*

1) H. Erkell, *Augustus, Felicitas, Fortuna: Lateinische Wortstudien* (Göteborg 1952) 108–114; S. Weinstock, rev. of Erkell in *JRS* 45 (1955) 187–188. On the statues at Actium, see *Suet. Aug.* 96.2; *Plut. Ant.* 65. Zonaras 10.30 (= p. 428, vol. 2 in Dindorf, 1896) says the statues were later taken to Byzantium. The donkey may also have been a symbol of good luck: A. Alföldi, *Asina. Eine dritte Gruppe heidnischer Neujahrsminzen im spätantiken Rom*, *GNS* 2 (1951) 57–66. The *Fasti Palatii Urbinae* record the *dies natalis* of *Felicitas in cam(po) Mart(io)* on Augustus' birthday. See A. Degrassi, *Insc. Ital.* 13.2, 63, 512. The bibliography on *felicitas* is extensive. Summaries in J. Rufus Fears, *The Cult of Virtues and Roman Imperial Ideology*, *ANRW* 17.2, 843 and in Erkell, 183–89.

2) The evidence for *felicitas* in Orosius has gone unnoticed. The second case has been noted by J. Gagé, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* (Paris 1950) 159, n. 1, but not discussed.

(Res Gest. 2) – and enshrined the date in the calendar for annual remembrance: [*Caesa*]r Augustus vicit Phil(i)ppis posteriore proelio Bruto occiso (Fasti Praen. for Oct. 23; cf. Cass. Dio 48.3.2). Because of illness and inexperience, however, Octavian took almost no part in the strategy or the battle. As Antony won a victory over Cassius, Brutus defeated Octavian's forces and overran his camp. Accounts of Philippi tell of a warning dream which came to M. Artorius Asclepiades, Octavian's friend and physician, and advised him to lead Octavian, although seriously ill, from the camp³). As a result, Octavian was not in the camp when Brutus' forces attacked. Our sources reflect their bias or the bias of their own sources for or against Augustus in their account of these events. Suetonius, for example, in his biography of Augustus (13.1–2) describes Octavian's withdrawal as an ignominious flight from pursuers. Velleius Paterculus (2.70.1), on the other hand, giving Antony no part in the battle, describes Octavian as carrying out his duties as a general despite a severe illness and even implies that if Octavian had stayed in the camp, Brutus would not have taken it: *cornu, cui Brutus praeerat, impulsis hostibus castra Caesaris cepit (nam ipse Caesar, etiamsi infirmissimus valetudine erat, obibat munia ducis...)*⁴.

Both Plutarch (Ant. 22; Brut. 41) and Appian (B.Civ. 4.110) specifically refer to Augustus' autobiography as their source of information for the dream which caused Octavian to leave his camp. Octavian's escape from a camp that was soon overrun by the enemy proved that he had the protection of the gods. We undoubtedly owe not merely the record but the interpretation of the dream to Augustus' memoirs where he obviously attempted to rewrite history not only to absolve himself of imputations of cowardice but to gain more credit for the victory⁵). Whether in Augustus-

3) Appian ascribes the dream to Octavian himself (B.Civ. 4.110). Other accounts of Octavian's health, the doctor, and the warning dream in Suet. Aug. 13.1; 91.1; Florus 2.17.9; Plut. Brut. 41, Ant. 22; Val. Max. 7.1; Cass. Dio 47.37.1; 47.41.3; 47.46.2; Oros. 6.18.15; App. B.Civ. 4.108; Vell. Pat. 2.70.1.

4) The observation of A. J. Woodman, Velleius Paterculus: The Caesarian and Augustan Narrative 2.41–93 (Cambridge 1983) 168–69.

5) On the bias of Augustus' memoirs and their content, see F. Blumenthal, Die Autobiographie des Augustus, WS 35 (1913) 113–30 and 36 (1914) 84–103. The Cantabrian War of 26–25 B. C. is the last event mentioned, so the memoirs may reflect Augustan propaganda at the time he was writing rather than propaganda at the time of the battle. The importance given to the dream in our sources reflects the significance given to omens and dreams by Augustus himself, who regularly marked important events in his life by such divine signs. See Suet. Aug. 91–96.

tus' autobiography or other written accounts partial to him, there were also attempts to rob Antony of his responsibility for victory by charging him with absence from the battle (Plut. Ant. 22; Brut. 42)⁶).

Orosius gives us a flattering account of Augustus' actions: *igitur Caesar et Antonius eosdem in Macedoniam magnis bellorum apparatibus persecuti, ad mortem compulerunt; quamvis manifestissime illa tunc pugna non virtute partis Antoni, sed Caesaris felicitate confecta sit. Caesar enim tunc aeger, cum se in castris capiendae quietis causa tenere statuisset, hortatu et precibus medici sui, qui per somnium admonitum sese fatebatur, ut ea die castris Caesarem salutis ipsius causa educeret, in campum aegre inter copias egressus est ac mox castra eius ab hostibus capta sunt. sed rursus Caesariani milites Cassi castra ceperunt* (6.18.14–15). This account gives Octavian's troops the credit for the victory or at least attempts to do so by not distinguishing the contingent led by Antony from that commanded by Octavian. Although Octavian's camp is taken, his troops take the camp of Cassius and as a result Brutus and Cassius kill themselves. Thus Orosius illustrates how the dream proved the presence of Octavian's *felicitas* and this, not any military maneuver, won the battle⁷).

Orosius' version is very close to the account of Velleius Paterculus, who gives the same sequence of events: Octavian, although ill, leaves his camp at the warning of his physician, his camp is seized by Brutus' troops, but Cassius is defeated. Velleius glosses over Antony's responsibility for the routing of Cassius' forces by passing over the fight to describe Cassius already in flight: *id autem, in quo Cassius fuerat, fugatum ac male mulcatum in altiora se receperat loca* (2.70.1). Scholars usually cite Livy or a compendium based on Livy as a source for this section of Orosius, and Velleius Paterculus could have been depending on Livy as well⁸). The surviving *periochae* of books 123 and 124, whose sub-

6) Appian emphasizes how Antony's stature after Philippi resulted from his responsibility for the victory. See B.Civ. 5.14, 53, 58. Discussion of the bias of our sources in E. Huzar, *Mark Antony: A Biography* (Minneapolis 1978) 251–52.

7) Cf. App. B.Civ. 4.128 who speaks rather ironically of Octavian's εὐτυχία (= *felicitas*) or his troops' fear of starvation as the two possible factors for a victory in the second battle at Philippi.

8) See C. Zangemeister, *Pauli Orosii: Historiarum adversum Paganos* (Vienna 1882) 409; A. Lippold and G. Chiarini, *Le Storie Contro I Pagani* (Rome 1976) vol. 2, 458. See too R. Syme, *Livy and Augustus*, HSCP 64 (1959) 27–87. The pro-Augustan version of Florus (2.17.7–15) is also similar except Florus says Antony was absent from the battle because of *metus* and *ignavia* (2.17.10). Florus em-

ject was Philippi, suggest nothing about Livy's portrayal of Octavian and Antony at the battle, although we know from the summaries of 117 and 130 that Livy was hostile to Antony. The *periochae* state that the battle ended in a draw with a victory and a defeat on each side but that victory came to Antony and Octavian because Cassius misunderstood the results of the first battle and killed himself: *C. Caesar et Antonius apud Philippos vario eventu adversus Brutum et Cassium pugnauerunt ita, ut dextra utriusque cornua vincerent et castra quoque utrimque ab his, qui vicerant, expugnarentur. Sed inaequalem fortunam partium mors Cassi fecit, qui cum in eo cornu fuisset, quod pulsum erat, totum exercitum fusum ratus mortem conscivit* (124).

Orosius' topic sentence is interesting for uniting and contrasting *virtus* and *felicitas*. No word, as Erkell writes, is more commonly connected to *felicitas* in Livy than *virtus*⁹). Together they comprise two of the necessary attributes of a successful general. Antony certainly won a reputation for bravery and for the victory at Philippi, on which he based his much superior position to Octavian in the period following the battle. Orosius' version does not deny Antony's valor but awards the actual victory to the manifestation of divine favor toward Octavian. It is tempting to posit the contrast between Antony's *virtus* and Octavian's *felicitas* as part of Orosius' source, whether Livy or a source based on Livy. *Felicitas* cleverly transformed Octavian's flight from the camp among his men into the reason for victory. What was more likely the original source than Augustus himself, whose memoirs deeply influenced Livy? Augustus' citation of the dream in his autobiography implies, in fact, his attempts to show that divine favor attended him at Philippi.

Appian is our source of information for the date Octavian chose in 36 B.C. to sail against Sextus Pompey: *καὶ τῆς ἀναγωγῆς τοῦ Καίσαρος ἡ ἡμέρα προεῖρητο πᾶσι, καὶ ἦν δεκάτη τροπῶν θερινῶν, ἦν τινα Ῥωμαῖοι νομιμῆσαν ἔχουσι τοῦ μηνός. ὃν ἐπὶ τιμῇ τοῦ Καίσαρος τοῦ προτέρου Ἰούλιον ἀντὶ Κυντιλίου καλοῦσι. τήνδε μὲν ὁ Καίσαρ ὥρισε τὴν ἡμέραν, αἰσιούμενος ἴσως διὰ τὸν πατέρα νικηφόρον αἰεὶ γεγόμενον* (5.97). Appian surmised that Octavian wanted to begin a battle on the first day of the month recently

phasizes that the *fortuna* of Octavian and not the *virtus* of the soldiers won the battle and thus echoes a similar comment made by Orosius about the decisive factor as the *felicitas* of Octavian and not the *virtus* of Antony's troops. See below in my text.

9) See Erkell (n. 1 above) p. 67, with citations.

renamed after his father because it might be a good omen for him. Gag e, however, noticed an interesting fact about July 1: It was the *dies natalis* of a shrine to *felicitas* in Rome¹⁰). Both reasons for the date are true and complementary. Gag e gave as Octavian's reason his well-known "attention superstitieuse" to dates¹¹). The Romans believed that the fortuitous coincidence of a *dies natalis* and a happy event such as news of a success in battle or a homecoming was auspicious. When Cicero returned to Italy after the Senate passed a decree to repatriate him, he wrote happily to Atticus that the date – August 8 – was the birthday of his daughter Tullia, who was there to greet him, and the birthday of the colony of Brundisium, the place where he arrived in Italy, and of the goddess Salus in Rome. The residents of Brundisium, learning of these last coincidences, enthusiastically congratulated Cicero: *Brundisium veni Non. Sext. ibi mihi Tulliola mea fuit praesto natali suo ipso die, qui casu idem natalis erat et Brundisinae coloniae et tuae vicinae Salutis; quae res animadversa a multitudine summa Brundisinorum gratulatione celebrata est* (Att. 4.1.4)¹²).

This careful choice of dates suits what we know of Augustus' later manipulation of the calendar to align the *dies natalis* of new and restored shrines with days personally important to him and his family¹³). While today we tend to look for political and dynastic motives for these shared days of celebration, this earlier occasion confirms a personal superstition about "lucky days" (cf. Suet. Aug. 92.2). But the choice of the *dies natalis* of *felicitas* as the day for the start of Octavian's expedition was not solely superstitious. In seeking to make *felicitas* the patron deity of the battle, Octavian may have had in mind Julius Caesar's choice of *felicitas* as his battle signal at Thapsus (B.Afr. 83.1). During the triumviral period Octavian imitated the omens and other marks of Caesar's good fortune to recall them to the Roman public and

10) See n. 2 above. Gag e's observation is, as far as I know, unique to him. Historians generally follow Appian's explanation. See, e.g., M. Hadas, Sextus Pompey (New York 1930) 123, n. 8.

11) See n. 2, p. 159. Cf. Suet. Aug. 92.2.

12) Cf. the superstitious feelings about the coincidence of Augustus' day of death and first consulship in Tac. Ann. 1.9.1 and the close coincidence of Pompey's birthday and the day of his death in Vell. Pat. 2.53.3. We may also note Pompey's choice of the date of his triumph in 61 B.C. to make it coincide with his birthday. See Plin. Nat. 37.13.

13) For examples and discussion, P. Gros, *Aurea Templa. Recherches sur l'architecture religieuse de Rome   l' poque d'Auguste* (Rome 1976) 31–36.

foster an obvious and flattering comparison between himself and his divine father¹⁴).

We do not know anything of the history of the temple whose *dies natalis* of July 1 is recorded in both the pre-Julian *Fasti Antiates maiores* and the Imperial *Fasti Antiates* and whose location in *Cap[it]o(lio)* appears in the latter. Degrassi and Platner and Ashby connect this shrine with a second date – October 9 – when two Imperial calendars record the *dies natalis* of a temple of Fausta Felicitas in *Capitolio* as well as two other shrines on the Capitoline hill, one dedicated to Venus Victrix, the other to Genius Publicus¹⁵). October 9 was also the date of dedication of the magnificent temple to Apollo on the Palatine, vowed in 36 B.C. after the great success at Naulochus, and dedicated in 28. The date of the establishment of the shrines of Venus Victrix, Felicitas and Genius Publicus remains, in the face of no evidence but the calendar citations, controversial¹⁶). Degrassi suggested the *dies natalis* of *felicitas* on October 9 as an Augustan restoration of the shrine whose original birthday was July 1. If so, the shrine continued to have two days during the year when birthday celebrations took place there. Some Augustan restorations displaced the earlier *dies natalis* although there are other cases when two days continued to be observed in the calendars¹⁷). In the case of the temple of Quirinus, for instance, the two *dies natales* each served a purpose. The old date was connected with the beginning of the Quirinalia and the new date honored Augustus. If July 1 and October 9 refer to the same shrine, we might find a reason for the continued attention to the old date in Augustus' choice of that date for his expedition

14) E. g., a birth omen of laurel: Sid. Apoll. Carm. 2.120 (Caesar) and Serv. on Aen. 6.230; an omen of 49 B.C. (Cass. Dio 41.39.2) was imitated by Octavian in 38 or 37 (Cass. Dio 48.52.3; Plin. Nat. 15.136; Suet. Gal. 1). Many examples and discussion in S. Weinstock, *Divus Iulius* (Oxford 1971).

15) A. Degrassi, *Inscr. Ital.* 13.2, 14, 209, 475. S. B. Platner and T. Ashby, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (London 1929) 207. Also of the same opinion is H. H. Scullard, *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic* (London 1981) 158–59. However, H. Jordan, *Topographie der Stadt Rom im Altertum* (Berlin 1878) vol. 1.2, p. 46 did not think that the two dates referred to the same temple. The *Fasti Fratrum Arvalium* and the *Fasti Amiternini* record the Oct. 9 date. See Degrassi, 37, 195, 518.

16) Gros (n. 13 above) 35 follows J. Gagé, *Apollon romain* (Paris 1955) 525–26 in presuming that the three temples were long-established while K. Latte, *Römische Religionsgeschichte* (Munich 1967) 188, n. 3 writes of „eine kaiserzeitliche Neuerung“.

17) The old and new *dies natalis*, if known, of temples restored by Augustus are listed by Gros (see n. 12 above), 90.

against Pompey. The two dates in fact complement each other, for October 9 brought *felicitas* into close conjunction with the temple of Apollo, originally meant to celebrate the victory in Sicily, and July 1 was the starting date of the expedition¹⁸).

Yet at first glance we might question why Augustus might care to recall this day, for its immediate outcome was disaster. On the third day of sailing toward Sicily, a storm blew up and destroyed a considerable part of Octavian's fleet (App. B.Civ. 5.98). Octavian's first thought, when he determined he would need a month to rebuild his fleet, was to postpone the effort against Pompey for another year (App. B.Civ. 5.99), but a crisis in the food supply and a hostile populace, many of whom enthusiastically continued to support Pompey, changed his mind. His need for a victory was imperative. Shortly after Agrippa's victory at Mylae, however, Octavian failed to win a sea fight against Pompey. In flight for his life he took refuge in the harbor of Abala where the local people, coming down to the shore to hear news of the battle, found him exhausted and distraught (App. B.Civ. 5.112). Pliny (Nat. 7.148) tells a story that we perhaps should associate with this moment. Octavian, in despair, asked a friend to help him commit suicide: *iam in navali fuga urgente hostium manu preces Proculio mortis admotae*. But in early September Agrippa won a tremendous victory at Naulochus, Pompey was on the run, and Rome was cheering Octavian as its savior. Augustus may have had personal reasons to remember this day, for what better symbolized his tremendous personal success than the expedition to Sicily, begun in disaster but finished with triumph? *Felicitas* was, after all, not the goddess of happy beginnings but successful results.

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18) The connection of Apollo Palatinus with the cults of Venus Victrix, Genius Publicus and Felicitas is regarded as deliberate Augustan policy by J. Gagé, *Felicitas*, RAC (Stuttgart 1969) 7.714. The connection of Apollo with *felicitas* is echoed in the dedication at Actium of a statue of the mule-driver Felix, where there was also built a new temple to Apollo. See J. Gagé, *Actiaca*, MEFR 53 (1936) 37–100 and J. M. Carter, *A New Fragment of Octavian's Inscription at Nicopolis*, ZPE 24 (1977) 227–30.