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## Augustus *Senex*: Old Age and the Remaking of the Principate

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In August AD 1, on the occasion of his birthday, Augustus wrote to Gaius, his adopted son and grandson by Julia and Agrippa, complaining about the onset of old age stating that he had: 'passed the climacteric common to all old men, the sixty-third year. And I pray the gods that whatever time is left to me I may pass with you safe and well, with our country in a flourishing condition, while you are playing the man and preparing to succeed to my position.'<sup>1</sup> The letter is recorded by Aulus Gellius (*NA* 15.7) who says that: 'It has been observed during a long period of human recollection, and found to be true, that for almost all old men the sixty-third year of their age is attended with danger, and with some disaster involving either serious bodily illness, or loss of life, or mental suffering. Therefore those who are engaged in the study of matters and terms of that kind call that period of life the "climacteric".'

Interestingly, in this letter, Augustus looks to the possibility of the younger man, Gaius, taking over from him. It is perhaps significant that in AD 1 Lucius holds proconsular *imperium* and we may be looking at a power structure that involves both the emperor and immediate members of his family, which is facilitated through a mixing of the older and the younger generations, the experienced with the physically more able.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The immediate family of Augustus wife: Livia, four years younger than himself, step-son Tiberius – who was living on Rhodes (Suet. *Tib.*10); daughter exiled to island of Pandateria (2BC; Dio 55.10.14; Suet. *Aug.* 65). Grandsons, Gaius and Lucius (Suet. *Aug.*56.2; Dio 54.27; 55.9).

<sup>2</sup> Stevenson, T. 2013. 'The Succession Planning of Augustus', *Antichthon* 47: 118-39 – p.135 on Augustus' *climacteric*.

The letter anticipates the emperor's withdrawal from public life, a matter noted later in the century by Seneca in *De Brevitate Vitae* (3.5). Augustus was always thought to have cherished the idea of *otium* (leisure) and even made the matter known in a letter to the senate. Yet, Seneca can marvel that:

'So desirable a thing did leisure seem that he anticipated it in thought because he could not attain it in reality. He, who saw everything depending upon himself alone, who determined the fortune of individuals and of nations, thought most happily of that future day on which he should lay aside his greatness...And so he longed for leisure, in the hope and thought of which he found relief for his labours. This was the prayer of one who was able to answer the prayers of mankind.'

This elucidates the situation of the old emperor denied the *otium* associated with old age, because he is seen by others as still all powerful and in command of the empire. There is no other evidence to suggest that Augustus really considered laying down power, although his behaviour in what turned out to be the last thirteen years of his life at times demonstrates physical weakening, even to the last, his actions seem calculated to preserve himself and his family as well as what he had achieved, both for the state and for his clan. The intersection of his age with his role as princeps in this final decade has been neglected, and we find the absence of Augustus as an old man in modern works an omission that marginalises the centrality of the ageing of an emperor to the development of the principate as an institution.

<sup>3</sup> Instead, the last decade of Augustus principate is often written with a focus on Tiberius'

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<sup>3</sup> On discussion of Augustus and new imagery: P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor, 1988); D. E. Favro, 'Making of a World City', in K. Galinsky (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus* (Cambridge, 2005), 234-63. But, note the imagery is sustained by Tiberius in AD 10 with the

succession, which has been found wanting in recent years.<sup>4</sup> This final period of August needs further attention, because it challenges the perception of a securely founded Augustan principate.

Most works on Augustus or the Augustan age have focussed attention on the formation of the principate, its development, and the ultimate honour of being named *Pater Patriae* in 2 BC. After 2 BC, Augustus as a person becomes marginal to most accounts which focus on the deaths of Gaius and Lucius and the increasing centrality of Tiberius – or the succession.<sup>5</sup> Yet Augustus would live as *Princeps* for longer than the reigns of most of the Julio Claudians and

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rebuilding of the Temple of Concordia as shown by K. A. Kellum, 'The City Adorned: Programmatic Display at the *Aedes Concordiae Augustae*', in K.A. Raaflaub and M. Toher (eds) *Between Republic and Empire: Interpretations of Augustus and his Principate* (Berkeley 1990), 276-308. The period is included as a time of consolidation, but few details in D. Favro, *The Urban Image of Augustan Rome* (Cambridge, 1996), 139-40 and 252-80 dwells on the more distant past as seen in AD 14 by an old man. There was little sense of the ageing emperor in the 2014 exhibition *Augusto*, see AAVV, 2013. *Augusto*, Milan.

<sup>4</sup> See for example K. Galinsky, *Augustus: Introduction to the Life of an Emperor* (Cambridge, 2012) or K. Galinsky, *Augustan Culture: An Interpretative Introduction* (Princeton, 1996). The idea of a succession is seen to be anachronistic by C. Vout, 'Tiberius and the Invention of Succession', in A.C.G. Gibson, *The Julio-Claudian Succession* (Leiden, 2013), 59-77.

<sup>5</sup> Many books feature a focus on Tiberius and a denial of Augustus' agency to exercise power. See papers in A.C.G. Gibson, (n. 4) for critique of the very notion of succession. The invisibility of Augustus is seen clearly in B. Severy, *Augustus and the Family at the Birth of the Roman Empire* (London, 2003), 187-205 with the chapter entitled 'Inheriting the *Res Publica* – Tiberius'. J.B. Lott, *Death and Dynasty in Early Imperial Rome* (Cambridge, 2012) for discussion of sources honouring Gaius and Lucius after their deaths. On coins, C.H.V. Sutherland, *Coinage in Imperial Policy 31 B.C. – A.D. 68* (London, 1971), 53-78 interprets the coinage as a device for creating a successor.

their successors, including those of Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Vespasian, Titus and Domitian.

When treated this final decade of Augustus' life is understood to be more autocratic than the previous decades of the principate.<sup>6</sup>

### The ancient conception of the elderly

Augustus was one of a small percentage of the Roman population who lived into their seventies.<sup>7</sup> We might imagine a scenario in which as Augustus became older, fewer and fewer companions of his own age were present in his life. His contemporaries from his youth were passing away, Agrippa, born like Augustus in 63BC, died in 12 BC and Maecenas in 8 BC. Demographers have suggested just six to eight percent of the population were over the age of sixty.<sup>8</sup> In antiquity, this small minority of the elderly, were seen as quite different from their younger peers. To understand Augustus as an old man, we need to review the *topoi* associated with the elderly – many of which are also present in our own society which has a far greater percentage of survivors over the age of sixty.

There are a number of age systems which survive from antiquity, all of which divide the male life course into certain stages according to particular theoretical thought worlds. Each stage

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<sup>6</sup> B. Levick, *Augustus: image and Substance* (London, 2010), 96-7 and p.154.

<sup>7</sup>Dio 56.30; T. Parkin, *Demography and Roman Society* (Baltimore, 1992); *Old Age in the Roman World* (Baltimore, 2003), 36-56, esp. 50-2 on model life tables. See also R. Saller, *Power, Patriarchy and Death* (Cambridge, 1994); R. Laurence and F. Trifilò, forthcoming.

<sup>8</sup> Parkin 2003 (n. 7), 50 estimates a population of 60 million, therefore 4 million over 60s.

has associated duties, responsibilities (or lack of them) and behavioural characteristics.<sup>9</sup> For Horace:

*Many ills encompass the old man, whether because he seeks gain, and then miserably holds aloof from his store and fears to use it, or because in all that he does he lacks fire and courage, is dilatory and slow to form hopes, is sluggish and greedy of a longer life, peevish and surly, given to praising the days he spent as a boy, and to reproving and condemning the young. Many blessings do the advancing years bring with them; many as they retire, they take away (Ars Poetica 156 ff).*

Varro, who died in 27 BC, developed a system of five ages, each of fifteen years, in which old age (*senectus*) started at sixty.<sup>10</sup> This might suggest some connection in the modern mind with retirement, but this needs to be resisted. Antiquity produced debates over the involvement of the old in public life, such as Plutarch in the *Moralia* (783b-797f) - *On whether an old man should engage in public affairs*; or in Cicero's *Cato Maior: de Senectute*.<sup>11</sup>

Whether there was a consensus on this seems far from certain, yet there would seem to have been an expectation that Augustus, in spite of his age, should remain a public figure. The problem was, as Ptolemy portrays it, old age was regarded as a degenerative process, and defined by more than one stage of life. For instance, the period translated as elderly

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<sup>9</sup> For a succinct summary see Parkin 2003: 17-21; Ibid 'Life Cycle' in M. Harlow & R. Laurence (eds.) *A Cultural History of Childhood and the Family in Antiquity* (London, 2010), 97-114.

<sup>10</sup> The schema is reproduced in Censorinus *Die dies natalis*.

<sup>11</sup> J.G.F.P. Powell, *Cato Maior de Senectute*, (Cambridge, 1988).

(*presbuteros*) for Ptolemy lasted from fifty-six to sixty-eight years of age during which the active life of manual labour, toil, turmoil and danger was meant to be replaced with retirement, deliberation and consolation. After sixty-eight, the next stage was characterised by the body was cooling and becoming worn down and weak, and the individual mentally dispirited, easy to offend and often hard to please. Augustus would have been seen within this mental prism that defined the elderly in ancient societies as the antithesis of the young.<sup>12</sup> At the age of sixty-two, Cicero could write to Atticus, 'Old age makes me more cantankerous, everything irritates me. But I have had my time, let the young men worry' (*Ad Att.*14.21.3).

### **The penultimate decade – the youths (Gaius and Lucius) create the ageing *senex***

In many ways, Augustus' age defines the very chronology of his long period in power. His age, at just nineteen, opens his own account of his life the *Res Gestae* – written in the very last year of his life according to Alison Cooley.<sup>13</sup> Cassius Dio creates a forty year chronology for Augustan Rome beginning with 27 BC and divided into four ten year periods. The logic of this structure works well with thinking through the periods from 27 BC to the *Ludi Saeculares*, then to 7 BC and the re-organisation of the city of Rome, and then onto AD 4 and finally to AD 14. It is worth mentioning at the outset that both Gaius and Lucius were adopted in 17 BC, at the transition point between the first ten year period of Augustan rule and its second decade. Lucius was born in 17 BC, when Gaius was already four years old. Augustus, their grandfather, was in his mid-forties when he adopted the boys – a grandfather, but certainly

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<sup>12</sup> M. Harlow and R. Laurence, *Growing Up and Growing Old in Ancient Rome*, (London, 2002), 1-15.

<sup>13</sup> A. E. Cooley, *Res gestae divi Augusti: text, translation, and commentary* (Cambridge, 2009), 42-3 dates composition between the start of 37<sup>th</sup> grant of tribunician power on 26 June AD 14 and his death on 19 August AD 14 both of which are referred to in the *Res Gestae* itself.

not 'ageing'.<sup>14</sup> This age structure creates a narrative that features the boys growing-up; while Augustus moves towards old age and his climacteric year 1 BC to AD 1. Lucius dies in AD 2. The death of Gaius in AD 4 coincides with the ending of the third decade of the reign of Augustus and the beginning of the final ten year period.

The penultimate decade, 7 BC to AD 4, has as a central feature the relationship between an ageing Princeps and the younger members of his family. The life style of his daughter, Julia, is, of course, very much part of the events of this decade that also sees the death of his grandsons Gaius and Lucius in their early twenties (Dio 55.11). It is possible to track the prominence of Gaius and Lucius as teenagers through coinage beginning in c. 5 BC, and from portraiture. It would appear that their statues were produced from as early as the age of seven.<sup>15</sup> Augustus had actively been involved in their education, as their adopted father, from infancy (Suet. *Aug.* 64). The list of skills taught to them: reading, swimming, writing – specifically copying his hand writing, suggest that they were being trained for public roles over a long period of time. It is interesting that some commentators note that: 'it is difficult to imagine the aging *princeps* in the role of swimming instructor,' but it was a traditional role

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<sup>14</sup> Ageing crops up in scholarly discussion of the Augustus in relationship to his grandsons from as early as 17 BC. See E.R. Parker, 'The Education of Heirs in the Julio-Claudian Family', *American Journal of Philology* 67 (1946), 29-50, note at p.35 'The ageing Augustus took on a new lease on life with the arrival of his grandsons....'

<sup>15</sup> For discussion of coins: B. Buxton and R. Hannah, 'OGIS 458, the Augustan Calendar and the Succession', in C. Deroux (ed), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* 12 (Brussels 2005), 290-309; on age of portraits: J. Pollini, *The Portraiture of Gaius and Lucius*, (New York, 1987), 89-94 for relationship of statues to their age; see also J.B. Lott, (n. 5) on their commemoration.

for a *paterfamilias* and a sign of Augustus' virtue.<sup>16</sup> The point might be that this is very different to the actions of Tiberius in old age, or of Domitian, whose relationship with swimming involved sex.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, Augustus's behaviour reflected the notion that, as Plato suggests (*Laws* 689D), not knowing writing or swimming were signs of ignorance. Whatever Augustus' age, he was well-able to ensure that his adopted sons gained a suitable knowledge of both (in contrast to Caligula, who could not swim, Suet. *Gaius* 54).<sup>18</sup> It is worth mentioning that Augustus' own adopted father, Julius Caesar, had been a swimmer of some prowess.<sup>19</sup> The ability to cross-rivers would seem to have been the key skill, perhaps even learnt by swimming the Tiber from the exercise fields of the Campus Martius.<sup>20</sup> This martial training, alongside Augustus' austere lifestyle, contrasted with their own love of luxury – a characteristic of youths (see, for example, Cicero *Pro Caelio*) was the subject of rebuke by Augustus (Suet. *Aug.* 56.2; Dio 54.27; 55.9).<sup>21</sup> The rebuke, thus also shaping him as a

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<sup>16</sup> M.L. Clarke, 'Three Notes on Roman Education', *Classical Philology* 63 (1968), 42-44; see M.G. Morgan, Suetonius and Swimming: A Note on *Div. Aug.* 64.3', *Classical Philology* 69 (1974), 276-78; E.R. Parker, 'The Education of Heirs in the Julio-Claudian Family', *American Journal of Philology* 67 (1946), 35-38.

<sup>17</sup> Suet. *Tib.* 44; Suet. *Dom.* 22; A. Cameron, 'Sex in the Swimming Pool', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 20 (1973), 149-50.

<sup>18</sup> On swimming: H.A. Sanders, 'Swimming amongst the Greeks and Romans', *Classical Journal* 20 (1925), 566-68; *Ibid.*, 'Swimming among the Greeks and Barbarians', *Classical Journal* 29 (1934), 609-12.

<sup>19</sup> Suet. *Jul.* 57; *Caes. Bell. Alex.* 21.

<sup>20</sup> Hor. *Sat.* 2.1.8; compare crossing the Danube under Hadrian M.P. Speidel, 'Swimming the Danube under Hadrian's Eyes', *Ancient Society* 22 (1991), 277-82 and also the Tiber: M.P. Speidel, 'Maxentius and his *Equites Singulares* in the Battle at the Milvian Bridge', *Classical Antiquity* 5 (1986), 253-62.

<sup>21</sup> Harlow and Laurence (n. 12) 65-78; E. Eyben, 'Antiquity's view of Puberty', *Latomus* 31 (1972), 677-97; *Ibid.* *Restless Youth in Ancient Rome*, (London, 1991).

stereotypical old man – happy to criticise the young. The penultimate decade, of course, ends with the loss of both his grandsons and with Augustus at the age of sixty-seven (Dio 55.11).<sup>22</sup> He recalled Tiberius and adopted him as a son and did the same for his surviving grandson, Agrippa Postumus. Tiberius, at the age of forty-two, was in the very prime of life; whereas Agrippa Postumus was just sixteen years of age. Thus, we have the old man, Augustus; the youth, Agrippa Postumus; and a man in mid-life, Tiberius, as the key members of the imperial family for the final ten years down to AD 14. In all, three generations were involved from which there was an expectation that the best, as opposed to the worst, characteristics of each stage of life would be present for the benefit of the *res publica*.

### **Augustus *senex***

There was a degree of debate about the role of old men in politics in antiquity. Augustus, by his very age, becomes defined by the discourse, whilst at the same time his actions contribute to the discourse. Plutarch (*Moralia* 207E) recalls an instance, when Augustus could not make himself heard above the uproar of young elite males, who paid him no attention, and quotes the wise *dictum* (saying) of Augustus: “Do you young men not listen to an old man, to whom old men listened when he was a young man?” This creates a dichotomy between Augustus as elderly, in contrast to the young. The norm was for old men to educate and instruct the young, for example Sulla and Pompey, or Fabius Maximus and Cato (Plut.*Mor.* 790E-F). Augustus was doing exactly this with his adopted grandsons Gaius and Lucius, but both had died. Similarly, when looking to the relationship between Augustus, his

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<sup>22</sup> J.B. Lott (n. 5), 54-77.

daughter and her younger lovers – Augustus, the old man, set upon a young man rumoured to have had sex with Julia (Plut.*Mor.*207D). As *Pater Patriae*, Augustus is set up to advise the young, but his temper disrupts the process, as does his occupation of power into his late seventies – he was not simply advising, but also taking decisions and leading the state.

In Dio, the final 10 years of Augustus' principate increasingly feature the age of princeps to explain actions taken in this last period of power.<sup>23</sup> He is seen as a milder version of the Augustus who established government as a young princeps in 27 BC, a man in old age who did not wish to incur the hatred of others. Now, at sixty-six years old, Dio explains Augustus' adoption of Tiberius in terms of age and the actions of an old man, he suggests the princeps does this because he was worn out in body by reason of old age and illness – suggesting he would not have made this choice had others been available (Dio 55.13.1a). The choice to adopt Tiberius, a forty-two year old in the prime of life, is driven by age and failing health, together with a degree of persuasion, attributed by Dio to Livia and to Julia (Dio places Julia on the Italian mainland, rather than isolated on an island). This arrangement might appear beneficial to Augustus in mitigating the process of ageing by inserting an active younger man into the power structure. However, we can identify age-related behaviour developing in the form of pessimism and fear. Tiberius was to be feared – he might march on Rome (Dio 55.31) and, as he developed successes in command, he was feared by Augustus. Fear was also an explanation for other Augustan behaviours: Augustus could reform the senate himself and take a census, but fear of rebellion of the people only took a census of those with more than

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<sup>23</sup> For narrative of events, see J.A Crook, 'Political History, 30 B.C. to A.D. 14', *Cambridge Ancient History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, volume 10 (Cambridge, 1996), 105-12.

200,000 sesterces. How such a census could have been undertaken is unclear – how would he know who had over or under this sum?

Such fears may have been real given the plots of AD 4 which led Dio to present a long discussion between Augustus and Livia over the need for clemency and consensus, rather than the destruction of enemies (Dio 55. 13, 14- 21 on Livia giving the arguments on how to control enemies, and not kill the conspirators). With Tiberius holding Tribunician power, Augustus and Tiberius ruled the empire as *paterfamilias* and *filius familias*; whilst Augustus held his final five-year period of *maius imperium*.<sup>24</sup> It looks like an arrangement similar to that of Augustus and Agrippa in 12 BC, but that is to see things in purely constitutional terms.<sup>25</sup> Instead, looking at it in terms of age, we can see Agrippa and Augustus in 12 BC as two equals at the prime of life (early forties) – whereas from AD 4 onwards, Augustus and Tiberius can be seen as an old man, admittedly with *maius imperium*, and a man in the prime of life taking direct action in military matters. In terms of age, Tiberius is in the stronger position – even if Augustus is the *princeps*. Dio writes this fear of the power of a man in his prime into this final phase of the principate of Augustus. It is also very different from the relationship that might have existed between Augustus in old age and his grandsons in their twenties – that situation might be seen to mirror the ideal that Cicero had sought in influencing the young Octavian in 44 BC, or the relationships between people of different ages embedded in Cicero's treatises

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<sup>24</sup> Suet. *Tib.* 15: '...he ceased to act as head of a family (*pro patre familias*), neither made gifts, nor freed slaves and did not even accept inheritances or receive legacies'.

<sup>25</sup> B. Levick, (n. 6) chapter 2

on the *Republic*, *de Amicitia* and so on, in which an older man explains the world to much younger men, who accept his advice.<sup>26</sup>

The physical effects of old age had an effect on the mechanics of decision making, the role of the senate and the constitution and can be seen at the end of the final decade of Augustus' life. Some see this period as one of autocracy created by the fact that Augustus could not attend the senate.<sup>27</sup> Instead, we see adjustments made to ensure Augustus continued to be involved in decision-making. Suetonius considers him to have been constantly at work, revising lists of jurors even when elderly (unclear at what age; *Aug.* 29); administering justice from a litter or even lying down at home if indisposed (*Aug.* 33). To facilitate his role in government, the format of the *consilium* established in AD 13 became the equivalent to a decision by the senate. His physical decline is also marked by a gradual withdrawal from certain responsibilities. It would seem that meetings of the senate were held in his house on the Palatine (*Aug.* 29). But despite 'old age and the feebleness of his body, he continued personally, with his assistants, to investigate judicial cases and to pass judgment, seated on the tribunal in the palace'. This appears to have been a major change to the nature of government – the palace was where power rested in the hands of an elderly princeps.<sup>28</sup> However, looking back to embassies reported in Josephus and dated to 4 BC, it is possible to

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<sup>26</sup> M. Harlow, and R. Laurence, 'De Amicitia: The Role of Age', in *Passages from Antiquity to the Middle Ages III: De Amicitia*, *Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae* 36 (2010), 21-32; Harlow and Laurence (n.12), 111-115 on Cicero and Octavian

<sup>27</sup> Levick (n. 6) 96-100.

<sup>28</sup> J.A. Crook, *Consilium Principis: Imperial Councils and Counsellors from Augustus to Domitian* (Cambridge, 1955), 31-36.

see the *consilium* meeting in private, and then meeting delegates at the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine, (i.e. in public), but then holding their discussion in private to develop the edict.<sup>29</sup> As Crook points out, there was a political and legal role for the *consilium* and the roles could not have been neatly divided but, as with many things dealt with by Augustus, involved a complicated mixture of both.<sup>30</sup> Yet, it is Augustus' frailty and inability to go to the senate that is maintained as a reason to create the *consilium* as a legislative body. There is some reasoning behind this. In the previous year, Augustus was unable to make himself heard in the senate house and employed Germanicus (in his first consulship) to read his words for him, even when those words commended the reader to the senators. Germanicus was a suitable substitute at the age of twenty-seven, he had been married to Augustus's granddaughter Agrippina for over twelve years and had at least three children (Gaius, to be Caligula, born in this year). The relationship of the elderly princeps to this young man was quite different to his relations with Tiberius, a man now approaching old age in his fifty-fourth year. However, Tiberius was seen as a substitute for Augustus and was created as a joint ruler of the provinces with Augustus, thus perhaps recognising that they were equals (Suet.*Tib.*20; Vell.Pat.2.121), but also suggesting that Tiberius might be a substitute for Augustus in attending the senate.

Earlier, in AD 8, Augustus had used the German war as an excuse to ask the senators not be offended if he asked them not to greet him at his home, or if he no longer attended public banquets with them, but he continued to visit his peers for birthdays and events such as

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<sup>29</sup> Josephus *BJ* 2.25, 2.81 and *AJ* 17.229, 17.301. Crook (n. 28), 32-33.

<sup>30</sup> Crook (n. 28), 33

betrothal parties, until he was 'well on in years' (*grandior*). Even while he was withdrawing from some of the duties of office, his age did not prevent him from travelling to Arminum to be better on hand to hear the news from Pannonia (Dio 55.34). In AD 9, at the age of seventy-one or –two, he addressed the equites in the forum with regard to their complaints about the marriage laws, talking about ensuring future generations. While there is an irony in this speech, given Augustus's own position with regard to surviving descendants at this stage, it was perhaps given with some self-awareness, that his audience must also have understood. The point about the necessity of a younger wife is also telling in relation to the health-care of elderly men and to temper the 'unreasonable harshness of old age' (Dio 56.3). The speech, in many ways, is a prelude to the enactment of the *Lex Papia Poppaea* (Dio 56.10), which Tacitus associated with Augustus in later life (*Ann.*3.25-28).<sup>31</sup> The law, strongly critiqued by Tacitus, might be argued as a poor ruling because it was passed towards the end of his life. Tacitus (*Ann.*1.3) presents Augustus, as a *senex*, ruled over by Livia in connection to the decision to exile Agrippa Postumus. Tacitus also suggests (*Ann.* 1.4) that there was a fundamental difference in the perception of Augustus in his prime and in his old age and poor health. This may reflect a distinction between Tacitus' experience of Nerva as an old emperor, and the rule of Trajan in his prime. The perception of the old emperor – whether Nerva or Augustus – was that they were not fully capable of being a princeps. The degree of infirmity, seen by others, may have influenced Suetonius' discussion of Augustus' health. He was a man who felt the cold, wore a chest protector, several layers of tunics and leg wraps to keep himself warm (*Suet.Aug.* 82). Augustus did not have a very strong constitution throughout his life, often suffering from what appear to be digestive complaints, bladder

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<sup>31</sup> S. Treggiari, *Roman Marriage* (Oxford, 1991), 60-80 for summation of the nature of the law.

stones, rheumatism, limping from weakness in his left leg, numbness of extremities (*Aug.* 80, 82).

### Ageing changed Augustus and the Principate?

When compared to the old age of his successors, Augustus appears to have acted as an archetypal *princeps senex*. Tiberius lived to the age of seventy-eight, but spent most of his later years indulging himself in Capri and generally earning his poor reputation which completely overrode any successes of his earlier life. He did not become emperor until the age of fifty-six, already in the eyes of many Romans, well into late middle age or approaching old age. Claudius, another long lived emperor, died age sixty-four – an interesting case as his physical disabilities had meant that Augustus and Tiberius had planned his life out of the public eye, and in terms of imagery, he is often portrayed as looking old.<sup>32</sup> Finally in the first century AD, Nerva who became emperor at the age of sixty-five of whom Dio says was so old and feeble in health that he used to vomit up his food and was rather weak, and further ‘finding himself in such contempt for reasons of his age said in a loud voice ‘I adopt Trajan’ – a general aged forty-two – that is, in Roman eyes, in the prime of his life.

How should we see Augustus as the old *princeps*? Fearful of others, milder than his younger self, too weak to attend the senate but capable of working and legislating. What is missing from our picture of the aged Augustus is the pomp and ceremony of the emperor proceeded

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<sup>32</sup> M. Harlow and R. Laurence, ‘Age, Agency and Disability: Suetonius and the Emperors of the First Century C.E.’, in C. Krötzel, K. Mustakallio, & J. Kuuliala (eds.), *Infirmity in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Farnham, 2015), 15-28.

by *lictors* taking his seat between the consuls in the senate house. Over the last decade of his life the emperor had become less visible and decision-making had shifted to the palace – not surprisingly, Tiberius’ attempt to put the clock back abolishing the Augustan *consilium* as a decision making body was fraught with difficulties. The compensation for an emperor being unable, due to age, to attend the senate shifted the political process away from the Curia to the palace. However much Tiberius may have or have not wanted the senate to speak freely with an emperor present, the shift back was not simple or easy.<sup>33</sup> The experience of an old Augustus had made a change and the ramifications of that change were to be felt in the following reign of an already ageing emperor, Tiberius, who would retire from Rome while power resided in the palace– just as it had done in the final years of Augustus’ reign. To a degree, the very fact of Augustus’ longevity re-shaped the Roman Empire with a final decade in which the emperor due to his age and health withdrew from day-to-day public interaction with senators and, thus, shifted power to the palace with a *consilium* taking on the powers of the senate.

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<sup>33</sup> Crook (n. 28), 36-39; B. Levick, *Tiberius the Politician* (revised edition), (London, 1999), 93-94.