

The Architect of Ambiguity?

A Study into Deliberate Ambiguity in the Augustan Era

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Cover image: bronze statue (1937) of Augustus in Fano (PU), Italy. Photograph courtesy of L. Benthem, private collection.

“ut optimi status auctor dicar”

Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, *Divus Augustus*, 28.2

“This morning, I shot an elephant in my pajamas.

How he got into my pajamas, I’ll never know.”

Groucho Marx (1890-1977)

“We just assume that some things are not imaginary.

My song is imaginary too. Listen to its existence.

I like to sing it because it is what opens Heaven.”

Herman Finkers, *Daarboven in de hemel (Up in Heaven)*.

Abstract

Scholars studying the age of Augustus have often characterized this period as one full of paradoxes, contradictions, and ambiguities. Their contributions, however, have often gone without deeper theoretical and empirical reflection on these concepts. In this thesis, I seek to address this void and present a first resolution. By building a framework of deliberate ambiguity, using previous scholarship of international relations and literary studies, I attempt to understand the nature and purpose of Augustan ambiguity itself, instead of using it as the final characterization. An exploration of the concept through its origins and Augustan architecture shows that the historical context of Augustus, rife with uncertainties and tensions, makes the use of deliberate ambiguity likely or plausible. The subsequent analysis, focusing on coinage and the *Res Gestae*, argues that Augustus' course of action in some individual respects can indeed be termed deliberate ambiguity. However, these instances do not add up to a general strategy and prove to differ from one another as well. Augustus employed deliberate ambiguity to achieve conflicting aims, but also to achieve singular, non-conflicting aims. He also engaged with other strategies, such as confusion, vagueness, and silence. I also show how other actors employed deliberate ambiguity in the period of Augustus, both for their own sake *and* for Augustus'. This thesis' framework helps to meaningfully differentiate between the relevant concepts and allows modern observers of the Augustan period to appreciate its historical complexity beyond the mere use of the name of concepts.

Keywords: Augustus, ambiguity, deliberate ambiguity, epigraphy, numismatics, Res Gestae

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Introduction

Like Caesar before him, Augustus was the architect – both literally and metaphorically – of his own divinity, recognizing of course that the categories of, and boundaries between, ‘god’, ‘divine’, and ‘human’ were neither stable nor essentially known.¹

In his study on Augustus’ endeavor of making himself a divinity (*autoapotheosis*), Droge aptly depicted the first Roman emperor (r. 27 BC-AD 14) as an architect who consciously engaged with unclear and unstable concepts and the boundaries between them. On this topic of Augustus’ divinity, Droge built on insights made by Feeney: ‘it was the *inherent ambiguity* of these terms’ of ‘human’ and ‘divine’ that left the emperor’s status ‘uncategorisable’.² This may be located under an issue that forms an important part of Augustan scholarship: Augustan ambiguity. In the broadest sense, this idea suggests that the period of Augustus is characterized by an abundance of unclear or vague meanings, filled with paradoxes, contradictions, and inconsistencies. This issue of ambiguity in the Augustan period is the subject of this thesis. In particular, it studies the extent to which this ambiguity was intended by Augustus himself and his regime and how he engaged with it; or, to borrow Droge’s formulation, to what extent Augustus can be called an architect of ambiguity.

Ambiguity in the period of Augustus has been observed in many different spheres, not in the least place regarding the princeps’ own endeavors. For instance, Wardle wrote that Augustus’ use of the word *respublica* in public documents, such as his own *Res Gestae*, was difficult to grasp: ‘any ambiguity there may well be deliberate.’³ Similarly, regarding Augustus’ relation to history, Gowing asserted that ‘[t]he paradox of the Augustan period was that it sought to assert the continuity of the Republic *while at the same time* claiming a new beginning.’⁴ This issue of simultaneously emphasizing continuity and rupture is perhaps most clearly embodied in Augustus’ own forum, which has been noted by several scholars.⁵ On the left side of the forum, the current ruling family of Julio-Claudians was placed to parallel the *summi viri* of the old Roman Republic on the right side. The two galleries were united by the *quadriga* statue of the princeps himself, who was presented as both the logical, natural

¹ Droge (2011: 100). I am indebted to Droge’s formulation for the title of my thesis. See also Droge (2011: 94) for Augustus as ‘the author and architect of history’, a role he played most notably on his own forum. I return to this idea of Augustus as an author or architect below, when I discuss the history of scholarship.

² Droge (2011: 100n.87), with Feeney (1998: 108-114), my emphasis.

³ Wardle (2005: 184). On Augustus and his *Res Gestae*, see also Bosworth (1999), Ramage (1987), Cooley (2009). For purposes of brevity, the *Res Gestae* will from now on be abbreviated to RG, both in the full text and in the footnotes.

⁴ Gowing (2005: 18), my emphasis.

⁵ Geiger (2008: 95ff.), Shaya (2013: 85), Rowell (1941: 269), Gowing (2005: 148-9).

continuation and the zenith of Roman history and as the beginning of a distinctly *nova aetas*.⁶ Augustus' forum purportedly demonstrated 'the emperor's ability to (re)create history in the future, as well as in the past.'⁷

As we saw in this thesis' opening quote, the intersection between categories is fundamental to the period of Augustus. Intersections between categories such as 'old' and 'new' and 'Greek' and 'Roman' have also been studied by Feeney in his account of how Augustus conducted the *Ludi Saeculares* in 17 BC. As Feeney argued, it was specifically this intersection that endowed the Augustan Saecular Games with meaning.⁸ Raditsa, furthermore, observed intersection, overlap, and unclear boundaries between the public and private realm. He wrote from a social perspective, locating the cause of the blurring of boundaries in Augustus' social legislation, concerning marriage, childbearing, and adultery, among other things.⁹ The blurring between public and private has also been noted regarding the representation of the imperial family, for instance on Augustus' own forum. Droge notably called this blurring 'deliberate'.¹⁰ Galinsky saw the Forum of Augustus as a general *locus* where Augustus' 'personal intentions and the public purpose coalesced.'¹¹

I must also mention the work of Elsner, who observed ambiguity in one of the period's most famous monuments, the *Ara Pacis Augustae*. According to Elsner, there was deliberate ambiguity in the sacrificial function of the monument. For instance, there was no clear receptive deity: this might have been Pax, but also Mars, or Augustus himself.¹² Furthermore, Elsner interestingly related the specific case of the Ara Pacis to the nature of the principate as a whole. If the Ara Pacis, such a prominent monument of the Augustan period, could carry ambiguous and uncertain meanings, Elsner argued that we should not be surprised to find ambiguity and uncertainty in other elements of this period, especially those pertaining to art and architecture, as well.¹³

The examples referred to above testify to the broad range and diverse areas in which Augustan ambiguity has been observed. However, in my opinion, the characterization of something as ambiguous, blurred, or unclear in historical Augustan scholarship has often gone

⁶ Cf. figure 2 on p.84.

⁷ Droge (2011: 95).

⁸ Feeney (1998: 31). Cf. Galinsky (1996: 200), who saw the Forum of Augustus as an 'innovative synthesis of Greek and Roman elements', and Wallace-Hadrill (2008: 39), who characterizes Suetonius' Augustus himself as 'deeply immersed in Greek language and culture'.

⁹ Raditsa (1980: 331-7).

¹⁰ Droge (2011: 94).

¹¹ Galinsky (1996: 198).

¹² Elsner (1991: 54). For identification issues on the Ara Pacis, see Edmondson (2009: 11), with further references.

¹³ Elsner (1991: 61). On the Ara Pacis' status as a prime monument for the Augustan principate, see Kleiner & Buxton (2008: 52).

without deeper reflection: what does it *mean* when something is ambiguous?¹⁴ In particular, I would like to draw attention to those instances in which ambiguity has been characterized as ‘deliberate’ on part of the princeps: if Augustus indeed engaged with ambiguity on purpose, then what purposes did this engagement serve? In this thesis, I try to go beyond mere characterizations by studying what ambiguity in the Augustan period really constituted and what purposes it might have served, to contribute to a greater understanding of Augustan ambiguity and, by extension, of the period in general. This research is grounded on two pillars: first, a thorough examination of the concept of (deliberate) ambiguity through insights from literary studies and international relations, which constitutes the first chapter; and, second, an analysis, based on this concept, of three different types of primary sources, that are crucial to understanding the Augustan period. In this way, this thesis seeks to answer the following question: *to what extent can Augustus and his regime be seen as trying to deliberately create or exploit ambiguous situations to achieve certain ends?*

In the following paragraphs, I first discuss the relevant history of scholarship, in which I situate my own research and show its urgency and relevance. As this discussion will show, while the characterization of ambiguity is widespread among Augustan scholars, it is certainly not the consensus. Hereafter, the relevant sources are introduced. I conclude this introduction by describing the structure and outline of this thesis.

1. History of Scholarship: Architect, Author, Agent

Anyone seeking an introduction to Augustan scholarship should start at Edmondson’s *Augustus* (2009). In this volume, Edmondson collected some of the most important contributions to Augustan scholarship; both his introductions and the individual contributions are great in helping the reader to understand the developments in Augustan scholarship.¹⁵ The history of scholarship presented here cannot deal with all the issues related to the study of Augustus. Instead, it engages with two of the most fundamental, intimately intertwined issues in the study of Augustus: first, the personal, individual influence of Augustus on ‘his’ era – dealing with

¹⁴ It should be emphasized that I am referring to *historical* Augustan scholarship here. Reflection on ambiguity and specifically on deliberate ambiguity is much more present in the study of classical literature. See now in particular Van der Velden (2017), both for an analysis of ancient ambiguity and an overview of its use in modern literary analysis. For example, in May 2019, the 13th *Trends in Classics International Conference* at Thessaloniki was called ‘Intended Ambiguity’. Even though this thesis studies Augustan history, insights from classics and literary studies, such as historiography (for instance, Sailor (2006) on Livy) and poetry (for instance, Oliensis (1997) on Ovid), will still be helpful in building this thesis’ theoretical framework.

¹⁵ See in particular Edmondson (2009: 14–26) for an overview of developments in Augustan scholarship since the end of the nineteenth century.

the topics of Augustan agency and centrality; and, second, notions concerning the existence and communication of an Augustan ideology.

In his overview of Augustan scholarship, Edmondson noted a tendency in Augustan scholarship to (over)emphasize Augustus' own role in the developments of his era, in which respect they followed ancient authors such as Suetonius, Tacitus, and Cassius Dio, and also Augustus' own record of his deeds, the *RG*.¹⁶ To substantiate this, one need only look at the sheer number of books that use 'Augustus' as the crucial qualification: the 'Augustan period', 'the age of Augustus', and 'Augustan Rome', among others.¹⁷ If we follow Suetonius, Augustus would not have regretted such a legacy, seeing as how he apparently wished to be called the author (*auctor*) of the best possible government.¹⁸ Delving into specific examples, we see that Augustus has been characterized as the main agent, author, or architect in many different fields – with and without being called deliberately ambiguous.¹⁹ One of these fields was (the control of) history: Augustus was involved in influencing the contemporary version or interpretation of Roman history. For example, Sailor showed how Augustus suggested a different version of Livy's story about the origins of the highest Roman military honor, the *spolia opima*.²⁰ Luce demonstrated the relations between Livian and Augustan versions of history with regard to Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* and Augustus' own forum.²¹ With regard to history and this forum, Droge even went so far as to acknowledge Augustus' self-presentation as a 'cosmic demiurge'.²²

This demiurge not only concerned himself with the past, but also with present issues. Through his reading of Vergil's description of Roman history in the *Aeneid*, Bosworth characterized Augustus as 'the principal architect of empire'.²³ In a similar vein, Murray and Petsas saw the heir of Caesar as 'left alone to heal the wounds of war and reform the shattered Republic into the Roman Principate.'²⁴ Augustus was also seen as the driving force behind the negotiation of his own divinity.²⁵ He was intimately tied to his social and moral legislation,

¹⁶ Edmondson (2009: 5-7).

¹⁷ Cf. Clarke (2003: 16), who observed an art-historical preference of using 'dynastic labels to indicate the date of a work of art: "an Augustan gem"'. See also the title of Laird (1996), characterizing the poetry from this period as 'Augustan poetry'.

¹⁸ Suet. *Aug.* 28.2: '*ut optimi status auctor dicar*'.

¹⁹ Augustus' many portraits (by far the highest surviving number of any ancient individual) indicate 'the multifarious aspects of the emperor's role': Beard & Henderson (2001: 216, 224).

²⁰ Luce (2006). Cf. Liv. 4.20.5-11. The *spolia opima*, the military equipment of an opposing commander, could only be dedicated once that opposing commander had been slain by a Roman commander in single combat.

²¹ Luce (2009 [1990]).

²² Droge (2011: 86, 97).

²³ Bosworth (1999: 2).

²⁴ Murray & Petsas (1989: 4).

²⁵ Droge (2011), Bosworth (1999). Cf. Stevenson (1998) for an account of the divinity of Augustus' adoptive father.

concerning issues like modesty and restraint, marriage, and childbearing.²⁶ In short, the general idea is that Augustus occupied himself with many different domains.

Besides the large number of different stages upon which he acted, the princeps is often seen as the primary actor of 'his' historical period. However, this has been no monolithic historiographical development. The focus on Augustus as the central actor, 'a ruthless faction leader' in the words of Syme, emerged around World War II. After that, it was mitigated by, first, Momigliano, who criticized Syme's ignorance of the motives and needs of Augustus' supporters. Then, first Brunt and later Millar emphasized the roles of the Senate (especially Brunt) and the people (especially Millar).²⁷ In any case, a political tone dominated. This was subsequently nuanced by Wallace-Hadrill, who called for attention to the cultural dimensions of Augustus' rise and regime. With this, he did not intend a substitution of, but rather an addition to the political focus such as that of the scholars named here.²⁸ '[P]olitical power on its own is not enough to define an elite', he argued, regardless of which actors are emphasized.²⁹

Judging from the more recent contributions (around and after the turn of the millennium) discussed here, the idea of Augustus' personal importance continues to be a historiographical stronghold up until this day. However, notwithstanding the prominence of the princeps, Augustus was not the only relevant actor during his era. An important case in point is the *Ara Pacis Augustae*. While its name characterizes the peace of the period as 'Augustan', the monument was indeed commissioned by the Roman Senate.³⁰ In this sphere of art and architecture, several scholars have tried to shift emphasis from imperial agents to ordinary Romans.³¹ Another telling example is Augustan coinage, in which the Senate played an important role, as did colleges of moneyers and foreign kings.³² This does not mean that Augustus had no influence on these matters at all, but rather to be aware of the presence of different actors on various stages. This thesis focuses on the possibility of deliberate ambiguity being employed by the Augustan regime, but will not exclude ambiguity employed by other influential actors.³³

A person who is perhaps not single-handedly responsible for the scholarly emphasis on

²⁶ Raditsa (1980), Wallace-Hadrill (1981), Bosworth (1999: 16).

²⁷ Edmondson (2009: 16-22), with further references.

²⁸ Wallace-Hadrill (2008). See in particular Wallace-Hadrill (2008: 35-7, 441ff.) for a larger summary of his main argument, and for the link suggested to the previous scholars named here, especially Syme (1939), *The Roman Revolution*. On the relationship between politics, culture, and elite, see also Clarke (2003: 7) with further references.

²⁹ Wallace-Hadrill (2008: 36).

³⁰ Elsner (1991: 50).

³¹ Clarke (2003), Elsner (1991), Elsner (2007).

³² Wallace-Hadrill (1986), Rowan (2019: 117-69). Coins and numismatic agency will be discussed in depth in Chapter III.

³³ We will meet two of those, Livy and Ovid, in the theoretical and methodological chapter.

Augustus himself, but who has been fundamental in creating a new paradigm (which might be a good analogy for the princeps), is the German art historian Zanker. Edmondson credited Zanker with a large role in the closer integration of the literary sources, on the one hand, and art and architecture, on the other, in histories of Augustus' principate.³⁴ Zanker's *magnum opus* was *Augustus und die Macht der Bilder* (1987) or *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (1988). Edmondson noticed a 'subtle difference' between the titles which is relevant for the topic of Augustan agency: the English translation of the title is quite neutral, whereas the original German title implicitly credits Augustus with more agency. In other words, is the Augustan age as a whole characterized by the power of images, or is Augustus the one explicitly wielding the images' power?³⁵

Zanker's contribution spawned a major new wave of Augustan scholarship that 'explored the ideological impact of the new visual communicative system'.³⁶ Ideology is the important word here, and this is where we turn to the other element of this historiographical discussion. Much of Augustan scholarship, especially since Zanker's contribution, has focused on the existence of an Augustan ideology: the idea that the Augustan regime had one clear message that it wanted to espouse through an ambitious visual and building program, consisting of monumental architecture, portraits, sculptures, and coins.³⁷ The historiographical notion is that this message, this 'ideology', is present, traceable, and understandable. Through its building program, the Augustan regime wanted to stress ideals such as modesty and restraint.³⁸ These ideals were visible in, for instance, Augustus' social and moral legislation, but they have also been observed in his supposedly modest private house on the Palatine.³⁹ Furthermore, another important part of this ideological program focused on Augustus' control of the *oikoumene* and of history, especially through (figurative) associations with legendary and divine figures, such as Romulus, Venus, Mars, and Apollo. For the enactment of this part of the program, scholars have usually referred to Augustus' forum as the main stage. On that forum, Augustan ideology was displayed most visibly and prominently, as Gruen and Rich argued.⁴⁰ Along the same lines, Favro saw the forum (opened in 2 BC), along with other buildings, such as the Porticus Philippi and the Porticus Octaviae, as perfect stages to communicate their Augustan message. 'Self-contained and internalized, their design prevented

³⁴ Edmondson (2009: 22-23).

³⁵ Edmondson (2009: 24).

³⁶ Edmondson (2009: 24).

³⁷ Zanker (1987) and (1988).

³⁸ E.g. Zanker (1988: 280-2).

³⁹ Zanker (1988: 51), Favro (2005: 250-1), Hollis (2014: 45-6), Hartnett (2017: 144, 161).

⁴⁰ Gruen (1990: 442), Rich (1998: 86). Cf. Zanker (1988: 194).

visual and conceptual *contamination* from adjacent Republican and non-Augustan urban projects.⁴¹ The word ‘contamination’ is crucial here. According to Favro, the Augustan regime sought to prevent contamination of their desired message; in other words, the Augustan regime was perceived to have aimed at disseminating a coherent, unified message. Augustus’ own forum also brings us back to the topic of Augustan agency. According to Geiger, the forum was an enterprise which was directed by Augustus himself.⁴²

A notable follower of Zanker’s idea of ‘a complete ideological package’ is Gordon.⁴³ With Augustus at the center of the message, his regime employed Roman religion, in particular, to serve as ‘a naked instrument of ideological domination’.⁴⁴ Zanker and Gordon were taken as opponents by the most ardent proponent of the opposite view, Elsner, who zoomed in on the debate by discussing the Ara Pacis in particular. Just like the forum, the Ara Pacis, even though it was officially decreed by the Senate on July 4th, 13 BC, is often seen as ‘provid[ing] great insight into the official ideology of the Augustan regime.’⁴⁵ In his aforementioned study on this Augustan monument, Elsner rejected the idea of a coherent, dominant ideological message, opting instead for the acknowledgment of (deliberate) ambiguity, contradictions, and paradoxes in the visual program of this specific monument.⁴⁶ It should be noted that the criticism here does not necessarily concern the themes of such a message, but rather the alleged unity of the message.⁴⁷

According to these critics, such a ‘totalizing reading’ leads to the reduction of a complex process of negotiation and experimentation to ‘a single, linear plot’ or a ‘master plan’.⁴⁸ Wallace-Hadrill focused not on the Augustan regime as senders of the message, but rather on the recipients: ‘the possibility for which Zanker does not allow is that the monument had an ambivalent effect on *all* Romans.’⁴⁹ Reeder did notice an ideology on behalf of the Augustan regime but she characterized it as inherently contradictory and ambiguous. Acknowledging the existence of an ideology is in line with Zanker’s view, the observation of its contradictory nature is not. Reeder does well in discussing the complexities of the Augustan building program and the alleged corresponding ideology: she did observe unified symbolism in Augustan architecture, but also acknowledged that ideology and policy must have grown ‘in

⁴¹ Favro (2005: 251), my emphasis.

⁴² Geiger (2008: 12).

⁴³ Zanker (1988: 332).

⁴⁴ Gordon (1990: 207).

⁴⁵ Edmondson (2009: 11).

⁴⁶ Elsner (1991).

⁴⁷ Elsner (1991: 60-1); Wallace-Hadrill (1989: 162-3), review of Zanker (1987) and (1988); Clarke (2003: 19-30).

⁴⁸ Droge (2011: 85).

⁴⁹ Wallace-Hadrill (1989: 163), original emphasis.

fits and starts.⁵⁰ She illustrated this by discussing the contradiction of Augustus' monarchical ambitions and his espoused notion of *res publica restitua*. She saw this contradiction reflected in the juxtapositions of different architectural styles of his mausoleum: traditional and novel, Greek and Roman.⁵¹ This is reminiscent of the overlap between categories that Feeney, which we discussed above, has observed.

Whereas Zanker and Gordon chose to emphasize the ideological dominance of the Augustan regime, to the point where there was no escaping that one dominant message, others have emphasized the possibility of subversion and opposition on behalf of the recipients of that message. Those recipients could play with the message and interpret it differently. Pandey showed how Ovid, consciously engaging with Augustan monuments such as his forum or imperial efforts such as *apotheosis* of the princeps, can be seen as defying the regime. The poet, she argued, invited his readers to do the same.⁵² Even Vergil, who is often seen as the poet of the Augustan regime *par excellence*, has been studied from the perspective of ambiguity.⁵³ In this respect, Thomas quoted a telling phrase from the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*: 'writers are on the lookout for any double meanings.' This led Thomas to conclude that (the concept of) ambiguity was not necessarily always (only) located in the modern observer, but was already acknowledged in Vergil's time – and thus Augustus'.⁵⁴ However, we must exert caution here, as Van der Velden noted the absence of a concept used in antiquity that is completely interchangeable with our 'ambiguity'.⁵⁵

What transpires from this discussion, I believe, is the following. Firstly, although his agency is complex and there have been calls for acknowledging the existence and influence of other actors, Augustus is still seen as the driving force in *his* period of history – as both a literal and figurative actor, agent, and architect. Secondly, many historians have subsequently seen the dissemination of a certain dominant ideology, of one clear message, as a prime example of this agency. However, others have tried to show that there were opposing voices and multiple interpretations possible during the period of Augustus already, trying to lessen the emphasis placed on an agency ascribed to Augustus and his regime. Along the first, Zankerian line of thought, Augustus and his regime are seen as the main actor, whereas in the second view, such as that of Elsner, the recipients and viewers are presented as the main actors. We can also

⁵⁰ Reeder (1992: 302-3).

⁵¹ Reeder (1992: 272).

⁵² Pandey (2013: esp. 444-5). On Ovid's place in the Roman empire, see also Habinek (2006).

⁵³ O'Hara (2007: 77-103), Perkell (1989), Thomas (2001). Cf. Van der Velden (2017: 11-2) for the remark that ambiguity in the *Aeneid* has consequences for how we interpret Augustus himself in the poem.

⁵⁴ *Ad Herennium* 2.16, with Thomas (2001: 1).

⁵⁵ Van der Velden (2017: 20).

observe a middle way: there are scholars who have emphasized Augustus' agency but have interpreted that agency as trying to establish some degree of ambiguity. Wardle's characterization of Augustus' use of *res publica* as possibly deliberately ambiguous in the *RG* is a good example. Even Elsner (Ara Pacis) and Droge (Forum of Augustus) have seen ambiguity and the blurring of boundaries as 'deliberate'. However, they have reflected little on the implications of this characterization: what does it mean when an ambiguous situation is deliberately created or engaged with? Why would an agent want to engage with ambiguity, what are his goals in striving towards ambiguity? Wardle wrote that '*res publica*' in Augustus' *RG* might have deliberately ambiguous meanings, but stopped there. Elsner wrote that the recipient of sacrifice in rituals at the Ara Pacis was deliberately left ambiguous but left open the question which ends this ambiguity would serve.

It must be acknowledged that Droge went quite a lot further in trying to explain this concept of deliberate ambiguity when he described the role of Augustus on his own forum, specifically in the Temple of Mars Ultor.⁵⁶ In an original argument with familiar theatrical imagery, Droge characterized the apse of the Martian temple as a stage, upon which a variety of performances was enacted, with Augustus playing a similar variety of roles as a 'living statue'. For example, he convened meetings of the Senate, manifested his divine status, and conducted religious services as the *pontifex maximus*. 'A spectator would be invited to see any number of things and make any number of possible associations. But in all of them, the focus remained relentlessly on Augustus as the actor and central figure.'⁵⁷ Thus, Droge gave a further description of what deliberate ambiguity looked like, without removing Augustus from the center of his final assessment. This is quite different from Elsner's final assessment:

Given my own principles of emphasizing the role of viewers and readers in creating meaning, it would be incongruous of me to attempt to legislate about any of these questions. But it does seem that a number of positions are available for students and scholars to adopt today, just as there were a number of positions available even in Augustus' own time. There was no simple one view of the emperor. There was a multiplicity of views created competitively in numerous monuments and texts, and themselves creatively transformed in the experience and according to the prejudices of the people whose father the emperor claimed to be.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Wallace-Hadrill's (1986) analysis of possibly deliberate ambiguity, vagueness, or 'confusion' is arguably on par with Droge's assessment as far as empirical reflection goes. His research receives full treatment in Chapter III, as Wallace-Hadrill was specifically concerned with coins in his article, which is the subject of that chapter.

⁵⁷ Droge (2011: 101-10, quote 109-10).

⁵⁸ Elsner (1991: 61).

Indeed, it may be said, a bit crudely perhaps, that Elsner's final assessment is the exact rejection of a final assessment.⁵⁹ Influenced by Droge, I would like to hypothesize that 'a multiplicity of views' and a 'number of positions to adopt' might have been precisely what Augustus wanted to achieve. This is where the urgency of the present thesis is located. Assessing this hypothesis, that Augustus deliberately employed ambiguity, I believe, can constitute a promising, novel avenue of research, by uniting or reconciling the two big historiographical tendencies described above. Zanker's approach focused on the sender, without accounting for the plurality of the message. Elsner did account for such a plurality, but subsequently shifted agency almost completely to the recipient. In other words, the traditional historiographical approaches either led to, on the one side, a confirmation of Augustus' dominance and the coherence of his ideological and imperial message, or, on the other side, an emphasis on the possibility of the subversion of an ambiguous, uncertain message, downplaying Augustus' own role.

My new, middle-of-the-road approach, focusing on the agency of the sender *and* acknowledging the possibility of plural, ambiguous meanings, is perhaps slightly tilted towards Elsner's side. I do not necessarily seek to challenge the possibility of subversion through ambiguity. Rather, I seek to *add* to the debate the possibility that the dominant emperor might have also employed ambiguity. From this perspective of deliberate ambiguity, ambiguity is seen not as weakening or subversive, but empowering. It is thus, in principle, something which can be desired. This is not to say beforehand that ambiguity on behalf of the Augustan regime *was* wholly and invariably deliberate. As this historiographical overview has shown, Augustus occupied himself with a wide variety of areas, a variety which on its own should already instill us with caution to make all too general statements. If this research finds that ambiguity in certain situations was *not* deliberate or that ambiguity did not exist at all, we are at least advancing our knowledge on the subject by making explicit what we are talking about.

The reconciliation of the two historiographical tendencies has already been hinted at by Elsner: 'if such visual representation frames the emperor in a context of ideological uncertainties and contradictions, then can it really be *reinforcing* power, ideology and domination, as Zanker and Gordon would wish?'⁶⁰ As I discuss in the following chapter, the concept of deliberate ambiguity opens up the possibility of answering Elsner's supposedly rhetorical question positively. In Elsner's view, uncertainty and ambiguity are all about subversion, about challenging or undermining the imperial or central authority. Clarke

⁵⁹ Both his emphasis on the viewer and his reluctance to provide authoritative readings or conclusions, or at least to characterize them as such, can also be seen in, for instance, Elsner (2007: xvi).

⁶⁰ Elsner (1991: 61), original emphasis.

maintains a similar view. I agree with his stress on the capacity of imperial monuments to be ‘multilayered and polysemic’.⁶¹ This is quite a strong refutation of Zanker’s stress on a coherent imperial, monumental building program and alludes to the possibility of these imperial monuments to communicate ambiguous messages. However, I myself would also like to refute something from Clarke’s view. Clarke’s aim of studying ordinary Romans’ view of imperial art in itself is no opposition to the present thesis, but the following statement is: ‘I wish to draw a picture of a pluralistic, rather than an imperialistic, Roman society.’⁶² For me, this (implicit) opposition is both unhelpful and false. There is no inherent opposition between imperialistic and pluralistic, and even simply writing that opposition can prevent us from fuller understanding Augustan Rome. Indeed, an imperialistic regime might have deliberately stimulated and engaged with the pluralistic nature of its empire in order to strengthen its own position.

2. *Introducing the Sources*

This thesis largely focuses on three types of material evidence: architecture, numismatics, and epigraphy. By its nature, this thesis pays extensive attention to justifying the selection of primary source material and critically evaluates them. Most of this happens in each of the respective chapters, as they are all centered on a specific type of evidence. Some preliminary remarks, however, are in order. Rowan noted the importance of the study of images and material culture in the specific context of ambiguity. Especially when studying an inherently complex concept such as ambiguity, material culture can help to make abstract notions tangible.⁶³ Furthermore, the choice for three different *types* of material sources enable me to study a multitude of Augustan topics. The diversity of these sources is in line with the diversity of Augustus’ long and dynamic reign and reflective of the many roles he played on various stages.

I trust that the discussion above has shown that studying material evidence from the Augustan era, such as the Forum of Augustus, the Ara Pacis, and the *RG*, (still) constitutes a promising avenue of research. All these sources are, as described above, sources that do not potentially describe deliberate ambiguity *directly*, but in or through which ambiguity might be observed. It is also important to acknowledge the regime or elite perspective of the sources under consideration: this is not to say that only these sources are the only relevant ones, but

⁶¹ Clarke (2003: 17).

⁶² Clarke (2003: 16).

⁶³ Rowan (2016: 50).

rather that they are the logical and right choice for a study that consciously and explicitly focuses on the policy and intentions of the Augustan regime.

While this thesis focuses on material culture, it will not be able to formulate interesting insights without help from literary sources.⁶⁴ The *RG*, unique in its length and composition, is a perfect example of a document that blurs the distinctions between archaeology and literature.⁶⁵ If we move to authors other than Augustus himself, historians such as Velleius Paterculus, Suetonius, Cassius Dio, Livy, and Plutarch are indispensable in charting and understanding the developments of the Augustan period.⁶⁶

Next to historiography, poetry is just as essential. Ovid and Vergil have already been mentioned briefly and their importance, along with Horace, has been formulated eloquently by Edmondson. Poetry, he wrote, ‘constitutes our only primary evidence for the contemporary written discourse that developed in Augustan Rome, to be set alongside the “visual language” of the art and monuments.’⁶⁷ The poems of these three authors serve both to challenge and illuminate our understanding of that art and those monuments; they are all occupied with themes like religion (Ovid’s *Fasti*, for instance), history (Vergil’s description of Roman history in the *Aeneid*), and they provide their own look at contemporary material culture (Horace’s reaction to inscriptions in his *Odes*; Ovid’s description of the Forum of Augustus).⁶⁸ In particular, the poets help in understanding a Roman empire that was strongly influenced by the legacy of civil war and constant political turmoil.⁶⁹ As we will see in Chapter II, that legacy had a lasting and decisive impact on Augustan society.

3. Structure and Outline

This thesis is structured around the building of the theoretical framework and the three different types of sources. Each chapter includes a reflection on the specific type of evidence and its possible connections to ambiguity. In Chapter I, I set out the framework of deliberate ambiguity. In Chapter II, I study the Augustan society as a product of its time, characterized by uncertainties, overlap, and negotiation. It focuses on the legacy of the civil wars and the intriguing blurring between the public sphere and the private sphere under Augustus. Building

⁶⁴ I will be consulting the translations of the *Loeb Classical Library*.

⁶⁵ Elsner (1996). I will be referring to the text and translation of the *RG* as presented by Cooley (2009).

⁶⁶ On the relationship between Augustus and the historians, see Gabba (1984).

⁶⁷ Edmondson (2009: 25).

⁶⁸ On the general relationship between Augustus and the poets, see Griffin (1984) and Barchiesi (2005); on Ovid’s *Fasti* as a historical source, see Herbert-Brown (1994); on Vergil and history, see e.g. Rowell (1941), also in relation to the Forum of Augustus; on Horace and inscriptions, see Nélis-Clement & Nélis (2013).

⁶⁹ Osgood (2006: 3).

on the background from this chapter, the following two analytical chapters apply the framework of deliberate ambiguity to two other types of Augustan sources. In Chapter III, I study Augustan coinage. Through a focus on numismatic associations featuring Augustus, I examine deliberate ambiguity in Augustus' relationship with Agrippa, with gods, and with Hellenistic kings. In Chapter IV, I focus on Augustus' *RG*, to which I add inscriptions that have been found on Augustus' own forum. This chapter's two subjects are the omission of names in the *RG* and Augustus' endeavors abroad. In the conclusion to this thesis, I will focus on three main topics: my response to the research question, in which I aim to connect and compare the outcome of the various analyses; a reflection on the framework of (deliberate) ambiguity and its value for studying the Augustan period; and the relation of this thesis to previous and possible future scholarship.

Chapter I – Methodology and Theory: A Close Reading into Deliberate Ambiguity

This chapter addresses the theoretical framework and the methodology of my research. I first discuss the concept of ambiguity in general. After a short introduction, the second paragraph focuses on defining ambiguity and on the distinction between ambiguity and vagueness. It also explores the perception of (the concept of) ambiguity in relevant historical and classical scholarship. The third paragraph moves on to the concept of deliberate ambiguity. I briefly discuss its scholarly history and mention some of its previous scholarly applications, before giving a more in-depth discussion of the version of the concept as employed in political studies international relations. There is no single standard work or one agreed-upon, clear-cut list of elements that belong to the concept of deliberate ambiguity. This is perhaps understandable given the nature of the concept. However, I argue that, through analyzing previous scholarly literature, it is still possible to identify recurring characteristics and elements which scholars have been able to study. I believe that these apply to Roman history as well. To illustrate this, I attempt to make both ambiguity and deliberate ambiguity tangible by discussing relevant, sometimes hypothetical, historical examples. I then summarize the elements that together form the analytical toolbox of this thesis. In the final paragraph of this chapter, I discuss my methodology and explain how the concept of deliberate ambiguity will be employed in order to answer this thesis' research question.

1. Introduction

While it is always the scholar's responsibility to be clear about his or her concepts and methods, this demand is even more pressing for someone who tries to engage with a concept that is inherently complex, pluralistic, and uncertain. This precarious situation was formulated succinctly by Cohen in *The Worst-Kept Secret. Israel's Bargain with the Bomb* (2010). In the preface to his study of Israel's policy of deliberate ambiguity regarding the country's possession of nuclear weapons (*amimut*, translated as 'nuclear ambiguity' or 'nuclear opacity'), Cohen wrote:

The knowledge claims made in this book are constrained by the very phenomenon the books seeks to study. The code and practice of *amimut* are not easily accessible to outsiders who seek to

understand and study it. By its nature, *amimut* aims to conceal, obscure, blur, and mask hidden realities. It systematically and purposefully withholds access to its own inner workings.⁷⁰

This description holds for (the study of) the phenomenon of ambiguity in the period of Augustus as well. The point of deliberately creating situations of ambiguity is establishing some degree of uncertainty. If one seeks to gain power from such an ambiguous situation, others should be unable to control it. Historical evidence can always be considered ‘hidden’ to a certain extent, simply because we are not living in the historical period that we study. However, situations that were purposely created to be hidden and to be uncertain are even harder to reach and to understand. From the outset, therefore, this thesis follows Cohen in acknowledging the limits of its central concept. While this situation might seem discouraging, I have interpreted it as a challenge. This framework does not aim to replace ambiguity with unambiguity, which would be missing the point altogether. Instead, it allows the scholar to account for complexity and multitudes, without discarding the possibility of agency on behalf of Augustus and his regime.

2. *Ambiguity*

What do we mean when we say that something is ambiguous?⁷¹ In my experience, in historical accounts of the Augustan era, the use of the concept has often gone without deeper, fundamental reflection and knowledge about what the term really means. Establishing and understanding ambiguity is an important prerequisite for two reasons. Firstly, Augustus would have needed (to create) ambiguous situations for strategies of deliberate ambiguity to work. This will be the focus of the following chapter. Secondly, before an attempt at studying deliberate ambiguity can be made, the modern scholar also needs to understand the concept of ambiguity, which is what this chapter aims to achieve. As Ossa-Richardson wrote, ‘We can barely get started in this world without being ambiguous’.⁷²

Ambiguity is complex. Let us, therefore, begin with a simple yet great introduction to the concept:

One morning, I shot an elephant in my pajamas. How he got into my pajamas, I’ll never know.

⁷⁰ Cohen (2010: xiv).

⁷¹ This paragraph is about the meaning of ambiguity, not about the (origins of the) word itself. For an elaborate discussion of this topic, see Van der Velden (2017: 32-57). For a more concise overview, see Ossa-Richardson (2019: 18n.62).

⁷² Ossa-Richardson (2019: 1)

This famous quote by American comedian Groucho Marx (1890-1977) plays on the linguistic ambiguous capacity of the phrase ‘I shot an elephant in my pajamas’. It is uncertain whether the narrator or the elephant is wearing the pajamas. The linguistic utterance itself provides no definitive clue, both readings are possible. This is central to the concept of ambiguity.⁷³ Any unclarity is located in the fact that there are multiple meanings possible. The possible meanings in themselves are clear and intelligible. This definition is the first, most basic and most important element that this thesis aims to study.⁷⁴ This definition does not mean that it would be realistic, in Marx’ quote, for the elephant to wear the narrator’s pajamas.⁷⁵ Rather, it means that an audience would be able to imagine or construct a clear, intelligible image of both possibilities. This is what sets ambiguity apart from the concept of vagueness.⁷⁶ In a vague situation, the possible interpretations are unclear themselves, as is the situation as a whole.⁷⁷ Both ambiguous situations and vague situations are always comprised of *at least* two possible interpretations.⁷⁸ When using the concept of deliberate ambiguity, it is paramount to be exactly that, ambiguous, not vague. This distinction between ambiguity and vagueness will be an important element for this thesis to study deliberate ambiguity in the Augustan period.

How does ambiguity come to be? As Van der Velden and Ossa-Richardson argue, ambiguity can be related to humans (whether the author or audience of ambiguous situations), to non-human entities (such as texts and their translations, but even costumes worn in plays), or to various combinations of these possibilities.⁷⁹ In Marx’ example, the audience would presumably not be expected to grasp only one of two possible interpretations, but also to observe the ambiguity itself, and thus be aware of the fact that there are multiple meanings possible.⁸⁰ In this case, we can say that the ambiguity is grounded fully in the linguistic

⁷³ With an incredibly large literature written on the subject from philosophical, logical, linguistic, legal, and mathematical points of view, the reader may find it helpful to consult Sennett’s (2016 [2011]) relatively concise entry on ambiguity to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

⁷⁴ For this simplified definition, I am also indebted to Empson (1953: 1), Van der Velden (2017: 22), and Ossa-Richardson (2019: 2).

⁷⁵ The ‘realistic’ interpretation would be that the narrator is wearing the pajamas; the interpretation of the elephant is wearing the pajamas is what makes the joke a joke. The second sentence of the joke makes clear that the ‘unrealistic’ interpretation is to be preferred. This figure of speech leading to a revision of the first part is called a ‘paraprosdokian’, which Marx used on other occasions as well: ‘I’ve had a perfectly wonderful evening, but this wasn’t it.’ Cf. LaPointe (2009).

⁷⁶ Interestingly, the definition of ambiguity itself has been criticized for being ‘vague’. Cf. Empson (1953: ix-xv) with Van der Velden (2017: 8) and Ossa-Richardson (2019: 5).

⁷⁷ For this, see the entry to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* by Sorensen (2018 [1997]) on vagueness.

⁷⁸ In this, I follow Budelmann, Maguire & Teasdale (2016: 92), building on Empson (1953: 1), who reject ‘the strict binary sense’ of ambiguity, that is, that ambiguity is always about *two* (and no more) meanings.

⁷⁹ Van der Velden (2017: 22), Ossa-Richardson (2019: 2). See Budelmann, Maguire & Teasdale (2016: 91-2) for a fuller list of sources of ambiguity.

⁸⁰ Van der Velden (2017: 66, 81, 96ff.) notes the aim of humor, through the use of jokes and puns, as a possible aim of an (ancient) author employing ambiguity: he indeed writes that for this aim to be achieved, the audience has to be aware of and accept the ambiguity of the humorously intended utterance.

utterance itself, caused by the unclear syntax chosen by the author. In other words, the ambiguity is not dependent on the audience. This is not always the case.⁸¹ Rowan has studied the concept of ambiguity in Roman history by looking at Republican coins.⁸² First of all, as a historian, she should be lauded for the relatively rare fact of having explicitly and consciously engaged with the concept of ambiguity, instead of simply using it as a denominator. Furthermore, her application can help to make the abstract notions in this paragraph more tangible. In a telling example, she studied the image of the wolf on various coins from the Italian peninsula.⁸³ The obvious association with a wolf might be the city of Rome, but there were multiple settlements that had their own unique connections to the wolf. As Rowan writes, these settlements shared an image without sharing a meaning.⁸⁴ If we were to make this tangible, we could imagine a Roman citizen seeing a wolf coin from another settlement. Broadly speaking, two situations might occur. First, our citizen might simply see a wolf and think of his own city, because that is the association to which he is accustomed. The ambiguity of the situation is then created because different viewers may construct different meanings or associations upon viewing the coin, not because the coin's image itself is necessarily ambiguous. In this simplified scenario, the ambiguity does not exist independently from the audience and its background. In a second scenario, our citizen might still see his own city depicted on a coin, but now he would be *aware* that there are other meanings and associations possible, for example, because he is familiar with the settlement of Lanuvium. In other words, he is aware of the ambiguity *itself*. Audience ambiguity can be created because constituents of the audience create different interpretations of the same utterance, or because constituents are aware of different possibilities, or both.⁸⁵ My discussion of Rowan's example is not intended to determine what would always happen, but to indicate the range of possibilities. It should be emphasized that these hypothetical situations have been constructed without the considering the possibility that the wolf may have been deliberately chosen by the moneyer of the coin. This relationship between deliberate ambiguity and the role of the audience in ambiguous situations is discussed below.

Before we turn to the specifics of deliberate ambiguity, it might be helpful to get an idea of the stance toward the concept in relevant classical scholarship, and how I see myself in

⁸¹ For an introduction to the role of audience as a 'place where ambiguity resides', see Budelmann, Maguire & Teasdale (2016: 89).

⁸² Rowan (2016).

⁸³ The example here is intended to explore the concept of ambiguity with a historical example; a further numismatic discussion of this example can be found in Chapter III.

⁸⁴ Rowan (2016: 27-31).

⁸⁵ As shown by Budelmann, Maguire & Teasdale (2016).

this debate. To start off, we may turn to Porter, who wrote that ‘being classical’ should not be understood simply as a ‘property that an object can have’. Rather, ‘it is the suggestion that a given object has this kind of property, which is why one needs to determine just where in any given case the suggestion originates’.⁸⁶ Ossa-Richardson saw this ‘suggestion’ as a useful way of thinking about the history of ambiguity as well.⁸⁷ For me, this does not mean that an object (be it a building, an inscription, or a coin) cannot be ambiguous *at all*, but rather, that what really matters is whether someone has thought that the object in question has the ambiguous property. That ‘someone’ in this paragraph relates to scholars, but in this thesis at large, that ‘someone’ will be ancient actors in the period of Augustus.⁸⁸ The focus is on actors effecting deliberate ambiguity, but to get a good grasp of this, their audience must also be considered.

In 2016, Rowan noted the ‘disparaged’ status of ambiguity in the English-speaking world of today.⁸⁹ In the same year, the philosopher Razinsky noted the marginalization of a related concept, that of ambivalence, in philosophy. Its observation often leads to a response of disregard, denial, or reinterpretation.⁹⁰ Even though it has been noted that since around the turn of the millennium looking for multiple, possibly mutually exclusive readings has become the new ‘literary-critical orthodoxy’, this situation is not monolithic, nor has its development been.⁹¹ Indeed, Van der Velden observed that the study of ambiguity in classical literature has not been without controversy. Taking the study of the Augustan poet Horace in the second half of the twentieth century as an example, Van der Velden describes the challenges which ambiguity has had to face: Horace was seen as ‘a school author striving for clarity’; modern literary theory was criticized for not allowing something to be ‘right’; and the observation of ambiguity was allegedly caused by ‘lack of philological abilities among scholars’, instead of being present in the text.⁹²

We might consider another polemic example that relates to another Augustan poet.⁹³ In *The Poet’s Truth*, Perkell argued that Vergil’s *Georgics* was inherently and deliberately

⁸⁶ Porter (2005: 30).

⁸⁷ Ossa-Richardson (2019: 19).

⁸⁸ This distinction is not an inherent opposition: both Van der Velden (2017) and Ossa-Richardson (2019) take scholars (in the broadest sense of the words) as their historical actors, with Van der Velden focusing on (late) antique scholars and Ossa-Richardson continuing (albeit without acknowledgement) this way of research up until the present.

⁸⁹ Rowan (2016: 25).

⁹⁰ Razinsky (2016: 3-4). Cf. Budelmann, Maguire & Teasdale (2016: 98) for an ambiguous theater play’s capacity to ‘polariz[e] opinion’.

⁹¹ Sharrock (2013: 3-4), whence the quote. This development is also sketched by O’Hara (2007: 1-7).

⁹² Van der Velden (2017: 14-5), with further references at ns.31-34.

⁹³ This example is also discussed by Van der Velden (2017: 15).

ambiguous: the poem's ambiguity was its defining character.⁹⁴ Two years after publication, the monograph was reviewed by Galinsky, who attacked Perkell's work on its most important premise:

The time has passed, even in classics, when the assiduous discovery of 'ambiguity' and 'irony' was tantamount to superior insight and sophistication; these terms should be the scholar's last resort, not the first, nor does their relentless repetition help make the case.⁹⁵

Thomas, whom we already met in the history of scholarship, deduced from Galinsky's remark that responses to 'the subversion of surface-meaning' are always angry, to some extent: '[d]efamiliarization vexes because it makes our worlds less sure.'⁹⁶ This seems reminiscent of what Razinsky observed in philosophy in general as well. While I would not agree with Galinsky's polemic tone, a more willing interpretation of his words could carry some value. The 'discovery' of ambiguity, I believe, should not be seen as a problem; the lack of (historical) reflection should. Furthermore, I think Galinsky is fundamentally wrong in talking about first and last resorts: it seems a strange way of thinking that there is a sequence of methodologies or concepts, instead of different, perhaps even better or worse methodologies. Then, I do agree with the fact that 'relentless repetition' of the concept itself does not make the case. However, the repeated, conscious application of a well-structured framework can, I am convinced, tell us something meaningful about ambiguity. We now move on to building such a framework.

3. Deliberate Ambiguity

The concept of deliberate ambiguity is not tightly associated with one particular scholar, but literary theorist Burke might have been among the first one to coin the term in his research on dramatism in 1955.⁹⁷ While the concept of deliberate ambiguity lacks an agreed-upon set of elements, Van der Velden has noted three different types of literary deliberate ambiguity, which are of use here: hidden meanings; jokes and puns; and 'equal-level' ambiguity.⁹⁸ His insights are centered on literary evidence, but his conceptualization and methodology are nonetheless helpful for buttressing the framework.⁹⁹ As far as hidden meanings are concerned, Van der

⁹⁴ Perkell (1989).

⁹⁵ Galinsky (1991: 478), review of Perkell (1989).

⁹⁶ Thomas (2001: 1). Also see Perkell's (1994) own response to Galinsky (1991).

⁹⁷ Burke (1955). Burke was acknowledged as being the first to coin the concept by Amit (2012: 4).

⁹⁸ Van der Velden (2017: 81). Note that Van der Velden usually writes 'intentional' instead of 'deliberate'. As far as semantics are concerned, this thesis does not meaningfully distinguish between these two adjectives, but it will distinguish between 'deliberate' and 'strategical', see below, note 125.

⁹⁹ Cf. Budelmann, Maguire & Teasdale (2016: 111-2), who make a connection between theater and 'the real world': through an interesting experiment in which an audience was first asked to watch four theater plays and then a

Velden distinguished between a ‘surface meaning’ and a ‘deeper meaning’, whereby the latter is usually understood to be ‘more correct’.¹⁰⁰ In particular, the specific aim ‘safe criticism’ associated with hidden meanings is relevant to this thesis and is discussed below, using Ovid and Livy. Hidden meanings can only work if the intended audience is able to understand both meanings and observe the ambiguity itself. In other words, at least one observer should remain at the surface, whereas the intended audience will be able to observe the deeper meaning as well. In jokes and puns, the audience is also intended to observe the ambiguous situation.¹⁰¹ This category is more closely related to literary studies and will thus receive no further attention: I trust that Marx’ joke has done its job.

The third type, ‘equal-level’ ambiguity, is perhaps the most interesting one for this thesis. In this type, there is no visible hierarchy between the possible interpretations.¹⁰² In the subtype ‘exclusive equal-level ambiguity’, one interpretation is still seen as the right one, but *which one exactly* remains unclear. The intention here is ‘to avoid being pinned down on a factual statement which might prove to be false.’ In other words, it is about increasing the chances that you are *factually* correct: if you throw a dice, you are more likely to be correct when choosing between even and odd than when choosing a number from one to six. It should thus be distinguished from ‘safe criticism’, which is about hiding your *opinion*. On the other hand, there is also ‘inclusive equal-level ambiguity’, in which both meanings are equally correct. This is what Edwards has called the ‘intensification of meaning’.¹⁰³ I return to Van der Velden’s threefold distinction at the end of this paragraph. After its origins in literary theory, the concept of deliberate ambiguity has seen widespread application in organization and communication studies, and even in bioethics.¹⁰⁴ Generally speaking, we can define deliberate ambiguity in all these fields as any (group of) actor(s) being intentionally ambiguous with the aim of achieving or acquiring something. These aims are different depending on the area in which the strategy is employed, but they are generally united through one common denominator: there is always some form of communication that takes place between a sender and an audience. In drama, it might serve to build up tension. In organizations or companies, it might be used by directors to effectively communicate difficult messages to different

possibly ambiguous statement by British prime minister Tony Blair, they observed that the audience created ambiguity in both the theatrical and the real cases.

¹⁰⁰ Van der Velden (2017: 81, 82-95).

¹⁰¹ Van der Velden (2017: 81, 96-104).

¹⁰² Van der Velden (2017: 81, 104-115).

¹⁰³ Edwards (1961).

¹⁰⁴ For deliberate ambiguity in organization and communication studies, see especially Eisenberg (1984) and (2007); for an example of deliberate ambiguity in bioethics, see Chun-yan & Tao (2004).

employees. In bioethics, at least one study has shown how deliberate ambiguity can be employed to achieve effective and morally sound medical decision-making, taking into account the wishes of the various people involved.¹⁰⁵ While all these studies have their own merit, I have chosen to base my framework on those studies belonging to the fields of international relations and political studies. These, I believe, are closer to the study of history as it approached in this thesis. A framework based on applications from those fields, therefore, requires less adaptation. These varied applications nonetheless testify to the existence of ambiguity in many different ‘spheres of life’.¹⁰⁶

With the delimitation made above, the definition of deliberate ambiguity as used in this thesis becomes more political: a (group of) political actor(s) being deliberately ambiguous to achieve political goals or to gain political profit. Ambiguity is, in this definition at least, considered a means, never an end in itself. This seems to be nothing special: governments try to find means to achieve their aims all the time. So why would they turn to ambiguity, and how does it work? In explaining why a government might turn to deliberate ambiguity, I first consider an important general remark, and then discuss two examples of how it has been used and studied before, relating them to the specific situation of Augustus in the process. This discussion then, finally, leads to the elements which I use to study deliberate ambiguity in the period of Augustus.

First, it is important to note with Rowan that ambiguity can indeed be an important communication strategy. This is not only true for the communication between employer and employee, or between doctor and patient, but also between cultures. In this last case, ambiguous communication can occur when cultures meet, when the boundaries between them are put under pressure. In these contexts, in which several different groups can exist, ambiguity as a strategy can contribute to the cohesion of these groups. Ambiguous communication, in forms such as words, objects, or images, enables the evocation of various responses.¹⁰⁷ In other words, groups that might be in conflict with each other or have nothing in common can be potentially united through ambiguous communication.¹⁰⁸ Thus, Rowan’s lupine coin that I discussed earlier could hypothetically be used to appeal to different peoples – something in which the leader of a large, diverse empire could very well be interested. This can also work on a smaller scale, however. To make a small leap to Greek antiquity, Van der Velden observed a speech

¹⁰⁵ This study is the aforementioned Chun-yan & Tao (2004).

¹⁰⁶ Barak (2010: 165). This might remind us of the diverse fields in which Augustus was active.

¹⁰⁷ Rowan (2016: 25).

¹⁰⁸ See Levine (1985: 20-35, 218) and Seligman & Weller (2012: 13-36), to whom Rowan (2016: 25ns.22-5) and, thereby, this thesis are indebted.

by Isocrates, who, through deliberate ambiguity, was able to please both sides of his divided audience. To those in the audience that already disliked the Spartans, Isocrates made it look like he was criticizing the Spartans, while he was really praising them.¹⁰⁹ Here, the dislike is the surface meaning and the praise is the deeper meaning. Isocrates did not want everybody to find out that he, in fact, *did* like the Spartans.

Cohen's study of Israeli nuclear policy is a helpful modern application of deliberate ambiguity. Israel, supported by the United States, remained ambiguous as to whether they were developing a nuclear arsenal. According to Cohen, this ambiguity 'has allowed Israel to build formidable nuclear capabilities while minimizing tension with the rest of the world, especially with the United States, and also minimizing the incentive for others in the region to follow Israel in acquiring nuclear weapons.'¹¹⁰ Sharkansky, another scholar in this field, made some related observations about ambiguity in addressing tensions: ambiguity may 'work to keep competing groups in the realm of antagonists who can negotiate with one another, rather than turning them into enemies who must battle on another.' Indeed, ambiguity may be a way of 'keeping together a polity easily split by contending demands and loyalties.'¹¹¹ This is reminiscent of Rowan's remark about appealing to various, different cultures. A hypothetical connection of this idea to the age of Augustus could concern the legacy of civil war. Rome had been torn into rival factions and experienced political instability for decades, so ambiguity might be a useful way for a new ruler to reconcile 'contending demands and loyalties' to bring peace and order to the empire.

These insights can be connected to Wallace-Hadrill's article about the imagery on Augustan coinage. In 1986, he wrote about the late Republican practice of substituting the goddess Roma's head for other divine heads, such as those of Libertas or Concordia, 'according to the conflicts of the moment'. These many, varied and quickly changing images were a testimony to an ambiguous situation, he argued. On this situation, he continued: 'Ambiguity of the image becomes intolerable when it has a message to convey, and can no longer rely on common assumptions.'¹¹² This is in opposition to what we have seen above: ambiguity is exactly (perceived as) strong because it can work with *different* assumptions. When employed carefully, an actor can indeed convey a message to various peoples, using various assumptions. From this perspective, ambiguity is not 'intolerable', but empowering. Based on the distinction

¹⁰⁹ Isoc. 12.239-40, with Van der Velden (2017: 85).

¹¹⁰ Cohen (2010: x).

¹¹¹ Sharkansky (1999: 9).

¹¹² Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 74).

between vagueness and ambiguity as discussed above, I would tentatively submit that it would be intolerable for a sender not when an image is (deliberately) ambiguous, but when an image is vague: when the image or its possible messages are not comprehensible at all. For ambiguity the work, these different messages would have to be comprehensible in their own right. A sender would want to avoid ‘contamination’ of the possible messages.¹¹³

We may now move on to a second previous application. In her study of the United Nations’ sanctions on Iran in retribution for its nuclear program, Gordon studied the United States’ (ab)use of the ambiguous language of the Security Council’s resolutions. While the resolution itself explicitly only allowed states to direct sanctions at companies and individuals *directly* related to the Iranian nuclear effort, the preamble of the resolution also called for ‘enhanced monitoring’ or to ‘exercise vigilance’. This enabled the United States to impose much harsher sanctions upon Iran, without going against the resolution. These sanctions subsequently caused a large economic downturn in Iran.¹¹⁴ Gordon argued that the deliberately ambiguous language of the resolution enabled both the Security Council and the United States to ‘elude accountability: the nations imposing these measures cite the Security Council resolutions as authority for their actions; while the Security Council can maintain that its explicit measures conform fully with international humanitarian law.’¹¹⁵ Based on these insights, we can posit that deliberate ambiguity concerns instances of ambiguity where an actor wants to achieve a political goal, *while at the same time also wanting something else*. This second goal would normally be impossible or contradictory if the first goal is pursued. If we think about this aim in the period of Augustus, we might turn to Gowing, who observed Augustus’ wish to emphasize continuity while at the same time also wanting to emphasize a new beginning.¹¹⁶

The specific aim of avoiding responsibility (related to Van der Velden’s ‘hidden meaning’ and ‘safe criticism’) is not unknown to classical scholarship. In her analysis of *nomina* in Ovid’s *Tristia*, Oliensis observed a ‘superabundance of meaning’. This superabundance, she argued, means that while the poem allows for several interpretations, it does not champion a specific one. Thanks to this, the poem carries ‘plausible deniability’: there will always be an excuse to not have interpreted something in a certain way because there will

¹¹³ Favro (2005: 251). On a related note, it would not be desirable for a sender if the message *is* ambiguous and the sender has no control over it: see below.

¹¹⁴ Gordon (2013).

¹¹⁵ Gordon (2013: 975-6).

¹¹⁶ Gowing (2005: 18).

always be another meaning that is just as valid and understandable.¹¹⁷ In this case, both Ovid and the reader are enabled through or by an ambiguous situation.¹¹⁸ The acquiring of plausible deniability might be especially interesting for the poet who is writing his exile poem.¹¹⁹ In another case, that of the *spolia opima*, Sailor hypothesized that Livy included Augustus' version of the story and described his own position 'with sufficient ambiguity (...) to allow himself a semblance of autonomy'.¹²⁰ In this suggestion, deliberate ambiguity might have enabled Livy to remain autonomous and voice his own opinion, without confronting the princeps head-on. Both Sailor's idea about Livy and Oliensis' idea about Ovid should not only serve as examples of deliberate ambiguity in general but also to show that actors other than Augustus and his regime might have deliberately exploited ambiguity to achieve a goal.

Oliensis' idea of 'superabundance' brings us to another issue regarding deliberate ambiguity: control. Deliberate ambiguity may be observed in two different cases: the relevant agent creates a new ambiguous situation or manages to exploit an already existing ambiguous situation. However, in both cases, the agent must be able to exercise some degree of control over the situation. For example, in Cohen's study, Israel exercised control over, and thus derived power from, its policy of *amimut*: only the Israelis really knew what was going on. Instead, if the situation is too flexible, 'irresponsible exploitation' might occur.¹²¹ Perhaps this is what Wallace-Hadrill meant when he talked about the intolerance of ambiguity in imagery: the actor(s) involved lose control of the ambiguous situation. This, I hypothesize, can take two forms: either the ambiguity becomes vagueness instead, or the control shifts to another actor.

Returning to the hypothetical Roman example concerning the civil wars, we might posit that Augustus would have wanted many people to be able to support his regime. They must have been able to find something in the ambiguous message with which they could agree, to the degree that they were enabled to support the regime while at the same time, for instance, maintaining their Republican convictions. It must go no further than this: they should not be enabled to rise up and revolt. However, in both this hypothetical example and in Oliensis' analysis of Ovidian superabundance, we do see that deliberate ambiguity can enable not just the originator of the strategy, but the target audience as well.

¹¹⁷ Oliensis (1997: 188).

¹¹⁸ A related Ovidian example, about evading trouble, in the *Ars Amatoria* is discussed by Van der Velden (2017: 87). Note that, in this case, the ambiguity is confined to the characters in the text itself: Ov. *Ars* 1.569-70, 601-2. Van der Velden (2017: 87), with further references.

¹¹⁹ I am aware of recent debates in Classics and literary criticism about differences between the 'flesh-and-blood' author, the *persona* of the author, and the 'implied' author; but this is not to place to discuss this in-depth. I am referring to the historical P. Ovidius Naso who might have wanted to acquire this plausible deniability.

¹²⁰ Sailor (2006: 376-7).

¹²¹ Sharkansky (1999: 11), with Barak (2010: 166).

This audience of the deliberate ambiguity has already received some attention, but it is worth finishing this discussion with some specific remarks on this element of deliberate ambiguity. Because of its limited size, this thesis will not be concerned with actual consequences of a deliberately ambiguous policy. The focus is on intentions, not on their realization or reception.¹²² However, these things should never be completely separated. When devising policy, one always has to reflect upon how it will work in practice.¹²³ In their study of the Ara Pacis, Kleiner and Buxton formulated this aptly: ‘The altar can be interpreted on many levels, and its reception by viewers was considered in its conception and design.’¹²⁴ This was certainly no simple issue to consider, seeing as how the viewers constituted a ‘varied lot’.¹²⁵ In this respect, this thesis engages with the question of who the intended audience of a certain source on behalf of the Augustan regime might be, and how this possibly influences the extent to which the source might be rightfully interpreted as deliberately ambiguous. This also relates to the issue of tensions and loyalties: is Augustus trying to reconcile or appeal to specific audiences?

Lastly, we would have to wonder whether the targeted audience(s) was intended to be aware of the ambiguous situation: do you want the audience to grasp the ambiguity or only the meaning directed at them? Building on Van der Velden, there might be three general options: first, full knowledge on behalf of the audience (such as for Marx’ joke to work); second, partial knowledge on behalf of the audience, with only a part of the audience observing a hidden meaning (Isocrates’ speech about Spartans); or third, full knowledge only on behalf of the actors (the *amimut* policy of Israel necessitated the ignorance of the relevant audiences). Van der Velden’s threefold typology, prepared for (reception of) literary deliberate ambiguity, is not intended to cover all types of ambiguity. However, the typology makes a conversation possible and enables us to study ancient sources in a critical and thoughtful way. Was it perhaps possible, to offer a hypothetical problematization of the typology, to have something like ‘inclusive hidden meanings’, in which one communication had two different meanings for two different audiences, and they were only meant to see their own? Problematizations of this kind will be analyzed in the chapters to come.

Based on this discussion, I study the concept of deliberate ambiguity by tracing and analyzing (the lack of) the following, intimately intertwined elements:

¹²² In this respect, I follow Davies’ (2017: 3) focus on politico-architectural intentions rather than reception.

¹²³ For this view from an architectural perspective, see Favro (1996: 10). Cf. Clarke (2003: 2).

¹²⁴ Kleiner & Buxton (2008: 57).

¹²⁵ Kleiner & Buxton (2008: 59).

(1) the basic definition of ambiguity and the distinction with vagueness: are there multiple possible meanings and are they intelligible?

(2) Van der Velden's typology: at what 'level' are these messages located? Can they be considered hidden, exclusive, or inclusive?

(3) the achievement of political aims and intentions: is there something at stake for the relevant actor? In other words, can the actor reasonably be said to have had a particular intention?

(4) the conflict between political aims: are the aims that are being pursued by the actor normally mutually exclusive?

(5) control of the situation: to what extent has the relevant actor been able to control the ambiguous situation?

(6) the audience: are there specific audiences targeted, with different messages? Is the deliberately ambiguous communication intended to reconcile different audiences? Are the audiences intended to be aware of the ambiguous situation itself?

4. Methodology: How to Trace Deliberate Ambiguity

In tracing deliberate ambiguity, this thesis focuses on individual instances and tries to interpret them using the elements described above. Any trace of deliberate ambiguity does not have to be true for the principate as a whole: it might be different for different sources, or for different topics that were communicated. I will not be studying a coherent policy plan that presents a unified strategy of deliberate ambiguity, but instead different instances in which something was at stake, and which may or may not have been attempted to be achieved through deliberate ambiguity.¹²⁶ If this thesis generalizes, it will only be in indicating the preference for or a tendency of using deliberate ambiguity (or not).

I employ a close reading (or, in some cases, viewing) of certain aspects of Augustan material culture, against the framework of deliberate ambiguity discussed above. This means that this thesis studies these material sources in detail: from the imagery on Augustan coinage to the language used on the *RG*. Wherever possible and relevant, I also address the architectural or archaeological context of the sources, such as the layout of the Forum of Augustus. The more specific, relevant methodologies and source criticism for the respective chapters are

¹²⁶ Let me also state here that in my analysis, I prefer 'deliberate' over 'strategical'. 'Strategical', I believe, carries the danger of seeing one grand strategy of deliberate ambiguity. Instead of this deductive method, I intend to pursue an inductive method: by studying various possibilities of deliberate ambiguity, I hope to be able to say something meaningful about deliberate ambiguity in the Augustan period as a whole.

discussed there.

In studying deliberate ambiguity, we can broadly distinguish between two types of sources. The first possibility would be to research documents, be they official or unofficial, in which a policy of deliberate ambiguity is discussed on its own. Cohen engaged with both the official and unofficial subtypes. In the 1970s, the Israeli Atomic Energy Commission codified ‘the ground rules and practices into a national doctrine of nuclear restraint’.¹²⁷ Alternatively, he also studied, for instance, informal memos from the United States in which Israel’s nuclear situation was discussed. Both the official and unofficial explicit documents are lacking for the period of Augustus. If we believe Suetonius, this should come as no surprise: Augustus made it his ‘chief aim to express his thought as clearly as possible (...) to avoid confusing’.¹²⁸ This thesis must look at the second possibility: deliberate ambiguity transpiring through other sources. In this respect, this research is more similar to Gordon’s study than it is to Cohen’s: Gordon had no documents that described intentions by the Security Council or the United States to create an ambiguous resolution, she had to study that ambiguous resolution itself. This is what justifies the close-reading approach: finding implicit deliberate ambiguity requires reading between the lines.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the use of a concept, theory, framework, no matter how well and decently structured it is, is never the historical reality itself – only a means to study the past. In the case of this thesis, the concept of choice is also a modern one, applied to an ancient past. Paraphrasing Van der Velden, this leads to a ‘deadlock’: to meaningfully discuss historical events from the Augustan period from the perspective of (deliberate) ambiguity, we need a definition, but we need those historical events to show the appropriateness of the definition. I follow Van der Velden’s circumventing of this problem: I emphasize that my definition and elements belonging to deliberate ambiguity are tentative, but they at least enable us to talk about deliberate ambiguity in the period of Augustus.¹²⁹ This tentative nature means that I will not hesitate to let the sources outweigh the framework if the framework proves to be insufficient. This is still a scholarly productive process: the insufficiency can only become apparent when a framework is well-structured, which can still lead to knowledge advancement. To use Van der Velden one more time, the framework’s ‘heuristic value’ can only be (dis)proven over the course of this whole thesis.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Cohen (2010: xxxiii)

¹²⁸ Suet. *Aug.* 86.1.

¹²⁹ Van der Velden (2019: 20-1). Instead of ‘historical events’, Van der Velden uses ‘passages’.

¹³⁰ Van der Velden (2019: 22).

Chapter II – Civil War, Uncertainty, and Overlap: An Exploration of Augustan Ambiguity through Augustan Architecture

Uncertainty is challenging but rewarding. Context is everything.¹³¹

In this chapter, I provide an analysis of Augustan society from the perspective of ambiguity. This chapter has two major aims. First, it aims to become acquainted with ambiguity in the Augustan period by studying its origins and the society in which it could emerge. Second, through this overview and analysis, it aims to provide a background and context in which the two following chapters can be grounded. In order to achieve these aims, this chapter has been divided into two paragraphs. In the first paragraph, I discuss ambiguity in Augustan society by analyzing two key elements that had a lasting impact on that society: first, the legacy of civil war and late-Republican political instability; and, second, the blurring of the spheres of public and private. Building on these two elements, I argue that Augustus came to rule over a Roman Empire that provided fertile ground on which deliberate ambiguity could potentially come to fruition. I further illustrate this by turning to the first type of source of this thesis: architecture. In the second paragraph, I explore the possible connections between (deliberate) ambiguity and (Augustan) architecture, which I make tangible by discussing Augustus' house on the Palatine Hill and the Altar of Augustan Peace on the Campus Martius.

1. The Origins of Augustan Ambiguity: The Legacy of Civil War and the Blurring of Public and Private

As Ossa-Richardson wrote, 'Ambiguity not only has a history, it is inseparable from history, makes history possible.'¹³² This relationship between ambiguity and history makes it important, in my opinion, to provide a historical description of ambiguity in Augustan history. Furthermore, I take Ossa-Richardson's remark to mean that ambiguity makes history possible in the sense that ambiguity is a productive situation. People might create ambiguity, which can be observed by others, and it can even be observed when it was not intended at all. In any case, multiple meanings and the relations between them encourage and enable us to think more deeply about the world in which we live. Ambiguity is a fundamental property of human history, but this does not mean that we can take its existence for granted *a priori*: ambiguity is multifarious and does not exist in each domain of life to the same extent, if at all. Before truly

¹³¹ Clarke (2003: 13).

¹³² Ossa-Richardson (2019: 4).

starting this paragraph, I would like to state that I follow Ossa-Richardson in one more respect. His *A History of Ambiguity*, he summarized, was ‘not a history of progress or decline, not a record of pathology and delusion, and not a romance of liberation from classical strictures. It is the history of a mind that has found too many past answers and will not choose between them.’¹³³ I aim to achieve the same for my history of ambiguity in the Augustan period: the presence, absence, or extent of ambiguity is not inherently negative or positive. Rather, the history, as presented in this chapter, aims to take stock of, in Ossa-Richardson’s words, the ‘too many past answers’ in the Augustan period.

In particular, the idea for this chapter was sparked by Elsner’s suggestion about Augustan art in general and the Ara Pacis in particular. The ambiguities, ambivalences, and contradictions that he observed on the Ara Pacis, he argued, ‘rais[e] a still more worrying question about the nature of the Principate itself.’¹³⁴ This ‘worrying’ has some cynicism to it: Elsner referred to scholars such as Gordon and Zanker who argued that the Augustan regime dominated the principate. Elsner instead argued that the ambiguities present in Augustan art had the potential to undermine that principate. The nature of this principate, along with its origins and historical context, takes center stage in this first paragraph. Since Elsner raised this issue from the topic of architecture, it seems right to first further explore this issue by studying architecture myself, before turning to numismatics and epigraphy in the following chapters.

At the heart of this chapter lies the idea that the Augustan period was characterized by an overlap of or an intersection between different categories: ‘divine’ and ‘human’, ‘old’ and ‘new’, ‘public’ and ‘private’, ‘Greek’ and ‘Roman’. It was Feeney who most directly connected this overlap to the topic of ambiguity, in particular concerning Augustus’ status between ‘divine’ and ‘human’ and between ‘revolutionary’ and ‘traditional’. Feeney characterized this in-between status as ‘ambiguous’ and ‘indeterminate’, which

allowed for multiple responses and initiatives from all orders and areas of the empire, accommodating the Emperor’s unparalleled power while incorporating him into traditional frames.¹³⁵

Without a definitive choice, we might call this situation of general ambiguity one of equal level. The ambiguity, I would say, is not situated in the multiple responses. Rather, the multiple responses are *enabled* by the ambiguity. Especially since we read ‘from all orders and areas of

¹³³ Ossa-Richardson (2019: 4).

¹³⁴ Elsner (1991: 61). The Ara Pacis’ primacy is also emphasized by Kleiner (2014: 59).

¹³⁵ Feeney (1998: 110).

the empire’, we are reminded, first, of the capacity of deliberate ambiguity of reconciling and appealing to various groups within a polity, and, second, of the agency of actors other than Augustus. In analogy with Elsner’s remark on the Ara Pacis and the nature of the whole principate, we might even state that ambiguity regarding these fundamental concepts should at least prepare us for the presence of ambiguity in other areas.

As we saw in the framework, in order to better understand ambiguity, we need to understand from where the (suggestion of) ambiguity originates: was this overlap of various categories unique to the Augustan period.? On the one hand, scholars like Raditsa, writing about social legislation, and Feeney, writing about religion under Augustus, argued that the blurring of or overlap between categories belonged specifically to the period of Augustus.¹³⁶ On the other hand, Droge, writing about Augustus’ divinity, and Wallace-Hadrill, writing both specifically about Augustan coinage and Roman culture in general, saw this ‘Augustan intersection’ as a part and the result of a longer historical and cultural development, with ties to the Hellenistic Mediterranean and the Roman Republic.¹³⁷ This debate becomes even more interesting once we realize that Augustus himself was constantly trying to emphasize both his ties to Roman (Republican) history and, simultaneously, to present his rise to power as the beginning of a distinctly new era.¹³⁸ I believe, with Wallace-Hadrill and Droge, that we must look at the historical context and developments from which Augustus emerged, not just at Augustus’ principate itself. To show this, let us start at one of the gloomiest times in Roman history: the civil wars of the first century BC.

1.1 The Legacy of Civil War

Tangled, chaotic, hideous¹³⁹

Wars leave an impact. Civil wars, where the enemy looks like oneself, where the battles may occur close to your home, have an even greater impact on a society and its memory. It would thus be hard to overestimate the impact that civil war and internal conflict had on Rome.¹⁴⁰ However, this subparagraph is not intended to map these consequences completely. Rather, it seeks to describe civil war and political instability as an important element of the society from

¹³⁶ Raditsa (1980); Feeney (1998: 108-114), about Augustus’ *apotheosis*, and (1998: 28-31) about the *Ludi Saeculares*, for example.

¹³⁷ Droge (2011: e.g. 100n.87); on coinage: Wallace-Hadrill (1986); on Roman culture: Wallace-Hadrill (1989) and (2008). For Augustus’ ties to Hellenism, see also in particular Versluys (2017); for Augustus’ ties to the Republic, see also Millar (1973).

¹³⁸ E.g. Gowing (2005: 18).

¹³⁹ Syme (1939: 3n.2), cited at Osgood (2006: 4).

¹⁴⁰ Breed, Damon & Rossi (2010: 4).

which Augustus emerged and over which he came to rule eventually. That society was clearly one that had just come out of years of conflict. Civil war, while destructive, also carried a creative impetus: the experience and memory of civil war evoked many different responses in a number of areas.¹⁴¹ Poets (Lucan, Horace, Propertius) and historians (Josephus, Appian, Plutarch) alike wrote about civil war as a means of coping with their memory.¹⁴²

Breed, Damon, and Rossi observe four fundamental civil wars in Roman history: Marius versus Sulla (80s BC), Caesar versus Pompey (early 40s BC), Octavian versus Antony (between 44 and 31 BC), and the year of the four emperors (AD 69).¹⁴³ AD 69 falls outside this thesis' temporal limits, so it will receive no further consideration: I focus on the collective impact of the Sullan, Caesarian, and Antonian civil wars. Together, as we will see, civil war, internal conflict, and political instability fundamentally (re)shaped Roman politics and communication. I believe that this development can be related to the concept of deliberate ambiguity. But exactly how did the legacy of civil war and political instability influence the ambiguous nature of the Augustan principate?

In Roman history, both by modern and ancient observers, civil wars are often seen as destabilizing, as creating uncertainty. Especially the fact that the civil wars followed each other in a rapid, seemingly endless continuation had a lasting impact on Roman society, creating political chaos.¹⁴⁴ This is what Syme argued when he, in the opening quote to this section, referred to the Antonian civil war as 'tangled, chaotic, hideous'. The second triumvirate, which was technically in power for most of this period, was characterized as 'desperately unstable' by Osgood: the triumvirs failed in effectively and equally sharing power and engaged in a civil war until finally, Octavian managed to take all power for himself.¹⁴⁵

However, this instability was not a distinct property of the triumviral period. The Republican system, as Davies writes, had a particular disposition for competition because of the limited number of magistrates. However, this was not seen as problematic, as long as the individual competition yielded results beneficial to the Republic.¹⁴⁶ However, after Sulla, powerful Roman individuals started to gain more prominence and power, at the cost of the 'commonwealth': a Roman Republic that was taking care of itself through collective administration and deliberation. These individual politicians and commanders now started to

¹⁴¹ This is the main premise of the volume by Breed, Damon & Rossi (2010).

¹⁴² Osgood (2006: 5-6) and (2015: 1691).

¹⁴³ Breed, Damon & Rossi (2010: 4).

¹⁴⁴ Breed, Damon & Rossi (2010: 10).

¹⁴⁵ Osgood (2006: 3-4).

¹⁴⁶ Davies (2017: 1-2). Also see Davies (2017: 272) where she describes how Caesar in particular came to challenge this relationship between individual glory and benefit to the commonwealth.

build up armies and factions that depended on personal loyalty, rather than to that Roman commonwealth. Pompey and Caesar were the prime examples of this development, Antony and Octavian followed.¹⁴⁷ These conflicts between individuals disrupted *concordia*, the Romans' sense of harmony. Instead, the civil war period, in which loyalty was no longer directed to the community but to several powerful individuals, fostered a sense of *discordia*, in which citizens fought against one another: they not only attacked themselves but, in the process, the idea of *concordia* as well.¹⁴⁸

Wallace-Hadrill also observed this development of conflict and competition, which he connected directly to changing modes of political expression and communication. The pre-Augustan period, he wrote, was characterized by political instability and disintegration, changing communal values, and the negotiation of new ones.¹⁴⁹ He put the start of this development even before Sulla, as far back as the 140s BC. For example, moneyers started to mint coins to display their individuality and own political affiliations, instead of conforming their coinage to traditional Roman iconography, related to the Republic itself or to its guardian deity, Roma.¹⁵⁰ When Sulla and Marius entered the stage, individual conflict and competition only increased. These individuals tried to present their own personal, individual values, concerns and aims as those of the state.¹⁵¹ In other words, we might say that two complementary developments occurred: individuals were politicized and politicized themselves, whereas Roman politics became more individualized. Individuals became the dominant political, public concerns, both as subjects and objects. In this process, the boundaries between what was individual and private and what was of the state and public started to blur.

In this process of politicization and individualization, the competition between individuals increased the velocity with which changes and innovations occurred. As individuals tried to assert their own prominence on the political stage, they adapted their communication to the conflicts of the moment as quickly as possible. For example, instead of Roma, other deities started to appear on coinage: Libertas and Concordia, to name just a few. Furthermore, for the first time, living Romans were depicted on coinage, from Caesar to Brutus and from Sextus Pompey to Octavian: representing the individual to whom one's loyalty was directed and reflecting the irreconcilable divisions of civil war.¹⁵² This process of individualization was

¹⁴⁷ Osgood (2015: 1687-8).

¹⁴⁸ Breed, Damon & Rossi (2010: 8).

¹⁴⁹ Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 74ff.). On 'disintegration', also see Wallace-Hadrill (2008: 258).

¹⁵⁰ On these characteristics of Republican coinage, see Rowan (2016).

¹⁵¹ Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 75, 79).

¹⁵² Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 74-5).

visible in architecture as well, especially when Caesar (a forum bearing his own name with the Temple of Venus Genetrix stressing his own divine ancestry) and Pompey (his theater-portico complex) erected buildings that were intimately tied to their own persons.¹⁵³ In Davies' words, this is the history 'of individuals and groups developing strategies to maneuver within the constraints imposed by the system, and finally breaking free.'¹⁵⁴

In summary, these developments in material culture, with their quickly changing images, references, and meanings, were both the result of and exacerbated the uncertain, competitive and individualized environment. Architecture receives more attention in the following paragraph, while Chapter III further discusses the numismatic innovations. The discussion here serves to show the impact of civil war and political instability. Rome became a city in which individuals were more important and powerful than the collective. The competition between these individuals gave rise to many innovations, which in turn amplified the existing uncertainty. The civil wars wove uncertainty and discord into the Roman fabric. With a large territory that housed so many different people with so many different loyalties, any ruler faced a daunting task of reconciling a discordant population: (the battle for) *concordia* was indeed another important Augustan *topos*. For example, the resolution of civil war and internal conflict became an important subject of Augustus' own forum and the *RG*, which I discuss in Chapter III. Finally, the individualization of politics and the politicization of individuals were developments that were here to stay. These two developments are related to the blurring of the private and public spheres, to which we now turn.

1.2 The Blurring of Public and Private

Augustus inherited a society in which uncertainty and insecurity had loomed large. According to Raditsa, the young princeps actively engaged with this legacy: 'He entered everywhere, this young man who knew well that times more irrational than usual confound all expectations'.¹⁵⁵ The 'entering everywhere' refers to Augustus' alleged preoccupation with all domains of life, most notably through his legislation on social issues such as childbearing, marriage, and adultery. The 'times more irrational than usual' are, as Raditsa has it, the Augustan times after civil war.¹⁵⁶ Augustus, Raditsa proceeds, effected a 'destruction of the public sphere' and with it 'the obliteration of the distinction between private and public'.¹⁵⁷ For this destruction and

¹⁵³ Davies (2017: 272).

¹⁵⁴ Davies (2017: 3).

¹⁵⁵ Raditsa (1980: 331).

¹⁵⁶ Raditsa (1980: 282).

¹⁵⁷ Raditsa (1980: 282, 330).

obliteration, Augustus' social legislation was the means, while the legacy of civil war provided the necessary context. In this paragraph, I explore this blurring of public and private, paying specific attention to the intertwining of the Augustan family and the Roman state.

On this relation between public and private in Augustan times, Pasco-Pranger saw Augustan social legislation as having the 'effect of making private life, and particularly women's private lives, a matter of the very public discourse of law.'¹⁵⁸ As an example, she noted Ovid's imaginary narrative of Roman women protesting against the prohibition of them riding in carriages, which they attacked by taking hostage their own reproductive power until their right of riding in carriages was restored. According to Pasco-Pranger, 'it seems that the politicization of private life can backfire.'¹⁵⁹ With this, she meant that Ovid saw a possibility that women, who now saw their most private possessions politicized and publicized, turned that politicization around and used it against Augustus.¹⁶⁰ This is the politicization that we discussed above: the usage of private possessions or individuals in public cases.

It must be emphasized that Ovid's narrative was imaginary, but it is nonetheless interesting to think about it in the context of a Rome in which the boundaries between the public and private, between the Roman state and the Augustan family, started to blur or even to fade altogether.¹⁶¹ According to Raditsa, Rome after the civil wars became an unclear world, with unclear meanings, without certainties, in which everybody and everything depended on the emperor.¹⁶² He defined the 'obliteration' of the distinction between public and private as 'the ability to distinguish between what concerns all and what concerns oneself.'¹⁶³

For this thesis, Raditsa's characterization of a post-civil war Rome completely devoid of meanings is extremely interesting. In such a world, where no interpretation is certain, could anything be ambiguous at all, let alone deliberately? According to Raditsa, Augustus' power was built on the 'uncertainty of definition', in particular 'on the debris of the collapse of the distinction in kind between family and public sphere'.¹⁶⁴ To elaborate on this, let us recall the distinction between ambiguity and vagueness. Both concepts carry a degree of uncertainty or unclarity: ambiguity in the fact that there are multiple meanings *possible*; vagueness, on the

¹⁵⁸ Pasco-Pranger (2006: 193).

¹⁵⁹ Pasco-Pranger (2006: 194). The narrative is to be found at Ov. *Fast.* 1.617-636.

¹⁶⁰ The topic of Ovid's subversion or subversion *in* Ovid against the Augustan regime is an interesting but equally daunting one which sadly cannot receive full attention here. In any case, Habinek (2006) would be a good place to start.

¹⁶¹ Imaginary is not the same as unrealistic here: Suet. *Aug.* 34 notes 'an open revolt' against a part of Augustus' legislative program, in this case the encouragement of marriage.

¹⁶² Raditsa (1980: 331).

¹⁶³ Raditsa (1980: 330).

¹⁶⁴ Raditsa (1980: 331).

other hand, is *inherently* unclear, also in its possible meanings (which might not even exist at all). If we apply this distinction to Raditsa's characterization, deliberate ambiguity would perhaps not be possible at all in Augustan Rome: for such a tactic to work, the primary actor would at least have to be able to count on some certainties. However, could Augustus perhaps have deliberately used vagueness? Was Augustus as the central point of society, as Raditsa writes, the only certainty that the emperor needed? The assumption of the concept of deliberate ambiguity is that certainties are needed: how Augustus may or may not have used ambiguity and/or vagueness is explored in the rest of this thesis.

For now, to further reflect on the blurring of public and private, let us consider a different characterization of the period of Augustus, provided by Wallace-Hadrill. Like Raditsa, he saw the Augustan period as the product of the resolution of a crisis (civil war) through the rise of a new order. However, there are two important differences. Unlike Raditsa, Wallace-Hadrill did not locate the origins of uncertainty in the Augustan period, and he allows for a lot more of (new-found) stability and tranquility in that new period: 'a new set of compromises is negotiated, an agreement is reached on a new Roman order and identity that is sustainable into the future.'¹⁶⁵ Compromise, negotiation, agreement: all these concepts are related to the concept of deliberate ambiguity. It might be said that Wallace-Hadrill sees Augustus as an actor capable of coming to terms with uncertainty, with different meanings, instead of creating uncertainty. The question then remains whether Augustus removed uncertainty altogether, or whether he was perhaps successful through tactics of deliberate ambiguity. In any case, according to Wallace-Hadrill, Augustus was great at achieving consensus on issues such as Roman dress, behavior, cities, customs, and rituals.¹⁶⁶

But why this deep interference into many, if not all, dimensions of public and private life, to such an extent that the distinction was attacked? Raditsa distinguishes between the public and the private as follows. The public realm is defined by clear definitions, by its harshness, by its confidence. The private realm is instead defined by seduction, by obliqueness, by a preference of gossip over fact, by confusion.¹⁶⁷ Ambiguity provides an interesting problematization of this distinction. On the one hand, clear definitions are an important element of an ambiguous situation, which, in this case, would belong to Raditsa's public realm. On the other hand, because of the existence of multiple clear definitions, a confusion over what to choose might arise: Raditsa confines confusion to the private realm.

¹⁶⁵ Wallace-Hadrill (2008: 450-1).

¹⁶⁶ Wallace-Hadrill (2008: 453-4).

¹⁶⁷ Raditsa (1980: 333).

To make this blurring of public and private tangible, we may return to the concept of *concordia* and *discordia*. The Romans, after having experienced so much conflict, desperately needed a sense of community. Augustus' attempts to endow the Roman state with *concordia*, were often intimately related to his own family. One way to foster *concordia* was through particularly emotional events: funerals of Augustus' family members. Their deaths were experienced and presented as losses not just to the Augustan family, but to the whole Roman state. Especially telling are the cases of Drusus (brother of Tiberius) and Octavia (sister of Augustus) where we can see how the Roman public, presented as acting as that concordant whole that Augustus desired, was actively mourning the loss of their late family members together.¹⁶⁸ On a related note, Currie observed an inseparable connection between 'the demands of public commemoration and private grief' in the cult of Venus, so dear to the Augustan regime, as she was perceived to be the divine ancestor of the Julian family.¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, Concord was a popular topic in material culture as well, such as in the Temple of Augustan Concord.¹⁷⁰ As Kellum wrote, endeavors such as these show that 'concord of the state and the concord of the imperial seem to have become one and the same.'¹⁷¹ Wallace-Hadrill, observing that the Concordia of Empire was equated to Augustan Concord on coinage as well, even observed 'deliberate ambiguity (...) as to whether the values concerned are external or internal to the person of the emperor.'¹⁷²

These examples about *concordia* are not meant as a direct illustration of ambiguity, but they show how the Roman state and the Augustan family were or were perceived as intimately intertwined, which is perhaps the most important, visible example of the intersection between the public and private. It is this intersection, to follow Feeney, that can provide a context for ambiguity. The place that Augustus' family acquired was by no means straightforward. During the Republic, the political dominance of one family was generally not accepted, as Brännstedt wrote.¹⁷³ The relation between state and family is further discussed in the following paragraph about architecture.

If we want to characterize the Rome over which Augustus came to rule, we cannot discard its heritage. The political instability of the Republican civil wars had its effect on the

¹⁶⁸ Drusus: Brännstedt (2015: 39), with Dio 55.2.2, Suet. *Clau.* 1.3, Sen. *De consolatione ad Marciam* 3ff., and *De consolatione ad Liviam*, of which see in particular 'concordia flendi' ('weeping in harmony') at 201 and 'Invenit tota maeror in Urbe locum' ('In all Rome has mourning found a home') at 294. Octavia: Treggiari (2005: 141), with Suet. *Aug.* 61.2 and Dio 54.35.4-5, of which see in particular 'δημόσιον γὰρ τὸ πένθος', indicating the public character of the mourning.

¹⁶⁹ Currie (1996: 155-6).

¹⁷⁰ Breed, Damon & Rossi (2010: 10). Cf. Ov. *Fast.* 1.641-50.

¹⁷¹ Kellum (1990: 278).

¹⁷² Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 77).

¹⁷³ Brännstedt (2015: 38-9). For the influence of Republican politics on Augustus in general, see Millar (1973: 67).

population's mentality and created and intensified uncertainty. In this context, the developments of politicization and individualization occurred, in which individuals came to dominate the state and tried to sell their own private concerns as public ones. Augustus should be seen as belonging to this development. We should not forget that the Roman Republic itself was not a static entity, but its people and politics were dynamic and always evolving.¹⁷⁴ Augustus, as a part of this evolution, had emerged as the one dominant individual after conflicts between many. Where first the Republic as a collective and later those individuals had dominated material culture, Augustus established not only his own position, but also the dominance of his own family. This was not a radical shift between the late Republic and the Augustan principate. Instead, it was the following step in the processes of individualization and politicization. This step was very much visible in Augustan architecture, which was a prime testimony to Augustan ambiguity.

2. *Ambiguity & Augustan Architecture*

[B]uildings and environments are meaningless without people.¹⁷⁵

Architecture is intimately intertwined with Augustan politics. In this paragraph, I argue that architecture is a suitable medium both for *carrying* ambiguity (that is, in Augustan times, as a means of communication) and, therefore, for studying the concept of deliberate ambiguity. Firstly, I elaborate on the link between politics and architecture; secondly, I discuss the topics of visibility, literacy, and the possible audiences of Augustan architecture; and, thirdly, I explore the capacity of architecture to carry multiple meanings. Some specific observations on the House of Augustus help to further illustrate the blurring of public and private, as does an example of the Ara Pacis, which I will also specifically relate to deliberate ambiguity.

To start off, Wallace-Hadrill argued for the aligning of political change with cultural change in scholarly literature. That is not to say that the one was the cause of the other or that they happened exactly simultaneously; rather, it is a plea to discuss them in unison.¹⁷⁶ This thesis applies the concept of deliberate ambiguity in a political setting. For applying it to the period of Augustus, it should be studied in the architectural dimension, since that was so intimately tied to the political dimension. We already saw above that changing political tides were accompanied by a changing modes of material expression and communication, among

¹⁷⁴ This case is convincingly but forward in general by Flower (2010), but for this point relation to architecture, see also Davies (2017).

¹⁷⁵ Favro (1996: xx).

¹⁷⁶ Wallace-Hadrill (2008: xix, 35).

which architecture, numismatics, and epigraphy. Because of this, it is crucial for scholars and readers of the Augustan age to study various connections between political changes and ideology and the ways in which those were expressed, such as material culture and literature.¹⁷⁷ Writing about the *RG* and the Mausoleum in this specific context of Augustan architecture and politics, Elsner noted a ‘symbiosis between the will to power and monumental display’.¹⁷⁸ In other words, exerting or obtaining power often goes hand in hand with grandiose display, in this case through monumental buildings: the Ara Pacis, dedicated by the Senate but fitting the Augustan building program very well, would be another example.¹⁷⁹ Augustus’ house and forum were also prime ways for Augustus to communicate political messages. In this respect, Augustus was similar to his Republican predecessors: Davies has argued how Republican government and Republican architecture were ‘inextricably intertwined’.¹⁸⁰

Not only the objects themselves but also their respective locations could communicate messages; a commissioner or owner of a certain building would have been concerned with its surroundings – as was Augustus.¹⁸¹ Meanings and associations of urban buildings changed depending on the environment in which they were located.¹⁸² This is why it is also important to consider the architectural context of both buildings under the discussion: the relation of the Ara Pacis to the Campus Martius, and the place of the House of Augustus on the Palatine Hill.¹⁸³ In this respect, Augustus differed from his Republican predecessors. While Republican individuals such as Caesar and Pompey did succeed in erecting buildings tied to their own person, Augustus was able to form a program of several buildings tied to himself. In contrast to the individualized Republican buildings, Davies argued, Augustus’ buildings were not isolated but related to one another.¹⁸⁴

However, there is more to architecture than its direct relation to politics. Architecture is also related to topics of visibility and literacy. It is true that many ancient Romans could not read texts, but that is not to say that they could not read at all. Favro and Elsner have written that Romans from all classes were expert readers of their environment, in which their eyes were trained to read monuments and deduce meanings from them as if they were texts.¹⁸⁵ Along the

¹⁷⁷ Barchiesi (2005: 281).

¹⁷⁸ Elsner (1996: 32). Cf. Kleiner (2014: 66).

¹⁷⁹ On the Ara Pacis as a ‘monumental structure’, see Ricci (2019: 185) with Hölscher (2004: 77).

¹⁸⁰ Davies (2017: 1).

¹⁸¹ Favro (1996: 7) and (2005: 250).

¹⁸² Kleiner (2014: 7).

¹⁸³ The Ara Pacis and the Campus Martius: Favro (1996: 153), Clarke (2003: 22). The House of Augustus on/and the Palatine Hill: Favro (1996: 124), Coarelli (1973: 62), Renaud (1990: 13).

¹⁸⁴ See Davies (2017: 5) for the isolated, restrained character of late Republican architectural politics.

¹⁸⁵ Favro (1996: 4, 6-7); Elsner (2007: xvii).

same lines, Clarke argued that the endeavor of interpreting images was a practice common to all Romans.¹⁸⁶ Thus, including non-textual material sources has the added advantage of also acknowledging illiterate and/or lower-class Romans. Talking about class distinctions, Clarke observed the fact that (art) historiography has often considered imperial, elite art to be the only art of importance, which also goes for the imperial, elite interpretation of that art. However, as he argues, Roman art, even imperial and elite art, was of interest to all Romans. Their interests, nonetheless, might have differed significantly, which is something of which the imperial, elite commissioners of art were aware.¹⁸⁷ These different interests are also of interest for an analysis based on deliberate ambiguity. Deliberate ambiguity could potentially be employed to reconcile a divided audience, or to separately but simultaneously satisfy conflicting constituents of that audience.

Architecture and art are capable of conveying many different messages to a large range of viewers: ‘the same work of art can send different messages depending on who the viewer is’.¹⁸⁸ Imperial buildings, ‘multilayered and polysemic’, were interpreted by Roman elites and non-elites in various, ‘free-ranging’ ways.¹⁸⁹ This is reminiscent of how Feeney saw many different responses to Augustus’ in-between status coming from different people from different places of the empire. Favro agreed with this viewpoint in specific regard to buildings such as the Ara Pacis and the House of Augustus.¹⁹⁰ They were objects of interest for a Roman emperor, who may or may not have tried to control and create these free-ranging ways. Clarke wondered how a non-elite Roman observed monuments encoded with imperial values and subsequently asked ‘whether this is an *intended effect*: Is he or she receiving a message sent from “on high”?’¹⁹¹ Wallace-Hadrill argued that we must account for the possibility that Augustan monuments had an ambivalent effect on all Romans.¹⁹² Combining Clarke and Wallace-Hadrill, we can wonder whether the *ambiguity* was *intended* by Augustus.¹⁹³

Augustus’ intention can perhaps be clarified through a look Favro’s depiction of Augustus as an architectural *paterfamilias*. Just as he did not want to be perceived as a monarch, so Augustus went about carefully in his architectural enterprises. Instead of presenting himself as a dominating sole-ruler, Augustus preferred the authority of the *paterfamilias*. As

¹⁸⁶ Clarke (2003: 12).

¹⁸⁷ Clarke (2003: 14-6).

¹⁸⁸ Clarke (2003: 9).

¹⁸⁹ Clarke (2003: 12, 17).

¹⁹⁰ Favro (1996: 226-7).

¹⁹¹ Clarke (2003: 17).

¹⁹² Wallace-Hadrill (1989: 163).

¹⁹³ In studying architectural intentions rather than reception, I follow Davies (2017: 3).

paterfamilias, Augustus acquired the necessary justification to exert his architectural dominance.¹⁹⁴ Augustus saw the whole of Rome as his own *domus*, which reflected the status and wealth of his family and was headed by him as the rightful *paterfamilias*.¹⁹⁵ This conceptualization or construction of the *urbs* as his own *domus* enabled Augustus, as a father who knew what was best for children, to exert a large degree of architectural control.¹⁹⁶ The life of his private house on the Palatine Hill is instructive here. Roman houses always had a public dimension, and so did the house of the *princeps*.¹⁹⁷ This specific blurring of public and private was acknowledged by Augustus, who saw his house adorned with many public honors after his supposed return of the state to SPQR: the doorposts were covered with laurel and the *corona civica* was placed above the door.¹⁹⁸ The *corona* is another example of the blurring between public and private: while it was public military honor, its recognition of someone who had another in battle evoked the respect for fathers.¹⁹⁹ Augustus' father figure was manifestly clear: in 2 BC, the year in which his forum was opened, he formally received the title of *pater patriae*, which was inscribed on his house.²⁰⁰

Augustus' (architectural) constructions were both tangible and abstract. Seager's characterization of Augustus' family (also called *domus*) as an 'artificial construct' is helpful here: Augustus had to be creative in forming a concordant, stable family, because of the lack of natural, male heirs. Augustus tackled this problem through a complex scheme of adoptions and marriages.²⁰¹ However, this artificial construct had architectural resonances, which are very visible on the Ara Pacis: through a 'clever fiction', all members of Augustus' family that are depicted on the Ara Pacis look alike, as if they were all related by blood.²⁰² The similarities were so striking that, in Favro's imaginary walk through Augustan Rome, a grandfather and his granddaughter had troubles telling the family members apart.²⁰³ The Ara Pacis is dominated by Augustus' family (next to contemporary members, its ancestor Aeneas is also depicted). Families, like houses, were never fully private in Roman history, but this dominance was new – albeit the next step in the development suggested above.

¹⁹⁴ Favro (1996: 123). Cf. Favro (2005: 246).

¹⁹⁵ Favro (1996: 123).

¹⁹⁶ Favro (1996: 128).

¹⁹⁷ On the public aspect of the House of Augustus, see Richardson (1992: 118), Carettoni (1983: 9, 11, 16), and Hollis (2014: 46).

¹⁹⁸ RG34.

¹⁹⁹ Raditsa (1980: 332). Cf. Ov. *Fast.* 1.615-6.

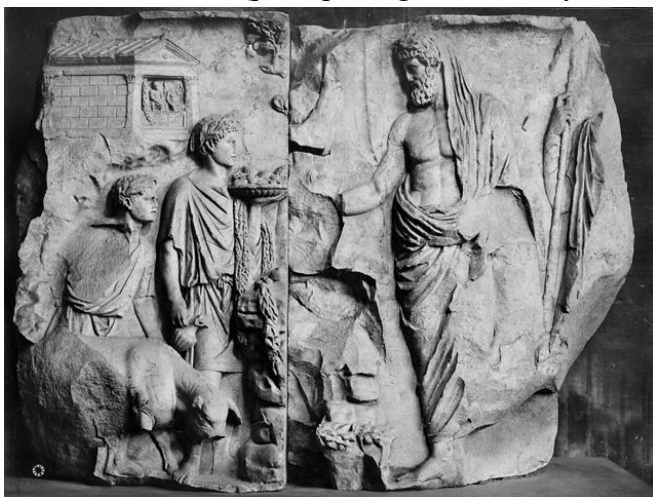
²⁰⁰ RG35. References to Augustus as father or parent had already been made before: see, for instance, *RIC* 1² 96-101 (18 BC) and 204 (7-6 BC).

²⁰¹ Seager (2012: 42). Cf. Kleiner (2005: 212).

²⁰² Kleiner (2005: 216).

²⁰³ Favro (1996: 267).

A sharper break with tradition was the depiction of children. They had belonged to the private realm, but Augustus drew them into the public eye by depicting them not only on the Ara Pacis, but also on coins.²⁰⁴ Let us look at a specific example, which Currie explicitly related to ambiguity. On the Ara Pacis, Currie also notes the presence of two *camili* next to Aeneas, who were his sacrificial assistants (figure 1). The older *camillus* is often seen as Iulus, Aeneas' son and namesake of the Julian family, but also as Gaius.²⁰⁵ Both interpretations seem to be possible, qualifying the image as ambiguous. In this case, deliberate ambiguity could have to do with the succession issue, which I briefly discussed above and will discuss again in Chapter III. If Augustus or the designer of this image intended the ambiguity, we may interpret it as follows. Two possibly contradictory aims might be at play here: Augustus wanting to present Gaius as a possible successor by connecting him to the origins of the Julio-Claudian family; and Augustus wanting to prevent the impression that he was trying to establish a dynasty, which would be in contradiction with his ideology of *res publica restituta*. The most straightforward interpretation would be an ambiguity of hidden meanings: the surface meaning would simply be Augustus trying to show his familial ties, while the hidden meaning would be related to Gaius' possible succession. However, that gives too little weight to the possible interpretation of the figure as Iulus. Instead, I claim that the very fact that the figure can be interpreted as Iulus legitimizes Gaius as possible successor by emphasizing his ties to the family of his grandfather. In other words, there may indeed be a hidden meaning at play here, but once an intended audience (perhaps Augustus' family itself, or his supporters) discovered that meaning,



they would have to take the surface meaning with them. Below the surface, it can be said that an ambiguity of a more equal level existed: even though Gaius might have been the preferred Augustan interpretation, acceptance of the interpretation of Iulus and therefore the ambiguity itself strengthened the other interpretation.²⁰⁶

Figure 1. Aeneas' sacrifice on the southwest panel. Source: Alinari/Art Resource New York, through Kleiner (2005: 225, fig. 30).

²⁰⁴ Currie (1996: 155-6). Gaius and Lucius, for instance, were depicted on coins: e.g. *RIC* 1² 404-5.

²⁰⁵ Currie (1996: 157).

²⁰⁶ Also note that Iulus was a *cognomen* belonging to an ancient branch of the *gens* Julia, several members of which bore the (admittedly common) *praenomen* Gaius.

All of this is not to say that Augustus was the only actor on this stage: all citizens were expected to help care for the city, for their *domus* – just like a *paterfamilias* would stress the importance of caring for family goods to his children.²⁰⁷ However, this *is* to say that Augustus was largely in control of what happened in his city, architecturally speaking. This is an important prerequisite for somebody possibly engaging with ambiguity: in the form of the concept that is used in this thesis, the primary actor wants to retain control over the possible interpretations of his deliberately ambiguous communication. Interestingly, Wallace-Hadrill relates this Augustan control of the city to the legacy of civil war as well. It was Rome's new *paterfamilias* who radically transformed the city. The pre-Augustan city, the Rome of the civil war of 49 BC, was disorganized: according to Wallace-Hadrill, it was an urban mess, full of winding streets and monuments belonging to different individuals.²⁰⁸ Because of this, it lacked a capacity to be truly understood, it was 'beyond cognitive grasp'. It was Augustus who organized Rome. Through various enterprises, such as *census* and a system of *regiones* and *vici*, Augustus collected and controlled information and knowledge. In the process, he rendered Rome itself known and controllable.²⁰⁹ Augustus' occupation with knowledge and control is visible throughout his reign. In his own *RG*, he mentions three *census*, at 28 BC (the beginning of his reign), 8 BC, and 14 AD (the end of his reign).²¹⁰ The *regiones* and *vici* also show the personal link of Augustus to his architectural endeavors: through his system of neighborhoods and wars, he encouraged worship of his genius and family spirits (*lares*), particularly in shrines at crossroads spread throughout the whole city.²¹¹ If we apply this thesis' framework to Wallace-Hadrill's insights, we might say that the pre-Augustan city was one of vagueness, one in which it was hard to comprehend anything at all, whereas the Augustan, post-civil war city was comprehensible and intelligible. This is not to say that the Augustan city was an ambiguous city. However, ambiguity at least needs intelligible interpretations. Deliberate ambiguity also requires control. Augustus brought both elements to the city, at least as far as concerning architecture and urban planning.

The conceptualizations of Rome as his house and the Romans as his family are very much reflected in Augustan architecture. What, then, is the relevance ambiguity here? Especially building on Feeney's insights, I believe that the connections, intersections, and

²⁰⁷ Favro (1996: 114).

²⁰⁸ See note 184 above.

²⁰⁹ Wallace-Hadrill (2008: 275, 301, 312).

²¹⁰ *RG*8.

²¹¹ Favro (1996: 123-4) and (2005: 246), Wallace-Hadrill (2008: 275-90). On Augustus' *regiones* and *vici*, see also Suet. *Aug.* 30.1, 43.1, 57 and Dio 55.8.7

overlap between these categories of public and private, state and family, personal and familial provide possibly interesting grounds for ambiguity. Because of the degree of complexity and unclarity located in the intersections of these categories, there was room for various meanings, interpretations, and responses.

The relation between the personal and the familial, between the private and the public, and between Augustus and Rome find many visible incarnations on several important monuments. Augustus' own forum, on which he was grandly portrayed as *pater patriae*, has been characterized as an 'amalgam of public and personal elements'.²¹² The *RG*, which might be seen as a monument in itself, connects many Augustan public building projects to his family members or include familial associations in general.²¹³ Augustan coins, which, as we will see in the next chapter, can be seen as 'monuments in miniature', also provide an interesting case from which to study the blurring of public and private.²¹⁴ For understanding the Forum of Augustus, the *RG*, and the coins, the context of Augustan architecture is indispensable.

²¹² Droge (2011: 94), whence the quote. Cf. Galinsky (1996: 198), Favro (1996: 126-8) and (2005: 246). For the title of *pater patriae*, see *RG*35.

²¹³ Examples include the Temple of Magna Mater (*RG*19), his father's forum (*RG*20) and the Temple of Apollo which bore the name of Augustus' son-in-law Marcellus (*RG*21).

²¹⁴ The term 'monuments in miniature' was coined by Meadows & Williams (2001).

Chapter III - Association, Agents, and Confusion: Ambiguity in Augustan Coin Issues

In this chapter, I study the concept of deliberate ambiguity by analyzing coins from the Augustan numismatic corpus.²¹⁵ First, I discuss the discipline of numismatics in relation to the concept of ambiguity and explain why coins are a suitable source to be studied with the concept of deliberate ambiguity. In the process, I pay special attention to the topic of how coins are related to the other types of evidence discussed in this thesis, namely epigraphy (the *RG* in particular) and architecture. I also situate Augustan coinage in its historical context, in relation to the sketch that I made in Chapter I. Second, I dedicate a paragraph to the topic of numismatic agency and intentions. With this discussion in place, I turn to the specific analysis of the primary source material.²¹⁶ In this analysis, I focus on associations with Augustus: Augustus and Agrippa; Augustus and deities; and Hellenistic kings and Augustus. As will become clear from this chapter, studying Augustan coinage challenges the framework of deliberate ambiguity employed in this thesis, especially considering the parts of the framework about conflicting aims and the agent(s) employing the ambiguity.

1. Introduction: Numismatics & Ambiguity in the Period of Augustus

Coinage is vital to understanding both the period of Augustus and the preceding period of the Late Republic, which had a formative impact on the period of the first Roman emperor.²¹⁷ This paragraph discusses various, interconnected numismatic elements: characteristics of coins (forms, content, nature), the relation of coinage to other Augustan sources, the dissemination and audiences of coinage, and Augustan coinage in the historical context of Roman civil war and political instability. Numismatic agency receives some more specific attention in a separate paragraph: this will be an excellent illustration of ‘how coinage can be used to enhance,

²¹⁵ The abbreviations used are:

BMCRE = *Coinage of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*;

HN Italy = *Historia Numorum Italy*;

SNG Cop. = *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum, Copenhagen*;

CNNM = *Corpus Nummorum Numidiae Mauretaniaeque*;

RRC = *Roman Republican Coinage*;

RPC 1 = *Roman Provincial Coinage 1*;

RIC 1² = *Roman Imperial Coinage 1*, second edition. In the case of *RIC 1²*, all coins referenced belong to the subcollection of Augustus, so for purposes of brevity, his name is omitted in the footnotes. For a full reference to the publications of these primary sources, see the bibliography.

Additionally, for the explanation and explication of (numismatic) symbols and references, I build on appendices 2 and 3 in Rowan (2019: 197-205).

²¹⁶ The coins that are paramount to the analysis have been included in the appendix at the end of this thesis and will be referred to in the respective footnotes.

²¹⁷ Edmondson (2009: 10); Rowan (2019: xix).

challenge, and change our understanding'.²¹⁸ This will prove to be true not only for our understanding of the period of Augustus but also for the central concept of this thesis.

The use of coinage was widespread throughout the Roman Empire.²¹⁹ Howgego related coinage, both its economic and symbolic uses, to imperial control, expansion, and ideology in general.²²⁰ More specifically, Rowan wrote that coins were official objects that represented or communicated something about Augustus and his regime, in which they were similar to, for instance, the *RG*.²²¹ As Wyke and Wallace-Hadrill have argued, coins carry discursive power: they can affect the discourse on a certain topic and influence the way people conceptualize and think about a topic.²²² Beliën noted that coins were intimately tied to public opinion: they could both influence and represent it. With representation, he meant that a message is most effective when it connects to something that people already know or believe.²²³ Wallace-Hadrill wrote in a similar spirit when he emphasized that any message had to be able to count on common assumptions.²²⁴

A fundamental characteristic of coinage is its mobility: due to its (capacity of) constant movement, coinage is situated in an 'inherently unstable viewing context'. This specific viewing context explicitly invites and makes possible multiple different meanings and interpretations of coins.²²⁵ To this, we might add a remark by Howgego: Roman coinage in particular had a multifarious, diverse character, having incorporated and building on other currencies, such as that of the Attalids, Ptolemies, and Seleucids.²²⁶ In short, coins were a potent and important medium for the Augustan regime to communicate their messages to their subjects. Considering its complex character and origins, the possibility of ambiguity in imperial Roman coinage should not be excluded.

Coins formed an integral part of the Augustan building program and are often called 'monuments in miniature'.²²⁷ Their place in the building program is twofold: first, they could represent (planned) monuments; second, they were also monuments in themselves, having an

²¹⁸ Rowan (2019: xix).

²¹⁹ Howgego (1995: 22-3).

²²⁰ Howgego (1995: 39-44).

²²¹ Rowan (2019: 117). Cf. Howgego (1995: 69).

²²² Wyke (2009 [2002]: 362), with Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 68, 70).

²²³ Beliën (2014: 71). Beliën writes about 'propaganda', but I choose 'message' instead, which I believe to be a more neutral term: on the problems of using the term 'propaganda' for ancient coinage, see Howgego (1995: 71) and Levick (1982) and the following paragraph.

²²⁴ Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 74).

²²⁵ Rowan (2016: 26).

²²⁶ Howgego (1995: 57).

²²⁷ The term finds its origin in Meadows & Williams (2001) and has now found widespread use in numismatics: see e.g. Rowan (2019: 3).

important role in the communication of an idealized image of the emperor.²²⁸ Their contents were very diverse. In this way, they reflected the many stages upon which Augustus acted: the princeps was variously depicted as *imperator*, *victor*, bringer of peace, benefactor, legislator, architect, and priest.²²⁹ Furthermore, in Wyke's apt formulation, coins were explicitly 'aligned with other public discourses of the principate'.²³⁰ If we take one such discourse for comparison, the *RG*, we see that studying coins carries an advantage: they give us an insight into Augustan ideas, practices, and strategies throughout the princeps' reign. The *RG* presents Augustus' principate at once, with the benefit of hindsight; coins instead represent various steps in the development of that principate.²³¹ To visualize: while coins together can be seen as a 'metal testament', there was no one colossal, central coin that described all of Augustus' deeds and honors at the same time.²³²

Augustan coinage and Augustus' testament shared many topics: the honors that Augustus received, successful enterprises abroad such as in Egypt and Armenia, and the erection and restoration of many public buildings, among others.²³³ Just like coins, the *RG* traveled to other parts of the empire, albeit a lot slower and on a more limited geographical scale: coins could more easily travel to more locations than inscriptions.²³⁴ In any case, in contrast to architecture, coins and the *RG* were directly visible to viewers outside Rome. However, precisely for this reason, the capital's architecture became known as well. The *RG* talked about the buildings that Augustus erected and restored, but the coins made them visible. This is where the coinage's velocity comes in: finished buildings could be depicted on coinage almost instantly. However, here we should exercise the caution preached by Rowan. First, coins are no photographs, and, second, coins could also depict buildings that might have never been built at all, showing that the Romans already valued the dedication, next to the building itself. The coins containing images that were built are interpretations of buildings at Rome: they show 'how buildings were viewed, not necessarily what they actually looked like.'²³⁵ A case in point is the Temple of Mars Ultor on Augustus' forum, the representation of which is also a testimony to the differences between different provincial mints.²³⁶ Spanish mints produced an image of a tetrastyle temple that housed Mars, but also a hexastyle temple containing the standards from

²²⁸ Howgego (1995: 77), Belien (2014: 71).

²²⁹ Belien (2014: 71).

²³⁰ Wyke (2009 [2002]: 362).

²³¹ Rowan (2019: 117), with Richardson (2012: 198).

²³² The phrase 'metal testament' can be found in Belien (2014: 72).

²³³ Howgego (1995: 76); Belien (2014: 71).

²³⁴ Cf. Chapter IV.

²³⁵ Rowan (2019: 139), whence the quote; Burnett (1999).

²³⁶ Rowan (2016: 24).

the Parthians, and another tetrastyle temple with a triumphal chariot.²³⁷ Pergamum and Antioch, furthermore, produced coins of a tetrastyle temple that contained a military standard.²³⁸ These differences point to the fact that provincial authorities, while often employing and adopting imperial imagery, could make their own choices and assert their own, local identities.²³⁹ This ability of coinage to express both imperial and local imagery and adapt to local circumstances was shared by the *RG*.²⁴⁰

Continuing, I should acknowledge that I am not the first to talk about Roman coinage and (deliberate) ambiguity. Wallace-Hadrill saw coinage as a testimony to Augustus' extraordinary, ambiguous relationship with tradition.²⁴¹ On a more general note, we already saw in Chapter I that Wallace-Hadrill thought of ambiguity as 'intolerable' when a coin wants to communicate a message, but cannot count on common values or assumption in which that message can be grounded.²⁴² He twice observed deliberate ambiguity, or deliberate exploitation of ambiguity, on coinage. The first instance was some coinage minted by contemporary Hellenistic client kings; the second was coinage that associated Augustus to various deities, such as Apollo, Concordia, and his own adoptive father.²⁴³ Wallace-Hadrill also noted the confusion that viewers might have experienced when viewing coins displaying both the heads of Augustus and Agrippa: why are there *two* heads on *one* coin? And what does that mean for who is in charge? According to him, causing this confusion was precisely the intention of such coins. If this is true, this intention has passed the test of time: modern catalogues are still unsure how to categorize coins that 'confuse' Augustus with Agrippa or others.²⁴⁴ These remarks sparked the analytical *topos* of possible (deliberate) ambiguity of various individuals to whom Augustus associated himself or to whom he was associated.

Wallace-Hadrill convincingly fought against 'false dichotomies' or 'binary oppositions' in coinage, such as between the obverse and the reverse of coins, or between the economic and ideological function of coinage.²⁴⁵ This breaking down of false dichotomies was

²³⁷ Tetrastyle and Mars: *RIC* 1² 39b; hexastyle and standards: *RIC* 1² 105a; tetrastyle and chariot: *RIC* 1² 115. To be sure, all these images are logical choices: they are all intimately related to the program of the Forum of Augustus. The point is that it is important to be aware of the differences in representation.

²³⁸ Pergamum: *RPC* 1 2200 = *RIC* 1² 507; Alexandria: *RPC* 1 5003.

²³⁹ Rowan (2019: 156-9).

²⁴⁰ Wigtill (1982a: 192). For a further discussion, see Chapter IV.

²⁴¹ Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 77).

²⁴² Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 74).

²⁴³ Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 73, 76-7). Augustus was also intimately linked to the three deities that had assisted him in his three major military victories as Octavian: Mars at Philippi (42 BC) against the conspirators, Diana at Naulochos against Sextus Pompey (36 BC), and Apollo at Actium against Antony (31 BC): Beliën (2014: 72: fig. 9).

²⁴⁴ Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 72).

²⁴⁵ In this spirit, see also Rowan (2016: 24), who noted the lack of a neat division between 'Roman' and 'provincial' coinage.

for a large part a response to a provocative essay by Jones. In the fifties, Jones argued that historical numismatic inquiry should focus on economic and monetary aspects, instead of on ideological and cultural ones. In his view, modern historians were much more occupied with intricate, hidden meanings than ancient Romans themselves, who allegedly used coins for three general, economic reasons only: means of account, means of exchange, and storage of value.²⁴⁶ At least accepting that there was more to coinage than its monetary value, Crawford and Sutherland still partly followed Jones when they argued that the economic function of a coin was always the primary one. The obverse of a coin exerted this economic authority, and any other information or message on the reverse of the coin was extra or secondary.²⁴⁷ In Wallace-Hadrill's view, however, the coins' obverses and reverses intimately worked together, and the economic and ideological functions were not separate. According to Crawford and Sutherland, a coin's authority (that which makes a coin a coin, makes it accepted by the people who use it) was located solely in the presence of Augustus' head on the obverse. Wallace-Hadrill instead argued that any depiction on the reverse of Augustus' qualities or deeds only elevate the coin's authority because those depictions elevate Augustus himself.²⁴⁸ Important examples can be found on coins referencing Victory on the reverse.²⁴⁹ The signs retrieved from the Parthians were also often used as an example of Augustus' successes and of the authority and respect that he and the coin were due.²⁵⁰ Furthermore, Augustus was at times also depicted on the reverse of coins, *without* being depicted on the obverse, which serves to further break down the rigid distinction between obverse and reverse.²⁵¹ The approach of Jones, on which Crawford and Sutherland at least built, has now largely been discredited in historiography. Acknowledging the fact that all its different functions were tied together, this chapter nonetheless focuses on these non-economic functions of coinage.

Let us now return to the connection between ambiguity and coinage. Whereas Wallace-Hadrill empirically observed (deliberate) ambiguity, Rowan explicitly approached Republican coinage (Republican coins, to be sure) from the perspective of ambiguity, and thus also built her interpretation on conceptual and theoretical literature on ambiguity.²⁵² She argued that coinage is an illustration and a representation of the complex, various, and uncertain world of

²⁴⁶ Jones (1956). For these three general economic functions of coinage in the Roman world, see Rowan (2019: 2-3).

²⁴⁷ Crawford (1983); Sutherland (1983).

²⁴⁸ Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 69-70, 74, 84). Cf. Beliën (2014: 71-2).

²⁴⁹ E.g. *RIC* 1² 1b, 31, 45. Cf. Osgood (2015: 1690).

²⁵⁰ E.g. with a reference to Mars as on *RIC* 1² 58 and 81, or with *SPQR* and the *clipeus virtutis* (*CL V*) on *RIC* 1² 85-7. In all cases, *SIGNIS RECEPTIS* is written on the coins' reverses.

²⁵¹ E.g. *RIC* 1² 301, which depicts the moneyer L. Aquilius Florus on the obverse and Augustus riding a *biga* with elephants on the reverse.

²⁵² Rowan (2016).

the late Republic, which we encountered in the previous chapter. Since the Roman Empire of Augustus was so intimately tied to that late Republic, appreciating the complexity of the Republic helps us to appreciate that of Augustan period.²⁵³ As we saw in Chapter I, ambiguity can be a useful strategy in periods of change or upheaval, for example by simultaneously appealing to different or competing groups in the same society.²⁵⁴ In this context, coinage has also been described as being able to embody political tensions or as a thermometer to measure the political temperature.²⁵⁵ If we add coinage's fast production and dissemination to this scheme, we can say that coinage not only reflected the quickly changing political society and its unsure meanings, but also exacerbated this development. The transition from Republic to Empire and the step-by-step development of the Augustan political order present an interesting context of such change and upheaval. In this context, ambiguity becomes an interesting way of communicating and coinage an interesting means of communicating, capable of ambiguity.

Before we turn to further explore that context, however, let us acquire a tangible idea of what numismatic ambiguity might look like. In the theoretical framework, we already encountered Rowan's discussion of the wolf symbol, upon which I shall now elaborate here. The wolf, Rome's quintessential animal, was also an important symbol to inhabitants of Lanuvium, the Samnite colony of the Hirpini, and the city of Rhegium.²⁵⁶ A coin from Rhegium presents the most compelling case. The wolf depicted on *HN Italy 2562* can either be viewed as a reference to Rome itself, or the recent victory of Rhegium and Rome over the Lucani, who capitalized on the similarity of their name to the Greek word for wolf (*λύκος*) to use the wolf as their symbol.²⁵⁷ In other words, in this case the coin, by virtue of its lupine imagery, possessed an ambiguous capacity to refer to Rome and the (victory over) Lucani *at the same time*. Animals, used as personifications for peoples or regions, were often depicted in relation to military victory, as they were in the period of Augustus. Perhaps the most famous example is the Nile crocodile, either with or without the legend *ÆGYPTO CAPTA*. Just like the Rhegian coin, the crocodile was often accompanied by palm symbols, which indicated victory.²⁵⁸

I would like to add to Rowan's discussion that just the fact that different entities had

²⁵³ Rowan (2016: 23-4).

²⁵⁴ Rowan (2016: 24-5).

²⁵⁵ Embodying political tensions: Rowan (2019: 131); thermometer: Howgego (1995: 69).

²⁵⁶ Rhegium: *HN Italy 2562* (appendix, figure 3). Rome: RRC 338 (91 BC); Lavinium: RRC 39/3 (217-5 BC), 472/1-2 (45 BC); Hirpini: Strabo 5.4.12;. For these primary references and further secondary references, see Rowan (2016: 27-8ns.35-41). Note that the example chosen for Rome is a coin which shows a she-wolf *without* Romulus and Remus.

²⁵⁷ Rowan (2016: 28), with further references. Rowan infers the possibility of the reference to the Rome from other Roman influences on contemporary Rhegian coinage and from the physical presence of Roman soldiers. The coin is tentatively dated to the last quarter of the third century BC

²⁵⁸ With palm symbols: *RIC 1*² 154-161; without palm symbols, but with the legend: *RIC 1*² 275, 544, 545.

different stories for the same image does not make a coin ambiguous. The Rhegian coin is a clearer example of ambiguity because the coin *on its own* contains two possible, clear interpretations that are grounded in the context in which the coin was issued. However, the other coins might still have an ambiguous *effect* on the viewer, for example when they pass through the hands of a Roman who will immediately recognize the animal of her own city, even if a Lanuvian or Samnite moneyer did not intend this reference. This is where we first come to talk about intention. Rowan addressed this issue as follows: ‘Even if the ambiguity was not intentional, once in circulation the meaning of the image likely changed as the coin circulated from user to user.’²⁵⁹ On the Rhegian coin, the ambiguity may or may not have been intended, but the ambiguity has a basis on the coin itself. This is not to say that there is no role for the viewer at all, because it is the viewer that chooses one of the two interpretations, perhaps without realizing that there were several options. Furthermore, we should not dismiss the factor of time: the wolf’s meaning could change over time, and the coins referred to were minted over a period of 150 years. In the Rhegian example, the relation to the Lucani only became relevant or useful *after* the Roman-Rhegian military victory. This is interesting for an actor trying to be deliberately ambiguous: could control of an ambiguous situation slip out of one’s hands over time, especially with an ambiguous, unstable means as coinage and its symbols?

The difference between the Rhegian coin and the ‘unambiguous’ Roman, Lanuvian, or Samnite coins is that, in the latter cases, the ambiguity is created by the different experiences of different viewers: both Romans and Lanuvians see the same wolf, but they will probably first think of the wolf in relation to their own background. In both cases (either intended or unintended by the creator of the coin), we can never come further than establishing whether it was *likely* that an observer noticed the multiple meanings of an image. The key characteristic is that these multiple meanings could exist next to each other ‘*simultaneously*’.²⁶⁰

Both with unintentional and intentional ambiguity, meanings could change depending on who observed the coin. Rowan is somewhat cautious in stating that there is often no way of knowing whether the ambiguous nature of a coin was intentional.²⁶¹ However, based on the theoretical framework, I believe that we can say something meaningful about those intentions. Perhaps ironically, Rowan herself contributed quite fundamentally to that framework with her remark about ambiguity as a strategy in times of uncertainty, upheaval, and change: we now

²⁵⁹ Rowan (2016: 26). Cf. her other example on this page (figs. 1 and 2) regarding the identification of a figure as either Roma (by a Roman soldier) or Perseus (by a Macedonian).

²⁶⁰ Rowan (2016: *passim*), my emphasis. See also Rowan (2019: 134).

²⁶¹ Rowan (2016: 28).

turn to such a context that is relevant for (studying) Augustus, before we further explore the contentious issue of numismatic intention.

Augustan coinage belongs to a historical context that was characterized by changes, innovations, uncertainty, and instability.²⁶² Augustus' relationship with (his) history was complicated, to say the least. He wanted to be seen as the initiator of a *nova aetas*, but also as the one who had saved and revived the Republic. A numismatic case in point is an aureus of 12 BC, in which the reverse depicts a togate Augustus reaching out his hand to a kneeling *respublica*.²⁶³ Furthermore, Augustus tried to distance himself from his triumviral past, instead emphasizing traditional Republican practices such as the handing over of the *fasces* or the principle of collegiality.²⁶⁴ That principle of collegiality is a relevant one for understanding Augustus' numismatic relation to Agrippa.

The characteristic uncertainty did not disappear with the advent of the princeps. For example, when the principate was still to be conceived, there was the uncertainty of who would come to rule Rome and in what way. Even after Augustus' rule had been established, uncertainty remained and negotiation was needed about who would come to succeed Augustus.²⁶⁵ In the previous chapter, we already saw that material expression (including coinage) was intimately related to politicization and individualization during the Republic: there was much competition between several powerful individuals that tried to present their own, personal aims and values as if they were those of the Republic as a whole. This context caused an increase in the discursive force of images on coins: it was becoming more and more important for individual Romans to persuade others to their cause, and coins were one way to do that. In general, the late Republic was characterized by Howgego as one of 'greater ambiguity', also from a numismatic point of view.²⁶⁶ Three tangible numismatic developments took place during this time period of increased and increasing ambiguity, which we can now further explore here. It is important to emphasize that all these three novelties continued *into* the Augustan period; they were no invention *of* that period: changes in deities; changes in portraits; and the increased use of numismatic inscriptions – the legends.

In the previous chapter, I discussed the numismatic rise of new deities, according to

²⁶² The importance of seeing Augustan coinage in its historical context has been noted by, for instance, Wallace-Hadrill (1986: esp. 74-6) and Rowan (2019: xix).

²⁶³ *RIC* 1² 413.

²⁶⁴ Cooley (2009: 258-60); Seager (2012: 1690).

²⁶⁵ This specific example is from Rowan (2019: 160). On the uncertainties surrounding succession, see also Seager (2012).

²⁶⁶ Howgego (1995: 67).

specific conflicts.²⁶⁷ This is understood as opposed to the stable, public iconography of Roma and the Republic. As Howgego writes, the use of such deities that personified ideals and virtues, along with their associated objects, enabled the communication of ‘the essence of a political programme’.²⁶⁸ Furthermore, the association of individuals with more ‘personal’ gods also became established practice. Caesar surpassed the Sullan and Pompeian claims to Venus, managing to present the goddess as his *genetrix*, the ancestor of his family.²⁶⁹ This practice continued into the triumviral period: Octavian was connected to Venus and her descendants (including the now deified Caesar), Antony to Heracles, and Lepidus to Vesta – perhaps understandable given his new office as *pontifex maximus*.²⁷⁰

The second innovation has to do with coinage portraits. Most importantly, during the civil war period, *living* Romans start to be depicted on coinage: from Julius Caesar to Brutus, and from Sextus Pompey to Octavian. This is perhaps the clearest illustration of the individualization on and of coinage. More in general, during the second triumvirate portrait heads even become the figurative norm. Even more striking is the fact that double-headed coins now started to appear more frequently: triumvirs were paired, as were Octavian and Caesar, and Antony and Octavia. Interestingly, this made Octavia the first Roman women to be depicted on a coin, dead or alive.²⁷¹ I further analyze this development below, both in the specific sense of double-headed coins, but also in a more general sense where two seemingly equally important individuals were depicted together.

Thirdly, there is the rise of the legend. From this period onwards, text takes on a more prominent role on coinage. This is first of all related to the desire of the triumvirs to present their titles in elaborate fashion.²⁷² In some instances, the text could even become the design itself, unaccompanied by images.²⁷³ Furthermore, Wallace-Hadrill connects the changed and

²⁶⁷ The murder of Julius Caesar is related to the newfound L/libertas of the Roman Republic, seen on coinage related to Brutus the Younger: e.g. RRC 502/3 and 505/4. For a triumviral use of C/concordia, see e.g. RRC 529/4a and b (Antony).

²⁶⁸ Howgego (1995: 75), referring to Julius Caesar. An additional instance might be RRC 494/5, in which Antony manages to include Genius, a caduceus, a cornucopia, a globe, a shield, and an eagle on a cippus: referencing, among other things, plenty, world rule, and Mercury.

²⁶⁹ Howgego (1995: 78).

²⁷⁰ For instance: Octavian: RRC 494/3a-b (with Aeneas and Anchises) and 494/6a-b (with Venus and Cupid); Antony: RRC 494/2a-b; Lepidus: RRC 494/1. On Antony’s relationship to Heracles, see Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 36.4 and 3.3 below.

²⁷¹ See, for example, RRC 429/1 (Antony-Octavian), 429/2 (Antony-Lepidus), 495/2a (Lepidus-Octavian); 490/2 (Octavian-Caesar); 527/1 (Antony-Octavia). These examples and the description of the development they indicate are courtesy of Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 75n.50).

²⁷² E.g. RRC 493/1a, detailing the titles of Octavian (obverse) and Antony (reverse).

²⁷³ E.g. RRC 534, which has three types with only ‘M.AGRIPPA.COS DESIG’ on the reverse. While this type has heads on the obverse (on which see below), RRC 537/1 has Octavian’s titles on the obverse and contains only images on the reverse, such as a *lituus*.

increased use of the legend explicitly to ambiguity: the idea is that text helps the reader in understanding what the creator of the coin intended. In tumultuous and uncertain times, where common numismatic conventions (established images, a clear public focus) were broken down and replaced by different competing factions and individuals in rapid succession, not all meanings might be self-evident. Thus, those individuals would want to make their own message as clear and intelligible as possible.²⁷⁴ Where multiple interpretations were possible, a legend might help in favoring a particular one.

Rowan picks the identification of individuals as a case in which a legend would be important. On some coins from Iberia, generic male heads were normally depicted on the obverse. As Augustus came to power, these male heads may or may not have come to exhibit features of Augustus. Some coins resolved this situation by inscribing the princeps' name, others did not.²⁷⁵ In these Iberian examples without a legend, I would submit that they are vague coins rather than ambiguous ones: if the features are not compelling enough for an image to be meaningfully interpreted as Augustus, then the interpretation itself is unclear, thus pointing to vagueness rather than ambiguity. This is not to say that interpreting the male figure as Augustus is completely impossible, rather that it will always remain somewhat tentative, and that at least the legend here cannot help to establish the identification. Subsequently, in the cases *with* a legend, the text thus resolves (or prevents) vagueness, not ambiguity.

In any case, whether resolving ambiguity or vagueness, the legend is thought to increase the coin's clarity. I would like to posit the possibility that this is not necessarily always the case. All new messages, portraits, reference symbols – all numismatic innovations – compounded to increase the coins' complexity and obscurity. A legend can serve as an explanatory or clarifying element, but Howgego postulates that a legend can also extend a coin's meaning.²⁷⁶ With this addition, the possibility that the text might only increase the ambiguity should not be precluded. Text constitutes another additional layer of information that may perhaps lead to an (unintentional) intensification of meaning. Numismatic text usually consists of many abbreviations, that could be expanded in different ways, leading to different interpretations.²⁷⁷

By way of concluding this paragraph, the following example may help in illustrating

²⁷⁴ Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 74-5).

²⁷⁵ Inscribed: e.g. *RPC* 1 472 (Segobriga); uninscribed: e.g. *RPC* 1 58 (Osset). Cf. Rowan (2016: 32-3).

²⁷⁶ Howgego (1995: 75).

²⁷⁷ Burnett (1983: 563). An example of a such a different expansion can be found in the debate between Rich & Williams (1999) and Mantovani (2008): should 'P.R.' be expanded to the dative '*populo Romano*' or the genitive '*populi Romani*'?

Augustus' place in this context of an uncertain, competitive, and ambiguous political environment in which several individuals sought to promote their private concerns as if they were public ones. Octavian already partook in this environment long before he became Augustus in 27 BC. After Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 BC, Octavian took the numismatic presence of individuals one step further. In the three years after Caesar's death, Octavian had coins minted that not only depicted his head on the obverse, but also an equestrian statue on the reverse.²⁷⁸ This, it is usually argued, was an image of Octavian in disguise, who in the process became the first living Roman person to be depicted on *both* sides of the coin.²⁷⁹ These coins, I would like to stress, emphasized Octavian's particular, individual identity. In the first place, the equestrian statue was a reminder of the equestrian branch of the family to which he originally belonged. In the second place, he also stressed his ties to the murdered dictator: on all the coins referred to he is called *CAESAR*.²⁸⁰ However, thirdly, he also tried to connect his private *persona* to the public cause, which can be seen in various elements: the legend *S.C.*, *senatus consultu*; the *lituus* (the staff of the augur, an important traditional, Republican office); and the legend *POPULIUSSU*. Octavian thus followed the numismatic novelties of the period in which he first emerged into the Roman political arena and took these novelties with him into his own reign.

2. Numismatic Agency, Intention, and Audience in the Augustan Principate in Relation to Deliberate Ambiguity

Before we can turn to tangible coins from that principate, we must first address three connected issues related to numismatic methodology and the discipline as a whole: agency, intention, and audience. Who chose which coins were minted? What was the rationale behind these choices? What were they intended to achieve and with what audience? These questions have not gone without some controversy. Through even a brief discussion of that controversy, we can further explore the relation between coinage and ambiguity and further solidify the numismatic analysis and its results.

Beliën wrote that it was unknown who decided what message was to be communicated, or through what images and text. He summarized that some scholars thought that Augustus himself was intimately and directly concerned with this task, while other scholars argued that

²⁷⁸ 43 BC: RRC 490/1, /3 (appendix, figure 4); 42 BC: RRC 497/1; 41 BC: RRC 518/2, 490/3.

²⁷⁹ Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 75).

²⁸⁰ Either simply '*CAESAR*', '*C. CAESAR*', or '*C. CAESAR IMP.*' Also note RRC 490/4 (with Caesar on the reverse) and in particular 490/2, which depicts C. Caesar (Octavian) on the obverse and C. Caesar (Julius Caesar) on the reverse, the latter of whom is referred to as '*DICT PERP*', *dictator perpetuo*.

the task would have been delegated to lower officials, such as moneyers, or persons from the emperor's entourage. In any case, the result was the same, according to Beliën: the coins served to present an idealized image of the emperor and his deeds, what was desirable to him.²⁸¹ In what follows, I try to explicate the complexities glossed over in Beliën's – understandably – general summary.

In the triumviral period and before that, several authorities were involved in the process of striking coinage. After Octavian, now Augustus, succeeds in centralizing the power in his own person, the *tresviri monetales*, colleges of moneyers, return to the coins around 23 BC. They had been conspicuously absent in the years before but were now brought back in order to strengthen Augustus' façade of having restored the republic, Howgego argues.²⁸² This arrangement was short-lived, however, as names of moneyers disappear once again from precious metal coinage (gold, silver) in 11 BC and base metal in 4 BC. This development has usually been understood as part of the imperial effort to monopolize all significant forms of public display, particularly in the capital and including coinage.²⁸³ If we phrase this in terms of deliberate ambiguity, we might say that the regime tried to exercise control over the (possibly ambiguous) numismatic situation. However, this is not to say that the regime succeeded in this desire. Augustus inherited a numismatic context of 'exceptions, hesitations and uncertainties', which had not yet fully settled, and which allowed other agents room to maneuver.²⁸⁴

So who were these other agents? Broadly speaking, there were two important groups that are relevant to this thesis: individual moneyers and client kings. The general consensus is that both groups had a relatively large degree of autonomy in choosing the coin types – it is only hard to state this for certain for individual coins. As Howgego shows, the influence of the moneyers can be inferred by looking at the roles other officials played in mints: a *procurator monetae* oversaw the whole mint, while an *a rationibus* was in control of the amount of coinage that was minted. Assuming that each official had a specific task, Howgego writes that a moneyer's involvement in choosing coin types becomes quite likely.²⁸⁵ Furthermore, the offices of moneyer were usually filled by young men at the start of their imperial administrative careers. A number of scholars have argued that it would have taken no imperial, centralized orders for these men to mint coins that would glorify Augustus: their ambition to rise through

²⁸¹ Beliën (2014: 71). A similar summary is presented by Howgego (1995: 70).

²⁸² Howgego (1995: 69).

²⁸³ Howgego (1995: 69), Droge (2011: 90n.35), Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 76).

²⁸⁴ Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 85).

²⁸⁵ Howgego (1995: 70). Cf. Stat. *Silv.* 3.3.103-5.

the ranks would have been enough.²⁸⁶ Interestingly, Rowan specifically stated that mint officials ‘possessed an understanding of official imperial ideology’, with she inferred through the assumption that the emperor would have never been able to occupy himself with every single small imperial form of communication. Thus, they would have been capable to select the appropriate images that Augustus would have wanted, eliminating the need of direct intervention of the emperor himself.²⁸⁷

This seems reminiscent of a concept that contemporary historian Kershaw has developed: ‘Working towards the Führer’. In this seminal article, he argued that the radicalization of the Nazi regime was possible in part because of Hitler’s non-intervention in the state’s bureaucracy and the absence of a fully structured, well-defined ideology. This enabled officials in the administration to devise policies according to what they thought Hitler wanted, in order to receive the Führer’s favor.²⁸⁸ In terms of control, Hitler did not exercise control over the boundaries and meanings, which may make this situation rather one of vagueness. The value of this analogy is largely determined by whether one follows Zanker’s or Elsner’s approach. If one accepts Zanker’s stress on a coherent, dominant ideology, then the comparison with a loosely defined ideology does not hold (but officials trying to obtain the leader’s favor does). On the other hand, if one accepts Elsner’s room for various meanings and interpretations by actors other than the supreme authority, the analogy is almost perfect. If we take account of the uncertain (numismatic) context in which Augustan coins were situated and minted, Elsner’s view seems more applicable.

What, then, is the relevance of deliberate ambiguity here? This is where Rowan’s remark about coinage challenging our understanding comes in: could it be possible that actors other than Augustus might have exercised deliberate ambiguity on his behalf? If we add the client kings to this picture, this question only becomes more interesting to answer: we already discussed how provincial and local mints were able to assert their own identity in what they minted. Indeed, Burnett even wrote that many local authorities were not at all legally obliged to represent Augustus on coinage, but they nonetheless increasingly chose to do so.²⁸⁹ If it was not mandatory, why did they so? What would have been their aims? Did they exercise deliberate ambiguity to achieve these aims? This will be an important issue to analyze in the fifth paragraph.

²⁸⁶ A selection of these scholars: Levick (1982: 107), Wallace-Hadrill (1986), Howgego (1995: 70), Rowan (2019).

²⁸⁷ Rowan (2019: 15-6). Rowan (2013: 212-3) further explains this point for Antoninus Pius.

²⁸⁸ Kershaw (1993).

²⁸⁹ Walker & Burnett (1981). Cf. Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 72), Rowan (2019: 156-9).

The conviction of this thesis is that an important part of how deliberate ambiguity can be traced, how intention can perhaps be not proven, but at least be deemed plausible, is to establish that the actor(s) involved had at least two conflicting aims, that there was something at stake. As with tracing intentions in general, this is a treacherous endeavor. Howgego observes that a large part of the problem is that intentions, in this respect, are often related to propaganda: either the idea of a full, coherent, ‘systematic and deliberate’ programme of propaganda (and thus certain intentions) is defended, or this idea (and thus the possibility of tracing intentions) is denied completely.²⁹⁰ As I have emphasized before, this thesis does not want nor need to generalize. I see this either-or proposition as quite unhelpful and obstructive. I do not need to establish a general numismatic tactic of deliberate ambiguity; I am studying possible instances of it. In this respect, I follow Howgego and Levick. They suggested that this propaganda problem may be ‘side-stepped’ by instead talking about ‘political themes’ on coinage, to which I add the preference of studying individual coins.²⁹¹

To justify this stance a little further, we may return to the audience, specifically the impact that coinage had on its audience. The relation between sender and observer is paramount to the concept of deliberate ambiguity: it would be no use to be deliberately ambiguous if the different intended, possible meanings were not picked up by anybody. For the specific topic of coinage, we thus need to establish that coinage was noticed and looked at. First, we may recall the art historical conviction regarding viewership, discussed in the first chapter: Romans, from all classes, were trained readers in viewing and interpreting their environment. It is hard to imagine that this quality would not have applied to their viewing of coins. Furthermore, imperial imagery, especially in the city of Rome, became pervasive: it was hard *not* to notice it. Portraits in particular were likely to draw attention.²⁹² However, as both Hölscher and Zanker have shown, the pervasiveness of imperial imagery went further: preferred imperial symbols such as the capricorn, the *corona civica*, and the *clipeus virtutis* found their ways into private households, appearing on jewelry and funeral monuments, among other objects.²⁹³ As Rowan shows, imperial imagery was also adopted by provincial agents.²⁹⁴ It is not necessary here to establish what these images meant for private users, whether they attributed different meanings

²⁹⁰ Howgego (1995: 70-1), with further references. The former approach could remind us of the approach favored by, for instance, Zanker and Gordon. The latter, while perhaps also suitable for those following Elsner, is true for those historians that favored the study of coinage in their financial and economic aspects: Sutherland (1951), Jones (1956) and (1974: 61-81), Crawford (1983).

²⁹¹ Howgego (1995: 71-2), with Levick (1982).

²⁹² Howgego (1995: 74).

²⁹³ Hölscher (1984: 20-32), Zanker (1988: 265-95).

²⁹⁴ Rowan (2019: 155-7). Examples include Lepcis Magna (RPC 1 845), Philippi (RPC 1 1650), and Antioch (RPC 1 4264).

to them or not. What matters, is that ‘some groups in society (above all in Rome itself) were well able to “read” the imagery on coins if they wanted to.’²⁹⁵

Another crucial issue is whether those persons who issued coins and tried to communicate something, themselves *thought* that their coins could have an impact. Dio provides an example, writing that Brutus explicitly issued coins with his own portrait, indicating with the cap of liberty, two daggers, and an inscription that he and Cassius had liberated Rome.²⁹⁶ Coins could also become the object of *damnatio memoriae*. After the execution of the consul and suspected usurper Sejanus in AD 31, his name was erased from certain coins.²⁹⁷ At the beginning of the third century AD, the Senate decided to remove coins bearing the images of Caracalla and Geta from circulation.²⁹⁸ This indicates that these coins were thought to have some sort of impact – it would make no sense to take the effort to remove them otherwise.

3. Augustus and Agrippa: Ambiguity in Succession, Legitimacy, and Collegiality

Even though Augustus and imagery related to him were the prime subjects of the coinage of this period, he was certainly not the only one to feature on his coinage, nor did he always appear alone. The analysis of this chapter aims to understand the numismatic appearance of Augustus together with others using the framework of deliberate ambiguity. Broadly speaking, we may speak of two possibilities: either Augustus associated himself with others, or others associated themselves with Augustus. What shape could these associations take? What could these associations mean?

Starting with Agrippa, it is important to state that in this respect, as in many others, Augustus deliberately broke with conventions. According to Wallace-Hadrill, the convention of a coin having a distinct obverse and reverse (notwithstanding their relation) is broken down by a coin series with a double-headed coin type of Augustus and Agrippa. Let us first consider the audience here, as an agent employing deliberate ambiguity would have also done. This consideration could concern specific images, but also the context of numismatic conventions. If a well-established convention is broken down so rigidly, we might wonder whether ambiguity was still possible if a generic viewer would not expect two obverses with portrait heads, which may inhibit a meaningful interpretation and cause vagueness instead. However, I

²⁹⁵ Howgego (1995: 77).

²⁹⁶ Dio 47.25.3. This cap was normally presented to manumitted slaves: cf. Cary & Foster (1917: *ad loc*).

²⁹⁷ As evidenced on some versions of *RPC* 1 398. A narrative of Sejanus’ downfall can be found at Dio 58.12-4.

²⁹⁸ Howgego (1995: 71).

would say that the deliberate ambiguity could be employed. Even if the convention of a coin having only one portrait head is broken down, there are still many familiar things to which the viewer could connect. Firstly, portraits on their own had become dominant numismatic imagery. Secondly and more importantly, the particular portraits of Agrippa and Augustus would have been most familiar. In other words, we might say that this breaking down of conventions could cause ‘confusion’, but also created a new, ‘sensational’ and ‘unexpected’ context in which various meanings might arise.²⁹⁹

Even though Wallace-Hadrill does not make completely explicit *what* the intention of this confusion was, it seems that for him, Augustus is making a ‘dynastic statement’, with Agrippa ‘elevated to virtual parity with Augustus’.³⁰⁰ Perhaps this reminds one of Augustus’ illness in 23 BC, in which he supposedly prepared to hand over control of the state to Agrippa and Calpurnius Piso.³⁰¹ However, the coins to which Wallace-Hadrill refers were minted in 13 and 12 BC: ten years after the famous illness. The illness, while Augustus recovered, did cause the princeps to imbue his constitutional arrangement with greater security, taking Agrippa as his colleague in *tribunicia potestas*. This was renewed in 13 BC, when these coins started to be minted.³⁰² The dynasticism of these coins could perhaps also be asserted by looking at two other coins: in 13 BC, two types were minted with Augustus on the obverse, and Julia, Gaius, and Lucius on the reverse.³⁰³ It is commonly accepted that Gaius and/or Lucius, Augustus’ grandchildren by Agrippa and his daughter Julia, were Augustus’ preferred successors at the time. It might serve to enhance their legitimacy if both their natural and adoptive fathers were depicted together.

With this background in place, what can we say about these Agrippan-Augustan coins and their supposed ‘confusion’ from the perspective of deliberate ambiguity? Unequivocally, I would like to state that the confusion has nothing to do with identification issues. Through legends and imagery, the emperor and his right-hand man were often meaningfully distinguished. Augustus wore his oak wreath, while Agrippa wore his combined mural and rostral crown.³⁰⁴ The confusion or unclarity in these types should be sought in the fact that the two interpretations of *both* sides of the coin as obverses, as equal parts of the coin, were

²⁹⁹ The words between quotation marks are borrowed from Wallace-Hadrill’s (1986: 72).

³⁰⁰ Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 72).

³⁰¹ Dio 53.30.1-2, Suet. *Aug.* 28.1.

³⁰² Cf. *RG6* with Shipley (1924: *ad loc.*).

³⁰³ *RIC* 1² 404-5.

³⁰⁴ The wreath and crown can be seen on *RIC* 1² 409 (appendix, figure 6) and 414 (which also includes the legends), with Augustus on the obverse and Agrippa on the reverse. On *RIC* 1² 408 (appendix, figure 5), the two are only distinguished by the legend.

perfectly possible in their own right, lacking an obvious choice or hierarchy. For this to work, Augustus would have to count on the common assumptions: an obverse (commonly) contains the portrait of an important, authoritative figure. If we approach this the other way around, we might also say that, in this process, Agrippa's importance and authority are enhanced. Augustus was keen to have a colleague in his offices.³⁰⁵ Subsequently, it might be posited that by presenting Agrippa as his equal on coinage, Augustus wanted to solidify this appearance of collegiality, which was an important Republican political virtue.

We can continue this discussion of Agrippa by noting that the ambiguity here is of a decidedly numismatic nature: the intended confusion is caused by the coins' numismatic properties (relating to the double-headed, double portrait nature), playing with existing numismatic conventions and expectations.³⁰⁶ The aim seems to be clear as well: Augustus wanted to stress the importance of collegiality, wanted to be seen as somebody who shares his power. However, as set out in the framework, for something to qualify as deliberately ambiguous, there would have to be at least one further, *conflicting* aim: is such an aim present here? On the specific coins discussed above, I would say that there is not another specific aim present. However, it does seem counterintuitive not to qualify those coins as exhibiting a degree of deliberate ambiguity. While the deliberate ambiguity in these specific types does not enable Augustus to achieve two aims, it does enable him to achieve one – appearing as someone who values collegiality. If another aim were to be discerned, it might be to enhance the legitimacy of his possible successors, but this seems hardly in conflict with the former aim. The ambiguity here should not be considered one of surface and hidden meanings, but rather one of inclusive equal level: in fact, equality can be considered the defining characteristic of this instance of deliberate ambiguity. Additionally, I would like to emphasize that in this case an important role would have to be assigned to the audience. They had to be made aware of the claims of equality between Augustus and Agrippa, for which they had to accept the possibility of both sides of the coin to be an authoritative obverse, next to each other. It remains hard to say whether this means that they would have had to be aware of the ambiguity – perhaps not in name, but at least in content.

However, there are other coins from which we might deduce another aim, which is a better candidate to qualify as a conflicting aim. Augustus prided himself on the fact that he had

³⁰⁵ RG6, RG34.

³⁰⁶ This does not mean that I do not follow Wallace-Hadrill's view on obverses and reverse anymore: I am merely distinguishing between obverse and reverse, I am not separating the two sides of the coin or denying their connection altogether, quite on the contrary.

colleagues in his offices, but also that he still was the princeps – the first.³⁰⁷ The conflict of aims, then, might be located in the fact that Augustus wanted to present himself as a collegial man, equal to his colleagues, but simultaneously also the most important (and thus, by definition, unequal). Limiting this discussion to Agrippa, there are two coin types that merit our attention. The first type, also from 13 BC, Augustus is depicted on the obverse, while two men are seated together on the reverse.³⁰⁸ While usually taken to be Augustus and Agrippa, they are not meaningfully distinguished on this coin. However, the issue is still not who is who; rather, the issue is that there are two. This is supported by the presence of a *bisellium*, which is a seat specifically designed for two people to sit on. With Augustus presented on the obverse, there seems to be no doubt as to who is the most important of the two (if there ever was any). While there might thus be deliberate ambiguity (based on Augustus' conflicting aims of simultaneously stressing collegiality and his own individual prominence) on this individual coin, I would submit that this qualification depends for a large part on the other coins discussed here, which more clearly stress the collegiality between Augustus and Agrippa, instead of collegiality as an important virtue in itself. This issue could be researched further by adding to this scheme depictions of other Augustan colleagues: are they as important as Agrippa? What is more important to Augustus: stressing collegiality in general, or stressing the importance of Agrippa?

In the latter case, I hypothesize, the ambiguity might be seen as shifting to one of hidden meaning: the surface meaning is the importance of collegiality, the hidden meaning is, building on the importance of Agrippa, the legitimacy of the possible imperial successors Gaius and Lucius. This latter case is corroborated by the final coin for this discussion: a coin from 12 BC, the year of Agrippa's death, that depicts Augustus on the obverse and an *equestrian* statue of Agrippa on the reverse.³⁰⁹ Agrippa was of course an important and official member of the Julio-Claudian family through his marriage with Augustus' daughter. We might posit that this coin further emphasized that fact: we already saw that Octavian thought it important to stress his equestrian origins on his coinage, which is the same that happens here with Agrippa (the *gens Vipsania* was also equestrian), in conspicuously similar imagery.³¹⁰ It might also be added that the equestrian image here has an ambiguous capacity of referring to both the Vipsania and

³⁰⁷ RG34.

³⁰⁸ RIC 1² 407 (appendix, figure 7).

³⁰⁹ RIC 1² 412 (appendix, figure 8).

³¹⁰ RRC 518/2. The importance of the equestrian branch to Octavian/Augustus can also be inferred from the *Res Gestae*, in which the princeps, while indicating universal consent (RG34.1) for his position and deeds, literally inserts the order *into* the familiar phrase of *SPQR*: '*sena[tus et e]quester ordo populusq[ue] Romanus universus*': RG35.1.

Octavia families at the same time.

There is a series of coins that, simply for its striking nature, should also be noted here. Its analysis is more complicated, since the variations of these types were almost all perhaps or certainly minted after Agrippa's death.³¹¹ On these coins, Agrippa and Augustus are presented on the obverse together (meaningfully distinguished primarily through Agrippa's crown), with a crocodile and a reference to the colony of Nîmes.³¹² It might be said that this presents the most radical example of equality between the two, but further understanding of these coins in the context of deliberate ambiguity would have to incorporate an analysis of the Nemausian mint, which is outside the scope of this thesis. However, collegiality, legitimacy, and succession might still play roles here. Not in all cases had Agrippa already perished for certain, and collegiality would arguably still be important for Augustus to stress in any case. Finally, in many cases Lucius and Gaius were still alive, and continued underlining of their father's importance could not have hurt.

4. Augustus and Deities: Confusion in the 'Actium Series'?

Just as in the Augustus-Agrippa association, the confusion of Octavian with various deities in the Actium series (tentatively dated between 34 and 28 BC) was deemed deliberate by Wallace-Hadrill. There are several other interesting in which Augustus is associated to deities³¹³, but I limit myself to the Actium series here, to keep the analysis manageable. Since the Actium series presents associations to various deities, I believe that a discussion of this series can yield complex, interesting results. This paragraph engages with the numismatic contexts of the importance of portraits and the increased association with deities, inherited from the civil war period. Both developments are testimony to the individualization of Roman coinage and politics. Another important premise to this paragraph and a reason for studying this particular type of association, is how Droge and Feeney have characterized Augustus' status between human and divine as ambiguous, and how this in-between status was both used by Augustus himself and enabled various responses.

Octavian's victory at Actium (31 BC) over Antony and Cleopatra caused a 'momentous

³¹¹ Perhaps (20 – 10 BC): *RIC* 1² 154-7; certainly (9 – 3 BC): *RIC* 1² 158; certainly (AD 10 – 14): *RIC* 1² 159-60. The only variation that is dated to before 12 BC, the year of Agrippa's death, is *RIC* 1² 161 (15 – 13 BC).

³¹² Except for *RRC* 518/2, whose mint remains unidentified, all other coins discussed in this paragraph were minted in Rome.

³¹³ A particularly interesting example was suggested by Rowan on *RIC* 1² 338 in relation to the *Ludi Saeculares*: on this coin, the Saecular Games were more closely connected to the deified Caesar, whereas in literary sources and the surviving inscriptions the games were connected to Apollo and Diana. See Rowan (2019: 138), with further references.

change' in Roman coinage.³¹⁴ This change is related to the imperial effort of monopolization, and also fits the scheme of individualization and politicization: after 31 BC, almost every official imperial coin (whether gold, silver, or bronze), presents Octavian or Augustus in one way or another. Even though this change was gradual and complex, and even though it was anticipated by previous developments, the magnitude of the change was still characterized as 'revolutionary'.³¹⁵ This does not mean that only the image of Augustus mattered from here on: the coins of the Actium series are used by Wallace-Hadrill to show that Augustus' image could work together with other image, even alternating between obverse and reverse. In this collaboration between obverse and reverse, Octavian, possibly deliberately, allegedly creates confusion: but is it deliberately ambiguous?

As far as numismatic conventions are concerned, there is one important difference between this association and the association between Augustus and Agrippa of two decades later: the Actium series still carries a distinct typological difference between obverse and reverse. The obverse carries a portrait head, the reverse something else. This typological difference had existed for centuries after it had been borrowed by the Romans from Greece. It would have been readily recognized by Romans, just as we can readily recognize it today.³¹⁶ This means that any ambiguity in the Actium series could not have depended on a numismatic innovation concerning obverse and reverse, as did the ambiguity in the Augustan-Agrippan association.

Let us examine a first member of the series. In general, the issues form pairs: on one coin, Octavian's portrait decorates the obverse, on the other, this spot is occupied by the deity. We already saw that the association of Venus was particularly important for members of the Julio-Claudian family, as she was presented as their divine ancestor. It should thus come as no surprise that she is present in the Actium series.³¹⁷ The alternation between these two coins is neatly symmetrical: on the first, a portrait of Venus adorns the obverse, a standing figure of Octavian the reverse, while on the second, we find Octavian's portrait on the obverse and a standing Venus on the reverse. While, when one examines the two obverses, Octavian and Venus show similar facial features (thus highlighting their familial bond), it is hard for me to observe the confusion that Wallace-Hadrill noted but did not further explicate. It may be noted that both coins carry the inscription '*CAESAR DIVI F*', but this seems only to stress Octavian's

³¹⁴ Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 70).

³¹⁵ Millar (1984: 44), with Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 70).

³¹⁶ Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 71-2). As for the modern part of this statement, this is visible in the fact that collections and sourcebook do not display signs of confusion and hesitations as far as numismatic details are concerned.

³¹⁷ *BMCRE* 600 (Venus on obverse; appendix, figure 9) and 610 (Octavian on obverse; appendix, figure 10).

claim to divine ancestry, through his deified adoptive father to the goddess of love.³¹⁸ I would not qualify this coin as confusing, as Wallace-Hadrill does here. My own addition is that I would neither qualify it as deliberately ambiguous. There may be two aims involved (stressing divine ancestry; stressing divine aid), but these are not conflicting at all and the interpretation of the messages is quite clear, no messages are hidden or exist on an equal level next to each other. In other words, it would be hard to imagine an observer who would sincerely see Octavian as Venus and thus confirm the coin's ambiguous capacity. Yes, there is a clear political aim involved in this coin, but its realization is not attempted through deliberate ambiguity.

Confusion is more readily visible in the pair in which Octavian is associated to Jupiter. The pattern is the same: Octavian and Jupiter alternately occupy reverse and obverse.³¹⁹ Two further observations are of interest. First, while on the Venus-Octavian pair both figures are depicted standing on the reverses and – I assume – alive, on the Jupiter-Octavian pair, the reverses rather portray inanimate statues: a herm of Jupiter, an equestrian statue of Octavian. Second, this pair also carries a different inscription on the reverse ('*IMP CAESAR*'), perhaps suggesting a different relation of Octavian to Jupiter. Of course, the divine association remains important, but whereas with Venus the divine heritage is stressed, here it seems that Octavian's power is more relevant. This may be suitable for an association to the king of gods. Third, and this is where the confusion starts, Jupiter on the obverse assumes 'the unmistakable features of Caesar.'³²⁰ The most important feature is Augustus' waved hairstyle, which is the hairstyle that Jupiter seems to assume on the obverse of the second coin.³²¹ Burnett, however, while accepting the presentation of Jupiter as Octavian, notes that the identification is still not obvious. This is what may have influenced Wallace-Hadrill's judgment about confusion and what may have led Howgego to characterize Octavian's endeavor here as one of subtle intent.³²²

First of all, let us think about deliberate ambiguity on the Jupiter-Octavian coin. On the coin that depicts Jupiter-as-Octavian, can we observe two possible interpretations? Without knowledge of the coin with Octavian on the obverse (and the Venus-Octavian coins), it might indeed: the figure may alternatively be interpreted as Jupiter *or* Octavian. The most direct link

³¹⁸ This is true also for related variations of this type: *RIC* 1² 250a-b, 251.

³¹⁹ *BMCRE* 628 (Octavian on the obverse; appendix, figure 11) and 637 (Jupiter on the obverse; appendix, figure 12).

³²⁰ Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 71).

³²¹ Albert (1981). In his review of Albert's work, Burnett (1983) accepted this feature. For Augustus' portrait, also see Beard & Henderson (2001: 214-224).

³²² Burnett (1983: 563), Howgego (1995: 78).

to the Jupiter would be the symbol to the left of his portrait, which resembles a thunderbolt. The Octavian interpretation, which would depend at least partly on the hairline,³²³ might also not be that far-fetched: we already saw that Octavian was the first living Roman to be represented on both sides of the coin in 43 BC.³²⁴ This type thus preceded the Jupiter coin by more than a decade. Furthermore, the comparison is also strengthened by the fact that on both coins, the reverses had a similar depiction of Octavian: not presenting his portrait, but rather seated (as an equestrian statue in 43 BC, on a curule chair on the Jupiter coin).

The capacity of the image to refer simultaneously to Octavian and Jupiter thus seems established. However, is this what Octavian would have intended? It might be possible that his intended meaning was not Octavian *and* Jupiter, but a singular meaning, with the one being the other. This is where it becomes important to consider the Actium series *as series*. If we add the other coin of this pair and the Octavian-Venus pair to this scheme, it becomes less likely that Octavian was employing deliberate ambiguity here. If an observer had seen the Venus coins, that pair would have provided her with the necessary numismatic context for interpreting the Jupiter coins: on these pairs, Octavian and a deity should alternate obverses. The first obverse in the Jupiter pair is unambiguous: only an identification of Octavian is possible there. If the observer made the intended link, then she would probably favor the interpretation of Jupiter as the second obverse portrait. In other words, the Venus pair may serve to disambiguate the second Jupiter coin.

This line of thought, it will be clear, is very complex. First, it assumes a large amount of agency and relevant numismatic experience (perhaps even coincidence?) on behalf of the audience. Second, it falls prey to what we may call the coherence trap: it is tempting for modern observers to see a coherent series here, and, by extension, to imagine that Octavian had intended a coherent series, and that the coherence would have been visible to ancient observers. Let us instead now assume that the intended meaning or message of the coin with Jupiter on the obverse was conceived on its own. According to Wallace-Hadrill, on this coin it becomes hard to state exactly who is depicted.³²⁵ In this case, the thunderbolt and the hairline have to be considered so defining for their connected individuals, that it indeed becomes hard to make a choice between Octavian and Jupiter. In this case, we might state that there is an equal-level ambiguity at work here: both meanings are even strong and are both meant to be picked up. I

³²³ Zanker (1988: 292-5) has shown that the imperial hairstyles were noticed and indeed widely copied by the Roman population.

³²⁴ RRC 490/1, /3.

³²⁵ Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 71).

would add that, in any case, I do not see this coin as vague: the possible interpretations themselves are intelligible. However, I would also add that I also believe that there is no ambiguity at play here at all. The fact that the coin so strongly resembles both Octavian and Jupiter, is precisely the point, meaning that Octavian did not intend two possible meanings, but one: Octavian-as-Jupiter. This order of the association should be favored if one accepts the 43 BC equestrian coin as a precursor or influence; Jupiter-as-Octavian would be a more likely order if one accepted the pairing with the coin carrying an unambiguous Octavian on the obverse. In any case, with only one *meaning* at work (as opposed to one *aim* intended to be achieved), the coin is disqualified from being deliberately ambiguous. The aim is still the same: Octavian makes clear his divine support. Whether this was picked up by the audience, is another story: the coin may still qualify as unintentionally ambiguous, with the ambiguity in that case being grounded in the different experiences that constituents of the audience have had, for example their numismatic knowledge. It is true, as Wallace-Hadrill wrote, that it is hard to state for certain who is depicted, but it seems unlikely that Octavian intended the confusion: it is hard for me to see what purpose that would have served.

5. Hellenistic Monarchs and Augustus: Problematizing Aims and Agents in Deliberate Ambiguity

Talking about intentions, I hope that the reader notices the intended reversal in the title of this paragraph. Whereas in paragraphs 4 and 5 it was Augustus (or his advisors and circle) who made the association, in this case others associated themselves with Augustus: he became the object of the association, instead of the subject. To study this different type of association, I discuss three Hellenistic monarchs: Rhoemetaces I of Thrace (r.12 BC – AD 12); and Juba II (r.25 BC – 23 AD) and Cleopatra Selene II of Mauretania.³²⁶ The prominence of portraiture is once again be an important numismatic context, which is accompanied by coinage's capacity to express imperial and provincial local imagery at the same time. An important addition to this background is Howgego's remark about the 'uncertainty' and 'hesitation' regarding provincial coinage.³²⁷ Not only central Roman coinage was influenced by this context: provincial rulers experimented with various ways of responding to the new Augustan order, making room for various, new meanings to emerge, in which deliberate ambiguity could potentially be employed. As far as coins minted by provincial rulers are concerned, these rulers

³²⁶ From 30 to 25 BC, Juba ruled as king of Numidia; here the focus is on his later reign of Mauretania, because this was the kingdom he ruled together with Selene.

³²⁷ Howgego (1995: 84-5).

could exercise control over any ambiguous situation that might arise or that they might create.³²⁸

Let us start with Rhoemetalces, who was a king loyal to Augustus after having switched his allegiance from Antony.³²⁹ As with the Agrippa-Augustan coins, the relevant coins here are double-headed, sporting portrait heads on both sides of the coin. The reason for the inclusion of Rhoemetalces is the following remark by Wallace-Hadrill: on these coins, ‘it remains ambiguous whether he himself or Augustus constitutes the obverse: his deliberate exploitation of this ambiguity is emphasized when he twins his head with his queen’s on one face, and twins Augustus and Tiberius on the other.’³³⁰ Wallace-Hadrill writes that the inclusion of imperial heads (not only Augustus and Tiberius, but also Gaius, Lucius, and Livia) was a form of honor, with ‘a spectrum of significations’. Key in understanding this spectrum is the voluntary nature of the inclusion of imperial heads: the coins would have always benefitted from the emperor’s portrait, endowing the provincial coins with *auctoritas* and *maiestas*. This endowment is not only of a legal, financial nature, but constitutes ‘an appeal to a potentially powerful emotive response.’³³¹ Furthermore, provincial imagery often differed from coinage from the capital: the depiction of other family members is much more present on provincial coinage, as is the imperial cult.³³² In this section, I seek to understand the intention and agency of provincial coinage, inside that spectrum of significations which encapsulates various possible interpretations and provincial attitudes and aims, in relation to imperial ones.

In Wallace-Hadrill’s argument, the ambiguity is located in the two possible interpretations of a portrait head as both Augustus or Rhoemetalces, which is allegedly increased or emphasized with coins that constitute not two but three or four portraits. To untangle this situation, I focus on five issues that only have Rhoemetalces and Augustus depicted.³³³ Four of these (*RPC* 1 1717-20, ca. 11 BC – AD 12) have Rhoemetalces on the ‘obverse’ and Augustus on the ‘reverse’ and in all cases they are meaningfully distinguished through the Greek legends *ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΡΟΙΜΗΤΑΚΟΥ* and *ΚΑΙΣΑΡΟΣ ΣΕΒΑΣΤΟΥ* (which was Augustus’ Greek name). In addition, in all cases Rhoemetalces is either diademed or laureate, while Augustus’ head is bare. On 1717, king and emperor are further distinguished by the presence of Cotys V (Rhoemetalces) and a capricorn (Augustus), the latter of which is

³²⁸ On the numismatic influence and autonomy of provincial rulers during the period of Augustus, see Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 73), Rowan (2019: 149-61), Weech (1932: 67).

³²⁹ Plut. *Mor.* 207A; Vell. Pat. 2.112.4.

³³⁰ This specific example is *BMCRE* Rhoemetalces 2.

³³¹ Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 73).

³³² Augustus was keen to avoid divine reverence of his persona in the capital: cf. Rowan (2019: 129-30, 149, 152-3).

³³³ *RPC* 1 1717-20, 1775. 1718 (figure 13) and 1775 (figure 14) are included in the appendix.

also present on 1719. On 1775 (ca. 10 BC), there are no legends or additional images, but the two leaders' facial features differ so much that there is no way that the two can be confused. Thus, as with Agrippa, we can confirm that the ambiguity is of a numismatic nature and one of inclusive equal level. It is not about who is presented, but the fact that the two leaders are depicted as if they were of equal status – both sides are possible obverses. The aim is an increased legitimization of Rhoemetalces (and his coinage), which bears a similarity to the aim of the Agrippa-Augustus coins, but the agent here is not the emperor. However, in Rhoemetalces' case, the agent of the ambiguity and the primary intended receiver of the intended aim are the same. The depiction of Augustus is a way of honoring the emperor, but it can hardly be said that this is effected through the numismatic ambiguity: in Augustus' eyes, his equality to a Hellenistic king would have rather been an insult. While this discussion may seem rather straightforward, it is interesting to realize that on these coins, a part of the ambiguity (Augustus' portrait also qualifying as a possible obverse) also serves another aim (Augustus' honor) which is not effected *through* the ambiguity. It appears that a constituent part of an ambiguous situation can thus have a different (although not entirely unrelated) aim, apart from the ambiguity. The inclusive equal-level ambiguity serves to enhance Rhoemetalces' legitimacy. However, to honor Augustus, this equality must be broken. This should be not seen as complicated or difficult: Augustus would have known that he was superior in rank to Rhoemetalces, which is I why believe that the simultaneous honoring of Rhoemetalces and Augustus should not be as incompatible. What is more, if his own image could enhance the legitimacy of his client king, the ambiguity can still be said to have intended to serve Augustus: a stable leadership of a client kingdom was also in Augustus' best interest.

Other coins of Rhoemetalces do not seem to complicate, contradict, or enhance this picture, only to indeed 'emphasize' the ambiguity. The addition of Rhoemetalces' wife (Pythadorus) or Livia may point to a Thracian underlining or appropriation of Augustan *concordia*, but the ambiguity is not substantially different.³³⁴ In summary, at most, three aims might have been at play (enhancing Rhoemetalces legitimacy; and, by extension, serving Augustus; and honoring Augustus), only the first two of which can be said to have been the aims of deliberate ambiguity, but which were definitely not conflicting aims. The service done to Augustus presents the most interesting case: here we see deliberate ambiguity effected by somebody else than Augustus or his direct circle, but still *on behalf of* Augustus.

³³⁴ With Pythadorus and Livia: *RPC* 1 1708-10; with only Pythadorus: *RPC* 1 1711. This is not to say that the inclusion of Livia is uninteresting; her depictions emphasize the differences between provincial coinage and capital coinage, on the latter of which Livia was probably never depicted. See note 330 above.

The coinage of Juba and Selene paints quite a different picture.³³⁵ In sharp contrast to Rhoemetalces, their coinage never features a portrait of Augustus; rather, the association is made through symbols such as the capricorn.³³⁶ This should already alert us: even small images are capable of carrying different messages at the same time. Furthermore, whereas Rhoemetalces' loyalty to Augustus seemed quite straightforward, the connection between Juba and Selene and Augustus is more complicated. Juba's father (Juba I) had opposed Julius Caesar through his support for Scipio and Pompey.³³⁷ Selene's ancestry was perhaps even more controversial: she was the daughter of Mark Antony and Cleopatra, allegedly being designated one of his heirs.³³⁸ However, Augustus took pride in having spared her and her brother Helios, and was concerned about their upbringing 'as if they were his own kin.'³³⁹ Augustus decided that Selene should marry Juba, who had grown up in Italy and had accompanied Augustus on campaigns.³⁴⁰

In an uncertain context, both in a general and numismatic sense, how can we understand the Juba-Selene coinage from the perspective of deliberate ambiguity? Juba and Selene clearly tried to show their loyalty to Augustus and to Rome, for instance by naming their capital Caesarea and by promoting the imperial cult.³⁴¹ Juba and Selene issued many coins that carried Augustan imagery (for example, the temple of the imperial cult in Caesarea), which might have been a strategy to balance their many issues that had explicit Egyptian (for example, Isis' headdress) or Numidian (a lion) meanings.³⁴² In addition, on types referring to the couple directly, Selene's Hellenic background is stressed as her title is written in Greek, whereas her husband's is written in Latin.³⁴³ However, for the remainder of this paragraph, I focus on other imagery: namely, an image that had a capacity of referring *both* to Rome and to Selene's heritage, as this constitutes a more intriguing read from the perspective of deliberate ambiguity. I have chosen to select only of image because of spatial considerations, but my specific choice

³³⁵ For my analysis of Juba's and Selene's coinage, I should like to emphasize that I am indebted to insights provided to me by Florence Cobben, who wrote an essay on this subject at Utrecht University (2019). I thank her for the inspiration and literature references; the readings of the coins through my framework of deliberate ambiguity as presented here are still my own.

³³⁶ Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 73).

³³⁷ Vell. Patt. 2.53-4, Suet. *Iul.* 35, 59, 66. This Scipio is Quintus Caecilius Metellus Pius Cornelianus Scipio Nasica.

³³⁸ Suet. *Aug.* 17.1. Cf. Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 36.3

³³⁹ Suet. *Aug.* 17.5, whence the quote, and Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 81.2. This is notwithstanding the fact that Antyllus (one of Antony's sons by Fulvia) and Caesarion were killed. Cf. Dio 55.15.5 and Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 81.1, 82, 87.

³⁴⁰ Dio 55.15.6, Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 87.2. Cf. Dio 55.16, for the fact that 'many children of princes and kings' were being kept at Augustus' court.

³⁴¹ Rivers (2001: 428).

³⁴² Roller (2003: 152), Braund (1984: 177-8). The Augustan temple: e.g. *CNNM* 146; Isis: e.g. *SNG Cop.* 570; Lion: e.g. *SNG Cop.* 576.

³⁴³ *REX IVBA* and *KAEOILATPA BACLAICCA*: e.g. *SNG Cop.* 566 (with Selene's head; appendix, figure 15) or 590 (without Selene's head).

for Selene is based on her Antonian heritage, which is important for the next chapter as well. This does not entail a complete neglect of Juba, as his portrait and name are still present on these coins, and he seems to have been in charge of the material culture together with his wife.³⁴⁴

Selene is intimately related to the crocodile. This animal, often in conjunction with the legend *AEGYPTO CAPTA*, is mostly seen as a reference to Augustus' victory in the Battle of Actium. However, firstly, this must mean that the crocodile can refer to Egypt at all. Indeed, the crocodile was a symbol that belonged not just to Egypt, but to Cleopatra herself. She and Antony were the first to produce coins bearing the crocodile's image, marking the assignment of Crete and Cyrenaica to Selene.³⁴⁵ Draycott has argued that the crocodile enabled Cleopatra to connect to her family as a whole: she takes as examples the crocodiles' defense of Egypt against the invader Perdiccas and the importance of the crocodile god Sobek to the Ptolemaic dynasty.³⁴⁶ Now, on a Cleopatran-Antonian coin, only one reference seems possible (especially since 'Actium' had not happened yet). Also, on an Augustan coin, only one reference can be deemed plausible: he used the crocodile's capacity of referring to Egypt, but his victory over or capture of that region was probably the primary intention. However, it should be noted that Octavian probably chose the crocodile specifically because of its links to Selene, as Draycott infers from his neglect of other Egyptian symbols such as the ibis or papyrus.³⁴⁷ What happens, then, when another ruler, with links to both the first and second meaning, uses the crocodile herself?³⁴⁸

In this case, it is paramount to recognize Selene's (numismatic) agency. The crocodile can now potentially refer to both her heritage and the defining victory of the current ruler of the Mediterranean. On other provincial coinage in the same period, such as that of Nîmes, it is hard to imagine that the crocodile would refer to anything else than Augustus' Actian victory.³⁴⁹ It is through Selene's person, child of Antony and Cleopatra, but now a queen under Augustus, that the crocodile acquires an ambiguous capacity. The possibility for this can be said to have already existed, as the two meanings are intimately tied together. We can now ask ourselves whether this truly constitutes deliberate ambiguity. To answer yes, we first have to accept the loyalty espoused by Juba and Selene through their material culture in general: this

³⁴⁴ Weech (1932: 67).

³⁴⁵ Draycott (2012: 43-4).

³⁴⁶ Draycott (2012: 54).

³⁴⁷ Draycott (2012: 44-47), in which she also explains why it is unlikely that Augustus used the crocodile as it was used in the first half of the first century BC (e.g. RRC 352/1a).

³⁴⁸ E.g. *SNG Cop.* 548, 592. 592 is included in the appendix (figure 16).

³⁴⁹ *RIC* 1² 154ff.

would make the reading of a reference to Actium plausible. Second, we have to accept that Selene was *also* asserting her own heritage, which can be inferred from her coinage in general, as discussed above. The image then indeed has two intelligible interpretations active at the same time and thus qualifies as ambiguous. Because of Selene's material output and her connection to the crocodile in particular, I believe her intention is plausible. I am unsure, however, whether this deliberate ambiguity is also intended to achieve conflicting aims: would it really have been impossible for Selene to assert her heritage and loyalty at the same time? The only conflict visible, in my eyes, is the fact that two sides here were in conflict: however, as we will see in Chapter IV, Augustus may have tried to diminish the conflicting nature of Antony's family members. Because of that, I conclude that Selene's use of the crocodile can be deemed a deliberate ambiguity of inclusive equal level: both meanings exist next to each other and are both meant to be perceived, enabling Selene to assert her ties to Cleopatra and Antony and her loyalty to Augustus at the same time. In general, it seems illogical that Selene would be trying to hide anything here, especially if Augustus was aware of the reference capacities of the crocodile. However, if we were to specify a hiding endeavor, it might be hypothesized that Selene hides the fact that one of the two meanings is more important to herself. This would be in line with Draycott's suggestion that Selene is trying to reclaim the crocodile for herself.³⁵⁰ In this case, there would be *two* surface meanings, where the higher importance of one is the hidden meaning. Alternatively, there may be indeed an ambiguity of equal level, in which the inclusivity is a façade. In both cases, it remains speculation who exactly was to perceive which meaning, but we can at least establish the most important member of the audience: Selene herself. Whether she was reconciling other parts of her audience could perhaps be answered in further research.

We may end this discussion by comparing Selene's crocodile to Rhoemetalces' double portraits. Both associate themselves with Augustus, but I submit that Rhoemetalces' association is singular, as he is not associating himself with anyone else, as Selene does. In both cases, however, the references to Augustus are honoring him: we should remember Wallace-Hadrill's remark that honor can also be bestowed through referencing great deeds, such as Augustus' success against the Parthians, not only through portraiture. Still, I cannot help but feel that Rhoemetalces' loyalty to and honoring of Augustus are more straightforward than those of Juba and Selene, whose references to the emperor were more subtle and complex. This also means that, while Selene was an agent that effected deliberate ambiguity, her service

³⁵⁰ Draycott (2012: 55).

to Augustus through this deliberate ambiguity was perhaps lesser than that of Rhoemetalces. Finally, in Rhoemetalces' case, the ambiguity effected was of a decidedly numismatic nature related to the double interpretation of obverses. On the other hand, Juba and Selene used ambiguous *images*, which are not necessarily confined to coins, but which did have the capacity to express both local and imperial concerns at the same time.³⁵¹

³⁵¹ This capacity of (numismatic) images is discussed by Rowan (2019: 153).

Chapter IV – Names, Harmony, and Diplomacy: Ambiguity in the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*

Though illiterate, the workers stare reverentially at the row after row of inscriptions covering the tablets. They know the content well: The text records the impressive achievements of Augustus. The list, once thought to be endless, will no longer grow. The *princeps* is dead.³⁵²

This chapter studies the presence of possibly deliberate ambiguity in the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*. In addition, where possible and relevant, I use inscriptions from the Forum of Augustus to add both depth and width to the analysis, as well as its monumental context. The Forum also serves to add temporal complexity: they were finalized in 2 BC, after which Augustus had sixteen more years to complete the *RG*. Because of the epigraphical background of this chapter, Firstly, I study the possible connections between Augustan epigraphy and ambiguity.³⁵³ Secondly, I specifically discuss the *RG*, further preparing this chapter for its analysis, comparing it to the forum inscriptions and introducing the objects of the analysis in the process. There are two: first, the omission of names in the *RG*; and, second, the passages detailing Augustus' foreign endeavors. The *RG* and the inscriptions of Augustus' own forum present a different story of deliberate ambiguity than coinage: in contrast to the latter, the epigraphical sources discussed in this chapter are more direct and obvious testimonies to deliberate ambiguity effected by the princeps himself.

1. Introduction: Augustus, Epigraphy, and Ambiguity

On the relation between epigraphy and history, the words of the epigrapher Bodel are worth calling to mind: 'the history of classical antiquity could not be written without epigraphy'. It is the historian's job 'to set inscriptions into their cultural context and thus to demonstrate their contribution to history.'³⁵⁴ The historians of the early Roman Empire and specifically those of the Augustan era have plenty inscriptions with which to work. The *RG* and inscriptions of the Augustan forum have been selected because they are a great testimony to what the Augustan regime wanted to communicate to its subjects. It is this elite or government perspective from which this thesis is studying the Augustan period. Furthermore, Augustus had a great hand in

³⁵² Favro (1996: 252).

³⁵³ Where necessary, I quote text from the inscriptions using the relevant epigraphical symbols from the Leiden system, of which the most important ones can be found at Cooley (2009: 57).

³⁵⁴ Bodel (2001: 1). On the relation between epigraphy and ancient history, see also the eloquent words of Sandys (1918: 1).

the composition of both documents, which is an interesting contrast with the numismatic ambiguity discussed in the previous chapter. However, the epigraphical agency of the first princeps and the relevance of using inscriptions for studying his period are even broader. In epigraphy, a concept called ‘the epigraphic revolution of Augustus’ has taken hold, which is related to the exceptional quarry at modern-day Carrara. It was under Augustus that this quarry was first systematically exploited, providing the material that enabled a surge in inscriptions around the turn of the millennium.³⁵⁵ Interestingly, the Forum of Augustus, with its many inscriptions, was inaugurated in 2 BC. The idea of an ‘epigraphic revolution’ holds that it was Augustus who took the initiative in actually putting the material to use. Roman epigraphic culture became an ‘an empire-wide vehicle of Augustan ideology.’³⁵⁶ Specific inscriptions such as those of the Augustan forum and the *RG* were a crucial means of the regime to communicate their desired messages and create the desired image of its princeps.³⁵⁷

Roman epigraphy had relatively broad and clear outlines, but it had many ‘enigmatic’ and ‘obscure’ aspects. Among these aspects, Bodel noted the ‘surprising diversity of the Romans’ “sense of audience”’. It often remains difficult to say with certainty for whom a text was intended.³⁵⁸ Something that is characterized as ‘enigmatic’ or ‘obscure’ is not by definition ambiguous, but these characterizations at least show a possible connection of epigraphy to the relevant topics of ambiguity and vagueness: recall Cohen’s description of his usage of obscure and blurred source material in studying Israeli nuclear ambiguity.³⁵⁹ It is also interesting to emphasize Bodel’s instructive distinction between ‘broad, clear outlines’ and the ‘enigmatic, obscure nature’ of the Roman epigraphic habit. This is where the intended close reading of this thesis comes into play: studying epigraphy (and ambiguity) requires reading not just the outlines, but between the lines.

The existence of a hard-to-trace, diverse audience is another incentive for studying deliberate ambiguity through epigraphy. Such an audience might necessitate the communication of different messages, perhaps through the same source.³⁶⁰ The epigraphical analysis dedicates special attention to this topic of the intended audience(s). In particular, this chapter focuses on Augustus’ wish for universal *concordia* and his aim to appeal to various audiences. In this thesis so far, I have connected the audience element of deliberate ambiguity

³⁵⁵ Bodel (2001: 7-8), Favro (1996: 183-4), Beard & Henderson (2001: 167).

³⁵⁶ Bodel (2001: 7). On Augustus, epigraphy, and ideology, see also Alföldy (1991) and Cooley (2009: 2). On the specific idea of the Augustan epigraphic revolution, also see Salomies (2001: 79).

³⁵⁷ Elsner (1996: 35).

³⁵⁸ Bodel (2001: 10).

³⁵⁹ Cohen (2010: xiv).

³⁶⁰ Sharkansky (1999: 9).

mainly to Rome's legacy of civil war: first, the legacy of civil war made Rome into a place in which deliberate ambiguity was a possible, perhaps even necessary strategy; because, second, deliberate ambiguity might be a way for a Roman ruler to reconcile various conflicting factions in situations like (the aftermath of) civil wars. We know that Augustus was keen on acquiring universal consent, but did he indeed attempt to achieve this through deliberate ambiguity?³⁶¹

The enigmatic character of the Roman epigraphic habit and its audience also relate to another element of this thesis' framework, namely the control of possibly deliberately ambiguous situations. As we saw in the Introduction, many scholars have sketched an Augustan regime that wanted to communicate one coherent, unified message. The regime wanted to protect this message from possible 'contamination' by other, non-Augustan buildings and even coinage.³⁶² Combining these epigraphical and historical insights, it becomes interesting to assess how, in the specific case of Augustus, inscriptions were used to communicate certain messages. In this respect, the concept of deliberate ambiguity allows for an agent to communicate a message over which he exerts control, but which is nonetheless a plural, complex message, with various intended meanings for various audiences. These meanings, furthermore, not only depend on the texts of the individual inscriptions themselves, but also on their visibility, their related monuments, and their function, which Beard aptly summarized under the definition of the extratextual meaning of inscriptions.³⁶³ Furthermore, besides their meaning derived from extratextuality, the inscriptions discussed here also carry meaning based on intratextuality and intertextuality. Intratextuality, the quality of a text referring to itself, is concerned with relations *within* a text, which is relevant for the *RG*.³⁶⁴ Intertextuality, on the other hand, is about the relations *between* texts and is paramount for the for putting the *RG* and the forum inscriptions into conversation.³⁶⁵

³⁶¹ See e.g. *RG*34.1, '*per consensum universonum*'; *RG*35.1, where Augustus not only named SPQR but also the equestrian order in the enumeration of those who called him '*pater patriae*': '*senatus et equester ordo populusque Romanus universus [appell]avit me patrem patriae*.' Cf. Vell. Pat. 2.91.1, '*Planci sententia consensus universi senatus populiue Romani*', with Cooley (2009: 258). See also Raditsa (1980: 331).

³⁶² This specific notion of possible 'contamination' of the Augustan message is from Favro (2005: 250). Cf. Favro (1996: 8).

³⁶³ Beard (1985: e.g. 115). An instructive Augustan example of the interplay and relations between epigraphy and architecture can be found in Bodel (2001: 27), who described how the Campus Martius sundial and Ara Pacis 'combined to express the triumph of the Augustan peace'. Cf. Favro (1996: 129-30).

³⁶⁴ See e.g. Ramage (1987: 19-20) for an exercise in contrasting various passages *within* the *RG*.

³⁶⁵ See e.g. Geiger (2008: 144) for an argument based on a recurring theme *between* inscriptions of the Forum of Augustus. See Cooley (2009: 2, 6) for the generally important exercise of establishing connections between different inscriptions, and between inscriptions and other types of evidence.

2. *The Res Gestae Divi Augusti*

In a study into the Augustan regime, the ‘queen of inscriptions’ can hardly be ignored.³⁶⁶ Historians have indeed rarely done so: the document in which Augustus listed his achievements, honors, and expenditures is possibly the most often studied ancient document.³⁶⁷ This paragraph is not intended to give a full overview of ‘the achievements of the deified Augustus’,³⁶⁸ but rather discusses the characteristics and previous scholarship that are relevant to the purposes of this thesis. I commence by introducing and justifying the elements of my analysis, in relation to the *RG*’s contents. I then move on to discussing the *RG*’s history, audience, intended messages, Augustus’ control of the *RG*, exploring the relevant history of scholarship in the process.

The analysis of this chapter is divided into two *topoi*, which are related to several recurring themes in the *RG*. Cooley helpfully argued against imposing upon the *RG* the traditional rigid division of *honores* (*RG*1-14), *impensae* (*RG*15-24), and *res gestae* (*RG*25-35), suggesting instead that these three are all related. Put simply, Augustus received several honors (*honores*) for deeds that he performed (*res gestae*) by, or which included, spending (often his own) money (*impensae*).³⁶⁹ Instead, it is more helpful to take note of certain recurring themes or motifs, including world conquest, the supposedly restored Republican government after years of civil war, the restoration of traditional religious practices and buildings, the establishment of the Augustan peace throughout the Mediterranean, and the victory over Antony.³⁷⁰ The contents of the *RG* show some clear similarities to those of the inscriptions of *summi viri* on the Forum of Augustus. Those inscriptions generally consisted of two parts: a smaller *titulus* that described the honorand’s *cursus honorum*, whereas a larger *elogium* recounted the honorand’s *res gestae* in more detail.³⁷¹ In general, these inscriptions focused on the offices one held (as does Augustus in the *RG* – also those he did not have) and the deeds of the Republican men, which often included triumphs or the resolution of internal conflict.³⁷²

The first part of the analysis addresses the issue of the possible attractiveness of deliberate ambiguity for a ruler of a divided state, torn by civil war. In particular, this paragraph

³⁶⁶ Mommsen (1906 [1887]: 247).

³⁶⁷ Bodel (2001: 4).

³⁶⁸ *RG*, heading.

³⁶⁹ Cooley (2009: 34). Cf. Shipley (1924: 336), Ramage (1987: 17-20), Scheid (2007: xxxvi-xliii).

³⁷⁰ Cooley (2009: 2, 3, 4).

³⁷¹ This can be seen on one of the most completely preserved inscriptions: *CIL* XI 1829, belonging to L. Aemilius Paullus (consul in 182 and 168 BC). Cf. Geiger (2008: 151).

³⁷² This does not mean that these elements were present on all inscriptions: this is only based on the extant inscriptions. Cf. Geiger (2008: 122, 139, 142). *RG* parallels to the forum inscriptions include: *RG*6, *RG*7 (offices); *RG*4, *RG*21 (triumphs); *RG*1, *RG*2 (internal conflict).

focuses on the omission of certain names in the *RG* and is supplied by inscriptions from the Augustan forum that focus on the concept of *concordia*. The second part is concerned with the topic of diplomacy and foreign relations, which is an interesting topic to study because of the previous applications of this thesis' central concept: in modern political studies and the study of international relations, deliberate ambiguity is often employed to research diplomatic questions (such as the behavior of the UN Security Council or the Israeli position on its nuclear arsenal). Central to this diplomatic analysis is the famous Parthian episode, in which Augustus managed to retrieve the standards that had been lost by Crassus (53 BC) and Antony's legates (40 BC and 36 BC), which was also an important *topos* for the Augustan forum as a whole.³⁷³

Moving on from the *RG*'s general contents to its material situation, it must be acknowledged that we do not have the original bronze plaque with his achievements which Augustus ordered to be set up at the entrance to the Mausoleum after his death.³⁷⁴ Rather, the text that is nowadays used by historians and epigraphers is based on a copy, found in 1555 by the Dutch scholar Buysbecche, under the auspices of Ferdinand II at modern-day Ankara in Turkey: the *Monumentum Ancyranum*. A fragmentary, bilingual inscription (the original *RG* probably only included a Latin text) on the Temple of Roma and Augustus provided the basis for the first reconstruction of the text. It was later modified in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by subsequent discoveries at Apollonia (modern Uluborlu; only in Greek) and Pisidian Antioch (modern Yalvaç; only in Latin).³⁷⁵ To be sure, because this chapter focuses on the Latin text (since that was the one written and controlled by Augustus), there will be no further detailed discussion of the provincial contexts of the copies and Greek versions.³⁷⁶

The issues of what the *RG* actually wanted to communicate or to achieve and to whom it wanted to send these messages are intimately intertwined. To establish Augustus' aims for the *RG* is no easy task, one that has left scholars shilly-shallying between wanting to establish Augustus' intentions and warning against that very endeavor. Ramage is a good example of this delicate balance, seeing as how he needed a whole book to discuss *The Nature and Purpose of Augustus' 'Res Gestae'*, even though he found that Augustus apparently had a 'fairly clear plan in mind.'³⁷⁷ The notion of this 'fairly clear plan' is all the more remarkable given the fact

³⁷³ Loss of the standards: Dio 48.25, 49.24.5; Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 37.2, 38.5-6, 40.6. Recovery by Augustus: Suet. *Aug.* 21.3.

³⁷⁴ Suet. *Aug.* 101.4. My further introduction of the *RG* is indebted to Edmondson (2009), Cooley (2009), and Shipley (1924).

³⁷⁵ Edmondson (2009: 9); Cooley (2009: 7); Shipley (1924: 334-5).

³⁷⁶ This is not to say that non-urban, non-Roman audience was not important: see Cooley (2009: 18-9; 35) and Yavetz (1984: 8ff.) for a convincing refutation of the historiographical tendency to assume that the text of the *RG* could not have been of interest to anybody outside urban Rome, for which see e.g. Levi (1947: 189).

³⁷⁷ Ramage (1987: 19).

that he found studying the emperor's intentions in composing the *RG* 'a little dangerous'.³⁷⁸

Yavetz argued against this exercise from a wholly different perspective, writing that 'Augustus would not have wished to have his soul searched and his motives scrutinized'.³⁷⁹ His argument is specifically directed against scholars such as Hammond, who have argued for the importance of answering the question 'whether Augustus was a clever but hypocritical politician or a sincere statesman of genius'.³⁸⁰ Yavetz is a clear follower of Syme's stress on Augustus' deeds as a ruthless faction leader, opting not to be distracted by trying to understand Augustus' 'enigmatic personality'.³⁸¹ Neither of these positions strikes me as helpful. Hammond's position seems too close to a value judgment, while I would like to know whether we can thoughtfully interpret Augustus' *RG* as being indicative of deliberate ambiguity – not whether that should be characterized as clever, hypocritical, or ruthless. On the other hand, I believe that scholars like Yavetz and Syme propose too rigid a distinction between intentions and deeds. The *RG* is a perfect example of why these are not isolated from one another, because Augustus composing a narrative of his deeds is a deed in itself, for both of which he must have had intentions. If we accept the possibility that somebody might have been deliberately ambiguous in order to achieve real goals, then studying intentions no longer leads to 'disambiguating simplicity'³⁸², but can help us in appreciating complexity.

The unresolved character of the debate about whether we can or should try to trace Augustus' intentions is in line with the many different interpretations and characterizations of the *RG* itself. It has been seen as Augustus' political will and testament; his preparation for apotheosis; *apologia*; *elogium*; *eiuratio*; statement of accounts; epitaph; or a description of Augustus' political system.³⁸³ These varied characterizations are a great indication of the *RG*'s complexity and a reason why one should not try to grasp the *RG* in one single term or single aim. Indeed, it is precisely the possibility of the existence of multiple (possibly contradictory) aims within the same document which is relevant for this thesis.³⁸⁴ There is one 'unambiguous message' on the presence of which all scholars seem to agree, however: Augustus is presented as the central focus not only of the *RG* but of the whole Roman state.³⁸⁵ This echoes the

³⁷⁸ Ramage (1987: 111).

³⁷⁹ Yavetz (1984: 26). Note the (intended?) irony in Yavetz' statement, as it might be interpreted as scrutinizing Augustus' wish not to have his wishes scrutinized.

³⁸⁰ Hammond (1965: 152).

³⁸¹ Yavetz (1984: 26). For another example of the 'camp' opposing Yavetz, see Firth (1903).

³⁸² Ossa-Richardson (2019: 8).

³⁸³ This enumeration is based upon the summaries provided by Shipley (1924: 337), Ramage (1987: 111), and Cooley (2009: 30).

³⁸⁴ Cooley (2009: 36, 41).

³⁸⁵ The quote is from Cooley (2009: 24). See also e.g. Ramage (1987: 27-8) and Gordon (1968: 132-3).

situation which Ovid observed already 2000 years earlier: *'res est publica Caesar'*.³⁸⁶ When we compare the *RG* to the Forum of Augustus, it might be said that the latter (and its inscriptions) presented an Augustus-approved form of Roman history,³⁸⁷ whereas the former presented an Augustus-approved form of the Augustan principate. As in the *RG*, on his own forum Augustus is presented as the unchallenged, central leader, as evidenced by his *quadriga* statue that was placed in between the gallery of his own family and ancestors and the *summi viri* of the Roman Republic (no. 14 on figure 1).³⁸⁸

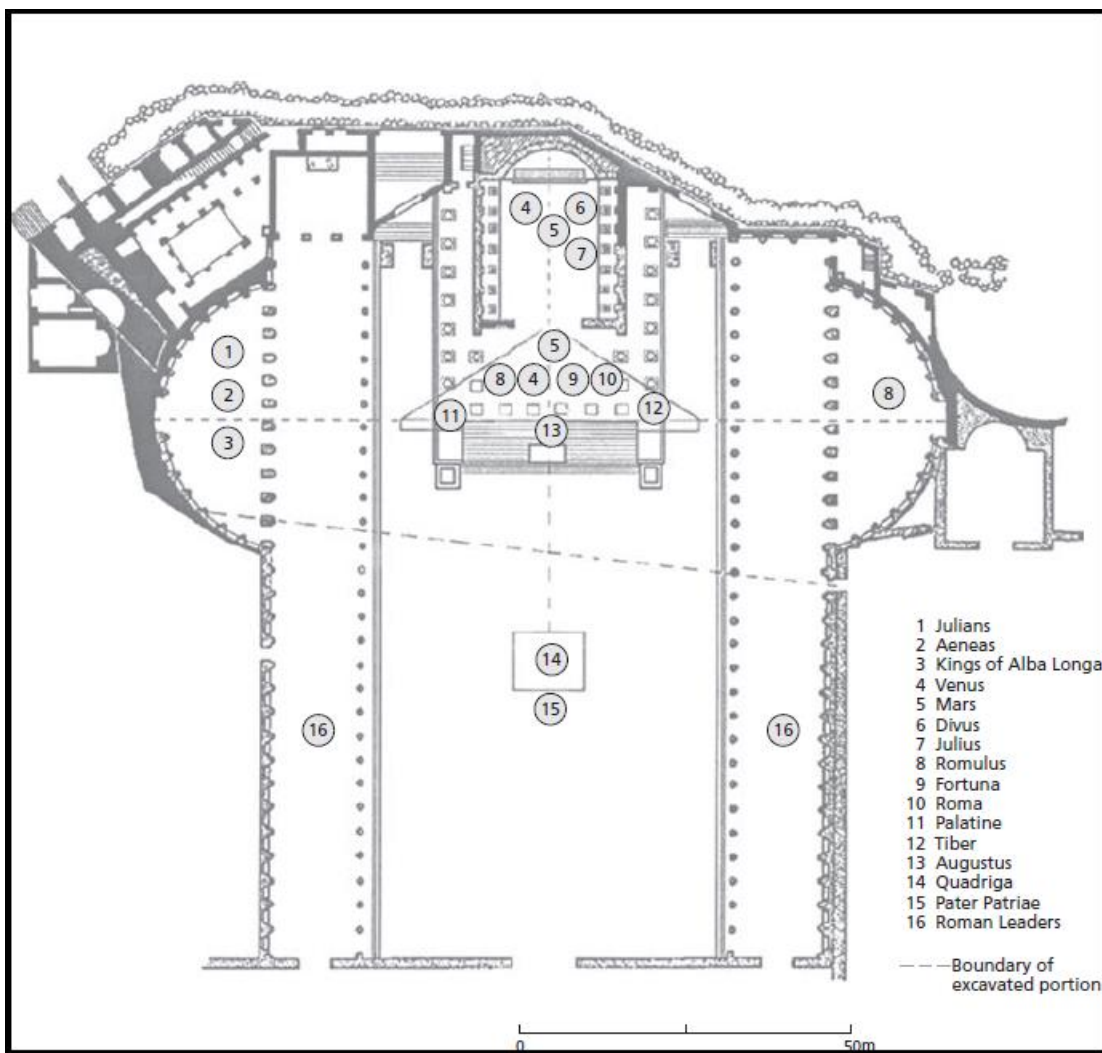


Figure 2. Plan of the Forum of Augustus, after Versluys (2017: 134, figure 3.7).

³⁸⁶ Ov. *Tr.* 4.4.15.

³⁸⁷ Versluys (2017: 132); Zanker (1988: 210ff.).

³⁸⁸ E.g. Shaya (2013).

Augustus' aims in composing the *RG* are as complex as the intended audience of the document.³⁸⁹ Even if we cannot establish the audience conclusively, it is important to at least have an idea of it, since it influence to a large extent the possible meanings and messages of the *RG* one is willing to accept.³⁹⁰ The obvious place to start is with future generations since the *RG* was only made public after Augustus' death.³⁹¹ If one chooses to emphasize this public, then the aim surfaces that Augustus mainly wanted to provide a description and explanation of how his new principate worked. According to Ramage, this would have been easily understood by all Romans in general, but was also directed specifically at Tiberius, Augustus' successor.³⁹²

Cooley, however, writes that the *RG* was addressed by Augustus as much to posterity as to contemporary audiences, which is also part of the justification of using the *RG* for this thesis. It would not be wrong to take the people of Rome as the *RG*'s primary intended audience since the *RG* was instructed to be published outside the Mausoleum. That is not the whole story, however: we already saw that copies were spread to eastern parts of the empire. Furthermore, the subjects of Rome were a diverse group: Augustus addressed or mentioned the Senate, the equestrian order, the people, the common man. He also wanted to be an *exemplum* for the younger members of the higher strata of society. However, freedmen and provincial audiences are conspicuously missing, whereas the population of the Italian peninsula is instead featured several times.³⁹³ The Italian population played an important part in Octavian's civil war effort: Osgood observed that Octavian took care in paying attention to not just the city of Rome, but also to the population of the peninsula. This was an important step in Octavian's eventually successful claim to power, establishing a broad and firm power base.³⁹⁴

In using inscriptions as historical documents, Parca has warned against cultural abstractions and simplified constructs of peoples in documents such as the *RG*: these constructs serve to foster political unity and to override diversity.³⁹⁵ Both aims are reminiscent of Augustus' wish for *concordia*. Augustus might have indeed had multiple audiences in mind. With Parca, we should remember that these groups are always more diverse in reality. In the *RG*, they might have rather been who or what Augustus wanted them to be. This will have influenced what Augustus wanted to communicate and is, therefore, relevant to possible instances of deliberate ambiguity. All in all, we might summarize that Augustus probably

³⁸⁹ Cooley (2009: 35).

³⁹⁰ Yavetz (1984: 14-5).

³⁹¹ Yavetz (1984: 15).

³⁹² Ramage (1987: 113, 115-6).

³⁹³ Cooley (2009: 39-40).

³⁹⁴ Osgood (2006: 2).

³⁹⁵ Parca (2001: 57).

wanted to address all Romans at once, but also left room for specific messages to pertain to specific audiences.

The *RG* is hard to pin down: it is complex in message, content, and audience. According to Cooley, the *RG*'s complexity is partly caused by the fact that Augustus composed a completely original text, which was not based on a single model. Because of this, she argued that Augustus had a lot of freedom in his composition. This may mean that the *RG* is the closest we can get to see how Augustus perceived his own role in the principate.³⁹⁶ This is important to state since it means that Augustus had no restraints in what or how he could write, as opposed to the other sometimes formulaic inscriptions of antiquity, in which one would always expect certain elements.³⁹⁷ Furthermore, it seems that Augustus was not only unrestrained thanks to his self-imposed model, he also was not concerned with providing the truth or an objective version of his accounts.³⁹⁸ Now Augustus was not only unrestrained (compare the US in their sanctions against Iran), he was also unmistakably the one in control of the contents of the text. In any case, if there was indeed deliberate ambiguity in the Latin text of the *RG*, we can quite safely say that it was created or controlled by Augustus himself, or at least those close to him.³⁹⁹ The same is true for the forum inscriptions. At least partly Augustan authorship is inferred from the emphasis on the connections of the *summi viri* to the princeps, most importantly the recurrent mention of the status of *princeps senatus*, which Augustus had been for forty years when he wrote the *RG*.⁴⁰⁰ In other words, there would be no deliberate ambiguity here effected by another, clearly distinct actor. Augustus was in control of the text of the *RG* when it was first published, but it is interesting to imagine what might have happened longer after his death: for example, ambiguity might have become less relevant for this document altogether, not only because the central actor was no longer present on the stage, but also because the specific historical context of civil war and political instability upon which the *RG* built became more and more confined to the past.

The notion of control might be illuminated through a glance at the Greek *πράξεις τε καὶ δῶρα καὶ Σεβαστοῦ θεοῦ*. The Greek version is no word-for-word translation: instead, where necessary, the translator has clearly modified the original Latin text to suit a Greek-speaking

³⁹⁶ Cooley (2009: 34).

³⁹⁷ For an introduction to the different types of inscriptions and their elements, see Sandys (1927) and Gordon (1983).

³⁹⁸ Ridley (2003), Cooley (2009: 35).

³⁹⁹ This is not the same as the saying that any ambiguity in the *RG* would then always be deliberate – that verdict will be based on a consideration of the concept's other elements.

⁴⁰⁰ Geiger (2008: 159-61); *RG7*. A clear indication of the importance of the *princeps senatus* on the forum can be found on Q. Fabius Maximus' *elogium*: *InscrIt.* XIII.3 80.

audience, away from Rome.⁴⁰¹ This modification might be formal, such as in the consistent conversion of currency.⁴⁰² Studying ambiguity, however, would be more relevant in studying translations relating to content, such as the Greek approximations of the Latin word *princeps*.⁴⁰³ In cases like this, ambiguity might have been inserted through a deliberate choice by the translator, or it might have been the consequence of the fact that there was no straightforward translation. Regarding the Greek *RG*, Augustus thus had lesser control of any ambiguous situations, and in some cases none at all.

The fact that Augustus was involved with and in control of the text of the *RG* is also related to the *RG*'s monumental context: the Augustan Mausoleum. As Versluys writes, Octavian planned to have a text added to his Mausoleum after his death.⁴⁰⁴ Since the Mausoleum was finalized in 28 BC, Augustus had 46 years in which he could work on this text. While the text that we have now is still one, definitive version, the *RG* is still connected to the whole of Augustus' reign. Adding the inscriptions of the Forum of Augustus (inaugurated in 2 BC) to the analysis of the *RG* serve to enhance this connection. From a source perspective, if the coins from Chapter III presented a continuous, dynamic picture of the Augustan principate, then the forum inscriptions and the *RG* serve as helpful landmarks within and at the end of that continuity.

3. *Call It What You Want? The Omission of Names and Smoothing over Tensions*

One of the most conspicuous features of the *RG* is the fact that few persons are mentioned by name. Augustan rivals and enemies will not find any direct mention of their names. His family members are in general only named if they are directly connected to Augustus' own efforts, and Augustus' own name is only mentioned in the passage where he receives that honorific.⁴⁰⁵ The only other direct names serve no other purpose than time-keeping: their consulships indicate when Augustus performed his deeds.⁴⁰⁶ It is thus from the start important to recognize that there is indeed a general tendency to omit names from the *RG*, but is no simple tendency, since it concerns so many different people from opposing camps.

Let us start at the beginning of the *RG*, where Augustus claimed to have liberated the

⁴⁰¹ Wigtil (1982a) and (1982b).

⁴⁰² E.g. RG15, with Wigtil (1982a: 192).

⁴⁰³ E.g. RG13, with Cooley (2009: 272) and Wigtil (1982b: 632, 637).

⁴⁰⁴ Versluys (2017: 127).

⁴⁰⁵ Shipley (1924: 336-7); RG34.2.

⁴⁰⁶ E.g. RG8.3, 'C(ai)o Censorino [et C(ai)o] Asinio co(n)s(ulibus)', to date the second time that Augustus held a census to 8 BC.

state, ‘which had been oppressed by a despotic faction.’⁴⁰⁷ Usually, and understandably, this ‘*dominatione factionis*’ is taken to refer to Mark Antony, Augustus’ nemesis.⁴⁰⁸ However, in this case, the reference in the Latin is not made by a noun that refers directly to a person (*hostes*, *homo*) but by a collective noun (*factio*). There are several translations for this noun, with different connotations. The Lewis & Short dictionary provides two basic meanings: the ‘making’, ‘doing’, or ‘preparing’ of something, or indeed, those meanings related to ‘faction’ (‘a company of persons associated or acting together’). Cooley remarks that more than one meaning may apply at the same time.⁴⁰⁹ This is exactly the definition of ambiguity, but I believe the ambiguity is not necessarily related to the two possible translations of *factio*. As I take it, the ambiguity would rather be located in the translation that sees *factio* as a group of persons. It might be taken to refer to the whole group, but it might also be taken to refer to the head of a group – *in casu* Antony – as a *pars pro toto*.

So why would Augustus refer to Antony in a ‘roundabout’ way, instead of calling him by his name or choosing a singular noun?⁴¹⁰ The answer, Cooley argues, must be sought in the ‘topsy-turvy political situation’, which I described in Chapter II.⁴¹¹ An example of this is an event in which, when a struggle for power was going on between two Caesarians, one of them, Octavian, with the help of Hirtius and Pansa, was trying to liberate a conspirator, D. Iunius Brutus Albinus.⁴¹² From this perspective, the uncertainty carried by *factio* is simply reflective of the unclear political situation: the groups were not as neatly distinguished as one might think. I would like to add to this that the omission of Antony’s name (disregarding for a moment the specific substitute) might serve an actual purpose. By omitting Antony’s name, Augustus leaves open the possibility that Antony, as a person, or his *gens*, is *not* the definition of the evil against which he prevailed. One of Antony’s sons, who thus also carried his *nomen*, Iullus Antonius, is perhaps the most tangible example of this. Partly raised by Octavia, he was praetor in 13 BC and consul in 10 BC.⁴¹³ Augustus seems to have thought quite highly of him.⁴¹⁴ Also of relevance is the fact that Antony had his ties to Augustus’ family through his children with Octavia: the two Antoniae, who carried their father’s *nomen gentilicium*. Additionally, the popular young general Germanicus was Antony’s grandson through the Younger Antonia; he

⁴⁰⁷ RG1.1.

⁴⁰⁸ An unequivocal formulation of this idea can be found in Shipley (1924: 347).

⁴⁰⁹ Cooley (2009: 108).

⁴¹⁰ Ramage (1987: 26-7); Cooley (2009: 150, 212). Also see Rowan (2019: 123-5) for a discussion of disguised numismatic references to Antony.

⁴¹¹ Cooley (2009: 108).

⁴¹² Vell. Pat. 2.61.4

⁴¹³ Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 87.1.

⁴¹⁴ Vell. Pat. 2.100.4; Dio 51.15.7.

was possibly considered an heir to the throne judging on Tiberius' adoption of him in AD 4.⁴¹⁵ The Antonii and their supporters had the advantage of not having their name directly associated with the charge of despotism from the *RG*, while everybody else would still know to whom Augustus was referring. The use of the word *factio* thus can be said to have enabled Augustus to make a relatively clear reference to Antony, without at the same time alienating or estranging possibly useful members or allies of that family, and taking into account the heritage of some prominent members of his own family. Augustus took much care to ensure and communicate the *concordia* of his families, both that of the Roman state and the Julio-Claudian house. Blemishing the reputation of some of the family's heritage would not have fitted that endeavor. To recall the previous chapter, Augustus' approach to Antony's house and children is what has led to me propose that Selene's aims of asserting her connections to both Antony and Augustus, as evidenced by her coinage, should not be seen as conflicting. One of the most popular Romans of the time, Germanicus, shared this double connection.

Interestingly enough, Cooley writes that, whereas Augustus early on called for strong retaliation against the conspirators, a possibility for conciliation was left open by Antony with through equivocation.⁴¹⁶ This is an instructive word, meaning either 'to use equivocal language especially with the *intent* to deceive' or 'to avoid committing oneself in what one says'.⁴¹⁷ This seems very reminiscent of the ambiguity intended to communicate hidden criticism, or of equal-level ambiguities. With regard to the conspirators, Augustus also chooses to omit their names, instead writing 'those who killed my father'.⁴¹⁸ The difference between Antony and Augustus is, I would say, that Antony's equivocation was directed at reconciliation with the conspirators themselves, whereas Augustus' equivocation (that is, not directly mentioning the assassins of his father) was directed at the conspirators' families. Many of those who participated in the assassination were high standing members of ancient Republican families, especially the Junii and the Cassii. Regarding those specific families, it is conceivable that Augustus would not have wanted to alienate the *gens* that traced back its origins to the first consul of the Roman Republic (Lucius Brutus), which Augustus tried to uphold, or to estrange another *gens* that could provide capable magistrates. For instance, a Lucius Cassius Longinus served as consul in AD 11, an M. Junius Silanus together with Augustus in 25 BC. As context, it is relevant to note that Augustus often held no consulship at all, or only for a few months,

⁴¹⁵ Levick (1966). His heritage is recounted in Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 87.3.

⁴¹⁶ Cooley (2009): 114-5).

⁴¹⁷ Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/equivocate> (accessed May 22nd, 2019).

⁴¹⁸ *RG*2.1.

and forced the other consul to also step down after half a year, so as to ensure that the high office was spread among as many families as possible.⁴¹⁹ That Augustus tried to show his ties to republic through certain families, is also evident from the fact that he was very close to (and even saw as a possible successor) C. Calpurnius Piso, who was known to be a staunch Republican.⁴²⁰

After Antony and the conspirators, a third enemy remains. Even the family of this second-to-last rival was allowed into the imperial bureaucracy: in Augustus' final year, a Sextus Pompey served as consul.⁴²¹ In the *RG*, the Sextus Pompey is referred to, but not mentioned by name, when Augustus recounts his victory over pirates.⁴²² This is in line with the indirect references to Antony and the conspirators. However, one of the very few names that the *RG* does include, is 'Pompeius': Augustus claimed to have restored the temple of Pompey the Great.⁴²³ This should not be seen as an anomaly: names are mostly omitted if they pertain to negative events, but are included if they are related to Augustus own projects, often the (re)construction of buildings. The omission of Sextus' *nomen* only becomes more logical considering that an image of Pompey the Great was present at Augustus' funeral and that he was probably also included among the forum's *summi viri*.⁴²⁴ The *nomen gentilicium* 'Pompeius' was thus important to Augustus, who might have tried to emulate Pompey the Great⁴²⁵: by referring to Sextus Pompey as part of a group, he could denounce his former adversary *without* blemishing his family's name.

*RG*1.1 (Antony's faction), *RG*2.1 (the conspirators), and *RG*6 (Sextus' pirates) share one feature: even if certain members are unquestionable, they refer to a *group*, to several persons.⁴²⁶ This is different from another famous name omission in the *RG*: when Augustus addresses his tenure as *pontifex maximus*, we do not hear 'Lepidus', the name of his predecessor.⁴²⁷ In this paragraph, Lepidus is referred to as '[c]onle[gae mei]' and simply with the pronoun 'eo'. Here, there cannot be ambiguity as to whom Augustus is referring: there was only one person who was *pontifex maximus* directly before Augustus. This omission can thus not have had the same purpose through the same tactic of deliberate ambiguity as the omissions

⁴¹⁹ Eder (1990: 114), Brunt (1984: 431), Gruen (2005: 36). On suffect consuls under Augustus in general, see Phillips (1997).

⁴²⁰ Eder (1990: 108) and (2005: 27).

⁴²¹ It is this Sextus Pompey to whom Ovid dedicates several poems: *Ov. Pont.* 4.1, 4.4, 4.5.

⁴²² *RG*25.

⁴²³ *RG*20.

⁴²⁴ Augustus' funeral: Dio 56.34.3; inclusion in the gallery: Geiger (2008: 128), with further references.

⁴²⁵ Cooley (2009: 33).

⁴²⁶ It should be noted, however, that there is one singular reference to Antony: *RG*24.1, '[is] cum quo bellum gesseram', 'the man against whom I had waged war'.

⁴²⁷ *RG*10.2.

concerning Antony, the conspirators, and Sextus, as they referred to multiple people. However, the goal of preventing alienation of possibly helpful family members might be present also in this case: for instance, a M. Aemilius Lepidus, a grand nephew of the triumvir, was consul in AD 6. Additionally, the *consul ordinarius* of AD 11 was M'. Aemilius Lepidus. According to Tacitus, in Augustus' eyes, this Manius was 'capable but disdainful' of becoming princeps.⁴²⁸

Just like there was only one Lepidus, there was also only one Julius Caesar who was Augustus' adoptive father. As with his rivals and enemies, Augustus prefers not to call his father by his name.⁴²⁹ The only time that we read 'Julius', is when he is needed as the divine namesake of a temple. Even in those cases, however, Augustus remains the center of attention.⁴³⁰ Ramage even called this anonymity a 'denigration' by Augustus of Julius Caesar, suggesting that Augustus wanted to subtly show that he was different than his father.⁴³¹ His father, the *dictator perpetuo*, took the state for himself, whereas Augustus in the *RG* is keen on emphasizing that he refused non-traditional powers and instead gave back the state to the Roman Senate and people.⁴³² In any case, as with Lepidus, there is one clear antecedent of the references to Julius Caesar, so whatever Augustus tried to accomplish with the references to his father, it was not through deliberate ambiguity.

It is worthwhile to note here that this is a good argument against seeing one coherent, continuous imperial program. In the previous chapter, we saw that Octavian/Augustus included clear connections to his adoptive father, even including the inscription *DICT PEPT* on a coin which also sported Octavian. On another note, it might have very well been the case that Augustus used his forum (2 BC) to further legitimize his special position, without appearing unroman. By stressing Marius' seven consulates, for example, Augustus tried to establish a 'precedent of the unprecedented'.⁴³³ The inclusion of M. Valerius Corvus (who might have had up to six consulates), who became consul at an usually young age, might have served the same aim.⁴³⁴ In other words, it was not unusual for a Roman leader to receive unusual honors or offices – and, thus, that Augustus was justified in writing that he accepted no offices contrary to established practice.

The different cases in which Augustus chose to omit names in the *RG* show that this

⁴²⁸ Tac. *Ann.* 1.13. Manius was thus included under a category of '*suffecturi abnuerent*', 'competent and disinclined'.

⁴²⁹ E.g. *RG*2: '*parentem meum*'; *RG*10.2: '*pater meus*'; *RG*15.1: '*patris meus*'.

⁴³⁰ Ramage (1987: 27); *RG*19.1, *RG*21.2.

⁴³¹ Ramage (1985: 226).

⁴³² *RG*6.1, *RG*34.1.

⁴³³ Marius: *CIL* VI.8.3 40957, with Geiger (2008: 155); for the 'precedent of the unprecedented', see Geiger (2008: 139).

⁴³⁴ Corvus' inclusion is inferred from Aulus Gellius' observation of the forum in *Gell.* 9.11.10.

preference was no simple, monolithic *damnatio memoriae*. The persons who had their names omitted and their references obscured were different: they were conspirators, a previous ally and later enemy, a previous ally and later rival, and even the princeps' own father. In the cases of Antony, the conspirators, and Sextus, I would submit that Augustus' omission can be considered deliberately ambiguous since it enabled him to refer both directly to the murderers of his father and his arch nemesis, without alienating possibly other helpful family members. Without ambiguity, it would not have been possible to achieve these conflicting aims at the same time. It is also interesting to contrast the omission of names in the *RG* with Ovid's treatment of names in the *Tristia* as observed by Oliensis.⁴³⁵ In her case, Ovid created a deliberately ambiguous situation by mentioning a 'superabundance' of names, whereas Augustus created an ambiguous situation precisely by omitting them. This reflects the poet's and princeps' distinct aims: Ovid's ambiguity, one of safe criticism or possibly exclusive equal level, was meant to evade responsibility; Augustus' ambiguity to foster *concordia*.

In the cases of Augustus' enemies, the ambiguity is situated in the existence of two possible interpretations – the group as a whole or certain individual constituents of that group. It does not seem to be the case that any meaning is hidden: Augustus would still have wanted to denounce his former enemies and would have wanted people to know who they are. This case of deliberate ambiguity should probably be seen as one of inclusive equal level: both interpretations of the group as a whole or an individual constituent are not distinguished, and both have to remain possible for Augustus' aims to be achieved at the same time. This is what sets these situations apart from exclusive equal level, in which one meaning would still be preferred, depending on the situation. I argue that there is no such dependence at play here: Augustus wanted to denounce his former enemies to *everybody*, and at the same time wanted to prevent denouncing some of his own family members and possibly helpful family members of his former enemies, also to *everybody*. Finally, it might be added that in this case, at least the audience of relevant relatives of the enemies were intended to be aware of the ambiguity: it is hard to imagine that they would not know to whom Augustus was referring, but for not feeling attacked, they would have to accept the capacity of a collective noun like *factio* or pronouns like *qui* and *eos* to lessen the impact on or reference to their families. For this to work, it might also be added that the rest of audience would not have to equate the actions of Augustus' enemies with their family names, which might have been effected through the choice for those collective nouns and pronouns. A decisive answer to the question whether the

⁴³⁵ Oliensis (1997).

ambiguity here was *created* by Augustus' use of the or whether such a capacity is inherent to these words would require more rigorous linguistic analysis.

The establishment of *concordia* is a paramount theme for Augustus.⁴³⁶ This is very much visible on his own forum: in the monumental context, in the inclusions of some Republicans, and in some individual inscriptions. In the monumental context, the harmony presented by the princeps might be seen in three steps: first, a clear, concordant Julio-Claudian family on one side; second, a clear, concordant collection of Republican heroes; which were both, third, united by the *pater patriae* in the middle of the forum. We already saw that Pompey was perhaps included, but it is interesting to note that arch enemies Marius and Sulla were both included, leading Shaya to observe a 'simple unity' on the forum.⁴³⁷ As far as particular stories are concerned, the most telling are those of Q. Fabius Maximus Cunctator, Papirius Cursor, Q. Caecilius Metellus Numidicus, Marius, and P. Cornelius Scipio Africanus.⁴³⁸ They all present internal challenges to the supreme leader, who in the end resolved the conflict, just as Augustus does.⁴³⁹ These inscriptions do not serve to further explicate character of the *RG*'s deliberate ambiguity, but rather to press the importance of the triumphing over struggle (establishing *concordia*, in Augustan terms). In the *elogia* of Cunctator, Cursor, and Metellus, the adversaries are mentioned by name. In those of Marius and Africanus, the names are omitted, perhaps in a style similar to the *RG*.⁴⁴⁰ Marius fought against L. Apuleius Saturninus and G. Servilius Glaucia.⁴⁴¹ Africanus was challenged by two Q. Petilii.⁴⁴² All their families had some importance pertaining to Augustus' principate: three Appuleii served as consul (29 BC, together with Octavian; 20 BC; 14 AD); the Servilii were a prominent family in the earlier days of the Republic (compare the omission Brutus' family name) and an M. Servilius served as consul in 3 AD; and a specific Petilius carried the *cognomen* Capitolinus, who served as a guardian of the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline during Augustus' principate.

The *RG* and the inscriptions of the forum aim to denounce the adversaries to the man in power without denouncing their family, either because of the family's prominence or Republican status, and/or because of the importance of certain family members to Augustus (in an administrative or familial sense). Only in the cases of Antony, the conspirators, and Sextus Pompey can these omissions be said to constitute deliberate ambiguity; in all other

⁴³⁶ Breed, Damon & Rossi (2010); Osgood (2015: 1691).

⁴³⁷ Marius: *CIL* VI.8.3 40957; Sulla: *CIL* VI.8.3 40951; Shaya (2013: 89).

⁴³⁸ *InscrIt.* XIII.3 80; *CIL* VI 1318; *CIL* VI.40942; *CIL* VI.8.3 40957; *CIL* VI.8.3 40948.

⁴³⁹ Geiger (2008: 147-8).

⁴⁴⁰ Geiger (2008: 154-5).

⁴⁴¹ App. *Bel. Civ.* 1.28-33.

⁴⁴² Liv. 38.50, 38.53-6.

cases, they did not, since all substitutes for names had singular, clear references. Finishing off, it is interesting to emphasize that Augustus may have tried to achieve similar aims through different tactics, which shows that the achievement of conflicting aims does not *necessitate* deliberate ambiguity, which may be seen as a mirror image of the fact that, as we saw in the previous chapter with the Agrippa association, deliberate ambiguity can also be employed to achieve a singular, non-conflicting aim.

4. *Ambiguity Abroad: Augustus' Foreign Affairs in the Res Gestae*

The *topos* of diplomacy and relation to foreign peoples features prominently in the *RG*. In *RG*25-33, Augustus describes his activities outside the Italian peninsula. Current applications of deliberate ambiguity are often concerned with diplomacy and international relations, but that is not the only reason to study Augustan foreign policy through the lens of that concept. As Cooley observed, 'The distinction between a request for friendship and submission through conquest was not always clearly preserved in the popular imagination'.⁴⁴³ If there was indeed an unclear distinction between friendships requests and submission, then this constitutes a fertile ground for either vagueness or ambiguity (depending on the intelligibility of and distinction between the two options) – all the more because this lack of distinction seems to already have existed in the minds of the audience. It is important to emphasize that ambiguity, in this case, would not have been created by Augustus. Instead, here we see an example of an actor employing possibly existing ambiguity. This is not to say that he might not take care to increase the ambiguity or vagueness of the situation. On a general level, this is exactly what Augustus might have done: the already blurred nature of foreign war is further exacerbated through a blurring with civil war.⁴⁴⁴ After Antony's last stand at Actium,⁴⁴⁵ the Roman Senate had the gates of war at the Temple of Janus shut, which stressed the achievement of peace throughout the whole empire, on both land and sea.⁴⁴⁵ In other words, the victory in civil war was put under the common denominator of imperial conquest.

Let us start with perhaps the most famous episode of foreign policy in the Augustan period: the recovery of the Roman standards from the Parthians in 20 BC. Augustus is unambiguous in the *RG*: he retrieved the military standards by a show of strength. 'I compelled the Parthians to give back to me spoils and standards of three Roman armies and humbly to

⁴⁴³ Cooley (2009: 249).

⁴⁴⁴ Osgood (2015: 1690).

⁴⁴⁵ *RG*13.

request the friendship of the Roman people.⁴⁴⁶ Suetonius seems to take this at face value, as does Velleius Paterculus.⁴⁴⁷ However, Augustus, in fact, managed to acquire the standards through a combination of good fortune and smart employment of Parthian succession quarrels.⁴⁴⁸ How exactly Augustus exploited this situation need not concern us here; what is more relevant is the discrepancy between Augustus' presentation of the story and 'reality'.⁴⁴⁹

The official Roman version of the story was quite clear: Augustus, without bloodshed but through dominance, managed to force the Parthians to return the Roman standards and have them supplicate for the Romans' friendship. Ancient historians, contemporary and later, followed this version, as did certain poets.⁴⁵⁰ The scene of a barbarian king returning the standards to a Roman officer was also famously printed on Augustus' cuirass on his Prima Porta statue.⁴⁵¹ Augustus' success was also linked to monuments, such as the Temple of Mars Ultor on his own forum.⁴⁵² Augustus communicated one clear message to his Roman (or Latin) audience. However, the Parthians *knew* that Augustus had instead been, first, lucky to encounter a kingdom troubled by dynastic struggles, and second, smart enough, rather than forceful, to exploit this situation. A diplomatic success it was nonetheless, but Rich is probably right in modestly referring to it as a 'settlement'.⁴⁵³ It might be said that, through his actions, opting for cunning diplomacy instead of military prowess, Augustus communicated a different message to the Parthians, namely that he was a leader with whom one could negotiate.

At this point, all ingredients for deliberate ambiguity seem to be present. Augustus had one story to twist, two different messages that he could communicate to two different audiences (Romans and Parthians), in a context that already had unclear boundaries between friendship and conquest. As the one in charge of foreign policy and of imperial communication, it also seems reasonable to postulate that Augustus could seize control of those boundaries. However, in my opinion, the specific communication in the *RG* constitutes no instance of deliberate ambiguity. This is because the *RG* itself did not communicate those two different messages at

⁴⁴⁶ *RG*29.2.

⁴⁴⁷ Suet. *Aug.* 21.3; Vell. Pat. 2.94.4. See also 2.101-2 for the fact that Paterculus was an eyewitness to the story that he recounts here.

⁴⁴⁸ Cooley (2009: 243). A primary narrative of this can be found in Dio 51.18.2-3, 53.33.1-2, 54.8.1. Cf. *RG*32, in which Augustus presents his relations with the Parthians.

⁴⁴⁹ Rich (1998: 73).

⁴⁵⁰ Cooley (2009: 243) notes for instance Ov. *Fast.* 5.579-96 and Hor. *Carm.* 4.15.6-8.

⁴⁵¹ Van der Vin (1981). Cf. Beard & Henderson (2001: 215-6) and Versluys (2017: 225-6). The statue of this thesis' cover image is a twentieth-century copy of the Prima Porta statue.

⁴⁵² Rich (1998). The Temple of Mars Ultor is often thought to be linked to Octavian's victory over the conspirators at Philippi (after which it was dedicated, cf. Suet. *Aug.* 29.1), but for instance Ovid also saw an additional connection to the Parthian episode: Ov. *Fast.* 5.595, with Geiger (2008: 55, 65).

⁴⁵³ Rich (1998: *passim*).

the same time: Augustus instead communicated his different messages at *different times* and through *different means* (statues, coins, deliberation with the Parthians), without the need for one ambiguous statement or document. The *RG* was not intended to inform the Parthians that Augustus was a trustworthy negotiator and the Romans that he was a strong ruler, at the same time. Why, then, is it important to discuss this? I admit that this does not advance our knowledge on Augustus and the Parthians. However, by locating the elements necessary for something to be considered deliberately ambiguous, we are advancing our knowledge and use of this specific concept – if we know when and why situations are not (deliberately) ambiguous, it may help us to better discern and demonstrate situations that are, and prevent all too liberal labelling.

If we return to modern applications of the concept, Augustus' Parthian diplomacy can be meaningfully compared to Israel's nuclear ambiguity. In both cases, both actors had conflicting aims that they wanted to communicate to conflicting or at least different audiences. In the Israeli case, it was *observed* by Cohen in source material explicitly setting out such as policy⁴⁵⁴; in the Augustan case, it can be *inferred* from the two different versions of the story. Augustus wanted to be a forceful, uncompromising ruler to the Romans and, at the same time, a reasonable, willing negotiator to the Parthians. The Israeli government wants to prove its strength to their domestic audience by having a nuclear arsenal, but wants to appease or not further enrage a foreign audience by *not* having a nuclear arsenal. For a more grounded and corroborated qualification of Augustus' Parthian diplomacy (and perhaps his diplomacy in general) as deliberately ambiguous, the diplomacy should be studied as a whole. The specific communication in the *RG* would nonetheless be an important part of such a study.

For now, this comparison can help us in at least conceptualizing the deliberate ambiguity of the Parthian diplomacy. If the comparison with Israeli *amimut* is indeed veritable, a course of deliberate ambiguity in the Parthian diplomacy can be seen as an interesting problematization of the difference between equal-level ambiguity and an ambiguity of hidden meaning. In both cases, both interpretations of the Augustan and Israeli stances are to be perceived, but only by their intended, separated audiences. This means that there is no absolute hierarchy between the interpretations, which is why there is no exclusive equal-level ambiguity. In the typology discussed in Chapter I, equal-level ambiguities were described as a situation in which both interpretations would be visible, as opposed to ambiguities of hidden meanings. I do not want to break down this typology, but rather use the types to suggest an

⁴⁵⁴ Cohen (2010).

addition to it. In the case of the Parthian diplomacy and Israeli *amimut*, an ambiguity of inclusive hidden meanings can be observed: both meanings are intended to be ‘equally’ correct, but the presentation of them as such should only be known to the actor effecting deliberate ambiguity. The meaning for the one audience should be hidden from the other audience. In that sense, the ambiguity can also be called ‘exclusive’: not in the sense that the one meaning excludes the other from being true, but rather that one audience is excluded from one specific meaning. It should also be clear that, ideally, the actor does not want the audience to be aware of the ambiguity in general, which would enable the audience to doubt the specific message intended for them.

Admittedly, it is imaginable that the Parthians would not have really cared about Augustus’ presentation of his leadership towards his own people, as long he remained somebody with whom they could negotiate. This leads me to another interesting point about the comparison made here: the connection to ‘reality’ or ‘truth’ of ambiguity. In the case of Israeli *amimut*, the two intended hidden meanings can clearly not both be true. Israel cannot have and not have a nuclear arsenal at the same time. The ambiguity of the situation lies in Israel’s policy of communication about it. On the contrary, Augustus’ simultaneous leadership capacities of ruthlessness and negotiation can exist in one person. In this case, the situation is not that both capacities cannot be true in general, but that they cannot have been true at the same specific show of leadership. This implies a contradiction between ruthlessness and a willingness to negotiate, which might not be shared by everyone, but seeing as how Augustus’ presentation to the Romans differed so much from how he probably actually behaved, the princeps himself might have seen the two as contradictory. To finish this section about the Parthian diplomacy, we might return to Cooley’s remark cited at the beginning of this paragraph. She noted a lack of clear distinction between ‘a request for friendship’ and ‘conquest through submission’. As Augustus presents it in the *RG*, he forced the Parthians to return the spoils and to seek the friendship of the Roman people.⁴⁵⁵ On the surface, this might be read as a combination of ‘request’ and ‘conquest’, but I would say it is not: Augustus means to show strength here, and only strength. Indeed, adding a final complication, I would say that Augustus aimed at establishing a clear(er) distinction. There was a possibility to engage creatively with these concepts, since they had no clear boundaries in the Roman perception. Augustus tried to disambiguate this situation, at least for his Roman subjects (who were intended to observe Augustus’ dominance, not his talent for negotiation), by entertaining a higher course of

⁴⁵⁵ *RG*29.

deliberate ambiguity, of which only his regime should really be aware. In this case, devising policy would be clearly of more interest than its realization: the latter's failure is well known.

With regard to the *topos* of diplomacy and foreign conquest, there are two statements of further interest. The first of these concerns Augustus' own involvement, the second concerns the foreign passages as a whole. In *RG*32, Augustus sums up the Parthian kings that fled to him as suppliants.⁴⁵⁶ According to Cooley, the *RG* prioritizes Augustus' own personal relationship with foreign leaders and envoys over the Roman Empire's relationship with them. In the *RG*, we can almost see Augustus struggling with how to describe the relationship between Rome and other polities: '*amicitiam meam et populi Romani*' (26.4), '*amicitiam populi Romani*' (29.2), and, '*amicitiam nostram*' (32.3). This last instance is important, since, according to Cooley, it is written 'perhaps in a deliberately vague fashion.'⁴⁵⁷

What exactly is vague from this statement we do not learn. I presume that she means that it is unclear to whom 'our' must refer. By inserting himself into the relation of friendship between Rome and foreign polities, Cooley argues, Augustus breaks the tradition that the Senate had an important role in welcoming envoys. However, in this specific instance, would it not be possible for *nostram* to refer both to the Roman Senate and to Augustus himself? Whether or not this was successful is a different question, but it seems conceivable that Augustus wanted to assume a prominent role for himself in these foreign relations (we saw before that Augustus is very keen on stressing his unique, central leadership), while the Senate formed an important audience for the *RG*. Additionally, it is known that Augustus, while being the one in charge, was keen to include the Senate in his rhetoric and policy – for example, to legitimize his rule and corroborate his claims to have restored the republic.⁴⁵⁸ The inscriptions of the Forum of Augustus, as we saw above, often included a reference to the status of princeps *senatus*, the importance of which for Augustus is corroborated by the *RG*. This status might be reflective of Augustus' relationship with the Senate is general: aligning with the traditionally Republican body, but nonetheless stressing his own primacy.

If we are to characterize this '*amicitiam nostram*' as deliberate ambiguity, we also have to accept that there is another, very specific audience: Augustus himself. In this case, we might say that Augustus was both sender and (part of the) audience, just as Juba, Selene, and Rhoemetalces were also their own audience. The deliberately ambiguous situation might be summarized as follows. Augustus wants to be central to the diplomatic efforts of the Roman

⁴⁵⁶ *RG*32.1.

⁴⁵⁷ Cooley (2009: 25).

⁴⁵⁸ Osgood (2015: 1688), Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 77-84).

state (for his own sake, but also communicating it to a wider audience), without at the same time alienating the Senate, who have traditionally played the central role in these affairs. He chooses the word *nostram*, which can refer to the Senate and the Roman people, including or excluding Augustus.⁴⁵⁹ If we follow the distinction between vague and ambiguous set out in the framework, this statement would only be vague if we would not know to whom *nostram* could refer at all. Instead, it seems to me that there are no other options than either SPQR, or SPQR *and* Augustus, and I would thus prefer to call this ambiguous. A further specification of this ambiguity might go as follows. Augustus, the actor of ambiguity here, would probably prefer the interpretation that includes himself, which might indicate some sort of hierarchy and thus exclusivity. However, he does want the other possibility, an interpretation limited to SPQR, to be observed as well, which would instead point to inclusivity. Alternatively, which is perhaps more likely, he knows that Senate would be aware of Augustus' membership of the word *nostram* and already be satisfied by the fact that Augustus does not (nominally) monopolize the foreign relations department. If that is the case, then the ambiguity would only be relevant if it were directed at those people who were to believe that Augustus, guardian of traditions, let the Senate conduct foreign affairs, as the *mores* demanded.

For something that is truly vague, we might consider one specific diplomatic fragment from the *RG*: in the same chapter, Augustus writes about the good faith of the Roman people, embassies and friendship for '*plurimaeque aliae gentes*', 'very many other peoples'.⁴⁶⁰ Cooley is right in characterizing this as a 'very vague statement'.⁴⁶¹ The fact that we can only guess and not adamantly champion one or another interpretation, disqualifies this statement from being ambiguous: for it to qualify as ambiguous, tangible possibilities would have needed to exist. This should be seen as an indication of the importance of conceptual clarity: Cooley calls two utterances 'vague', while on closer inspection, they have proven to be quite different in nature and content.

The vague character of the foreign passages (*RG*25-33) in general proves an interesting challenge to the clear distinction that I have put forward between ambiguity and vagueness. The seemingly endless enumeration of lands, waters, kings, and tribes that Augustus has conquered is very likely intended simply to impress observers of the *RG*.⁴⁶² Indeed, the enumeration might be intended to achieve this impression through a deliberate confusion.

⁴⁵⁹ Or could it perhaps refer *only* to the Augustus, interpreting *nostram* as a *pluralis majestatis*?

⁴⁶⁰ *RG*32.3.

⁴⁶¹ Cooley (2009: 255).

⁴⁶² Cooley (2019: 249).

Besides their sheer number and exotic names, they are also presented in a disorderly fashion: there seems to be no geographical ordering, nor is any dating provided.⁴⁶³ These facts deprive the passages of a large degree of certainty and thus disqualify the passages as a whole from being deliberately ambiguous. It is still interesting, however, that there seems to be deliberate vagueness at play here. Boasting much while detailing little, Augustus eludes factual accountability while opening up the possibility of receiving praise for his foreign deeds: this is an important aim that can be achieved through ambiguity, but apparently also through vagueness. In other words, the confusion as to what *exactly* Augustus did abroad might have been so great, that only praise was intended to be left as an appropriate response.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶³ Claassen (2019: 2-3).

⁴⁶⁴ Through a reading of *Op. Tr.* 2.173ff., however, Claassen (2019: 3) shows that at least one observer was not so impressed.

Conclusion

This thesis revolved around the following question: *to what extent can Augustus and his regime be seen as trying to deliberately create or exploit ambiguous situations to achieve certain ends?*

The question was deliberately open-ended: a yes or no would never suffice. I aimed to provide a thoughtful answer through a thorough examination of and, based on that examination, a solid framework of (deliberate) ambiguity. This framework united various insights from previous scholarly literature in international relations and literary studies. It consisted of the following elements: a basic definition of ambiguity and a distinction with vagueness; Van der Velden's literary typology about surface meanings, hidden meanings and equal-level ambiguity; the establishment of intention of an agent; the conflict between various aims that an agent may have had; the control of ambiguous situations; and a consideration of the audience.

Before the analysis, I explored the origins of Augustan ambiguity. Through a discussion that focused on the legacy of civil war and the blurring of public and private, it became clear that rapid political developments were accompanied by innovations in material culture, both of which caused increasing uncertainty and decreasing *concordia*. Increasing uncertainty, I suggested, could be a context in which a leader might successfully employ deliberate ambiguity, because of the existence of many different meanings in general, provided that he was able to exert control over those meanings. Decreasing *concordia* was a problem that could possibly be tackled through deliberate ambiguity.

I then related this discussion to Augustan architecture. In this bit, I further explored the connection between architecture and politics and argued that architecture was an important possible carrier of (deliberate) ambiguity. The developments of individualization of politics and the politicization of individuals continued under Augustus and had their bearings on his material culture as well. His coinage, his *RG*, and his forum were all testimony to the fact that Augustus as an individual was equal to the Roman state, to paraphrase Ovid. Augustus differed in his individualization in the sense that there was now only one dominant individual, who also managed to bring his family to the forefront.

Furthermore, I suggested that Augustus was largely in control of his material culture. This is mostly true for his forum and his *RG* (and for the city of Rome) but requires some nuance if we look at coinage. Augustus might not have occupied himself with every single coin type issued under his name. For this reason, in the case of numismatic deliberate ambiguity, it might be said that the actual agents were the moneyers. With their knowledge of what Augustus would have wanted, they could have employed deliberate ambiguity on the princeps' behalf.

In addition, the analysis of coinage also showed that there were other agents, outside Augustus' circles, who might have effected deliberate ambiguity. Selene's crocodile coins can be seen as deliberately ambiguous, although in Selene's case, this seemed to be more related to herself than to Augustus. Still, the ambiguity can be seen as one of equal-level, but if one accepts Selene as a part of her own audience, a hidden meaning could be discerned: Selene herself might have preferred one of the two references of her crocodile. In any case, this ambiguity was probably possible because of an uncertain (numismatic) context, which provided provincial authorities with a degree of numismatic authority. In this context, the analysis of Juba's coinage could be an interesting subject for future research. Furthermore, the selected inscriptions are prime cases of the emperor's agency: it would be interesting to enrich this picture by studying inscriptions outside the emperor's reach, or to study the Greek translation of the *RG* from this perspective.

I started off with a framework that saw the simultaneous achievement of conflicting, mutual aims at the same time as the most important goal of deliberate ambiguity. Several conflicting aims have indeed been observed, which I have attempted to understand more deeply by using the literary typology. A case that may be recounted here is the ambiguous *camillus* on the Ara Pacis, which might be Iulus, Gaius, or both. The conflict is located in the idea that Augustus wanted to groom his grandson and adopted son as a possible successor, but also that Augustus wanted to avoid the impression of establishing a dynasty. By using a *camillus* that could depict Iulus as well, Augustus could hide a deeper meaning. Through this example, I also suggested that there does not need to be a persistent distinction between surface meanings and hidden meanings: in the case of the *camillus*, the surface meaning might have strengthened the hidden meaning for those who were also meant to observe the latter.

In modern studies, reconciliation of or appealing to conflicting parts of an audience is one of the most important aims of deliberate ambiguity. This aim of reconciliation is visible in the *RG* and the inscriptions of the forum. Augustus' sense of audience should be seen as follows, I believe: he wanted to denounce his former adversaries to everyone, but wanted to prevent alienation of family members of those adversaries. These aims can be seen as mutually exclusive if one accepts that full, unblemished references made to Mark Antony, Brutus, Cassius, and Sextus Pompey would have hurt those Romans who bore the same family names.

The relationship between deliberate ambiguity and conflicting aims is more complicated than the framework initially allowed for. I have shown that deliberate ambiguity could have been used to achieve singular aims or multiple, non-conflicting aims. The clearest singular aim is related to Augustus' association with Agrippa, which could have enhanced

Agrippa's authority. In this association, when limited to the coins that bear both men's portraits on both sides of the coin, there is no achievement of conflicting aims: the ambiguity, situated in the numismatic innovation of both portraits as possible obverses rather underlined the equality of the two men.

However, this picture of Agrippa can be extended. The enhancement of his authority could be seen as a simultaneous legitimization of his biological children (Lucius and Gaius) as possible successors. This is no conflicting aim: it should perhaps be seen as the same aim, instead of a completely different one. Furthermore, together with the depiction of Iulus-Gaius on the Ara Pacis, this coin suggests an interesting connection between ambiguity and the Augustan succession issue in general. If one accepts that Augustus wanted to go about carefully in his succession-related endeavors, the legitimization of Gaius and Lucius through the enhanced authority of their biological father can be seen as a hidden meaning. Similar to the intended audience of interpreting the *camillus* as Gaius, it could be said that the audience here was also supposed to hold on to the surface meaning. This surface meaning related to Agrippa carried importance regardless of the two princes, as Agrippa was an invaluable part of Augustus' administration. In addition, multiple, non-conflicting aims were also seen on non-Augustan coinage: Rhoemetaces' association to Augustus enhanced his own authority, which would have also been beneficial to Augustus. This made for the remarkable situation that a different actor than Augustus himself (or those close to him) might have effected deliberate ambiguity, which might have nonetheless served Augustus.

The complexity of Augustan ambiguity is shown by the fact that we can make the Augustus-Agrippa association conflictual by adding other coins. In this case, one should consider coins where the equality between the two is diminished (lacking Agrippa's portrait and thus the interpretation of two equal obverses). In such an instance, Augustus tries to assert his own prominence, while also stressing the importance of collegiality, as he also does in the *RG*. This is a truly conflicting aim. Put simply, Augustus wants to stress equality and inequality at the same time. His resolution of this conflict might be situated in him stressing the important Republican political virtue of collegiality, allowing him to have formal equals while also clearly remaining the one in charge. To allow for this complexity beforehand, the resolution of conflicting aims should not be seen as the defining element of deliberate ambiguity. For assessing something as deliberately ambiguous, with the danger of sounding redundant, the deliberate use of ambiguity to achieve *something* should be prioritized.

It remains of course the case that deliberate ambiguity can be used to achieve conflicting aims, but it is not necessary. To illustrate this, I return to the omission of names in

the *RG*. I have argued that these instances can qualify as deliberately ambiguous, but only if the language used refers to groups. The references to Lepidus and Caesar in the *RG* clearly constituted only one possibility, as did the forum references to Apuleius, Servilius, and the Petili. This makes for the interesting case that Augustus attempted to achieve the same conflicting aims (denouncing adversaries without alienating their families) through different strategies. I acknowledge that, in this case, the ‘difference’ might be located in the eye of the modern beholder: it is conceivable that Augustus intended the omission of names as a more general strategy. In cases where Augustus does mention specific names in the context of internal conflict, as on the forum inscriptions of Cunctator, Cursor, and Metellus, it would be interesting to conduct further research into the importance that their families had to Augustus’ administration to either corroborate or falsify this strategy.

This also seems the right place to respond to possible charges of speculation, conjecturing, or wishful thinking. I admit that my thesis has had its fair share of all three. However, since the analysis was grounded in a solid framework built on conscious, explicit theoretical reflection, I believe that the analysis is still valuable. The lack of such reflection on the usage of concepts like ambiguity in the Augustan period was the main motivation behind this thesis. The usage of this framework enabled me to start talking about (deliberate) ambiguity in a meaningful way and understand its nature and aims, instead of using it as a mere characterization. In addition, in a few cases, I have been able to contradict or supplement previous interpretations. For example, I disqualified Augustus’ numismatic association to Venus and Jupiter from being deliberately confusing (Wallace-Hadrill), let alone deliberately ambiguous. In the case of Augustus’ foreign endeavors in the *RG*, I showed the importance of distinguishing between ambiguity and vagueness. Cooley called both Augustus’ mention of the Senate through the word *nostram* and his boasting of having befriended many foreign peoples ‘vague’. Through my application of the framework, I showed that the former was instead ambiguous, because the possible interpretations were intelligible in themselves, while the latter was indeed vague because it lacked tangible references.

If I could suggest a revision to the current scholarship on Augustus, it would be to alter the position of ambiguity by broadening and deepening our reflection on the concept. To a large extent, ambiguity has been seen as a consequence or result, whereas it might be said that in some essential instances, it was a means. I recommend that the focus be switched from *that* ambiguity exists to *what* ambiguity is and *why* it exists. Such a switch may also lead to a reduction of situations observed as ambiguous: ambiguity is as much a human trait as it was a Roman or Augustan trait, but it is not all-pervasive. On a related note, future research would

do well in paying more attention to chronology and periodization than I have done here. Using specific temporal contexts and events might help in further understanding the individual examples that I have analyzed here.

Finally, I reiterate my stance against generalization. The fact that Augustus may have employed deliberate ambiguity in some instances or areas, does not mean that he did so in others as well. The inverted is also false: Augustan coherence or consistency in some fields does not preclude the possibility of an imperial effort of deliberate ambiguity elsewhere. Augustus, if anything, was a calculating, balancing emperor. We should not assume that he would have either *always* or *never* gone for ambiguity. While the period of Augustus proved to be a fertile ground for instances of deliberate ambiguity, Augustus himself was, if the reader indulges my formulation, ambiguous in his ambiguity. This fact should only encourage us to keep conducting research into the first emperor of the Roman Empire. In what cases Augustus indeed proved to be an architect of ambiguity remains open to debate. The question mark in the title is there for a reason.

Appendix: coins

The wolf coin (3).



Figure 3. HN Italy 2562.

Bronze tetraantes. Last quarter of the third century B.C. (tentative)
Obverse: head of Apollo (right), laureate, with palm branch behind.
Reverse: wolf; in field: III (right), *PHFI* (above), *NQN* (exergue).
Source: Rowan (2016: 29, fig. 5).

Octavian & Octavian (4).



Figure 4. RRC 490/3.

Silver denarius. 43 BC.

Obverse: head of Octavian (right), bearded, border of dots. Legend:
C·CAESAR·III·VIR·R·P·C

Reverse: equestrian statue of Octavian, right hand raised, border of dots. Legend: S·C.
Source: <http://numismatics.org/crro/id/rrc-490.3> (accessed August 20th, 2019), image courtesy of British Museum (BNK,R.233).

Augustus & Agrippa (5-8).



Figure 5. RIC I² 408.

Silver denarius. 13 BC.

Obverse: head of Augustus (right), bare, border. Legend: CAESAR AVGVSTVS.

Reverse: head of Agrippa (right), bare. Legend: M AGRIPPA PLATORINVS III VIR.

Source: [http://numismatics.org/ocre/id/ric.1\(2\).aug.408](http://numismatics.org/ocre/id/ric.1(2).aug.408) (accessed August 20th, 2019), image courtesy of American Numismatic Society, 1937.158.391.



Figure 6. RIC I² 409.

Gold aureus. 13 BC.

Obverse: head of Augustus (right), wearing oak wreath. Legend: CAESAR AVGVSTVS.

Reverse: head of Agrippa (right), wearing combined mural-rostral crown. Legend: M AGRIPPA PLATORINVS III VIR.

Source: [http://numismatics.org/ocre/id/ric.1\(2\).aug.409](http://numismatics.org/ocre/id/ric.1(2).aug.409) (accessed August 20th, 2019), image courtesy of British Museum, R.9242.



Figure 7. RIC I² 407.

Silver denarius. 13 BC.

Obverse: head of Augustus (right), bare, border. Legend: CAESAR AVGVSTVS.

Reverse: Augustus and Agrippa, togate, seated on *bisellium*, platform with three *rostra*; border; field: apparitor's staff (left). Legend: C SVLPICVS PLATORIN

Source: [http://numismatics.org/ocre/id/ric.1\(2\).aug.407](http://numismatics.org/ocre/id/ric.1(2).aug.407) (accessed August 20th, 2019), image courtesy of American Numismatic Society, 1944.100.38341.



Figure 8. RIC I² 412.

Silver denarius. 12 BC.

Obverse: head of Augustus (right), bare, border. Legend: AVGVSTVS.

Reverse: equestrian statue of Agrippa (right), carrying trophy on ornated pedestal, border. Legend: COSSVS CN·F·LENTVLVS

Source: [http://numismatics.org/ocre/id/ric.1\(2\).aug.412](http://numismatics.org/ocre/id/ric.1(2).aug.412) (accessed August 20th, 2019), image courtesy of American Numismatic Society, 1937.158.395.

Octavian's 'Actium series' (9-12).



Figure 9. BMCRE 600.

Silver denarius. 34-28 BC (tentative).

Obverse: head of Venus (right), border.

Reverse: standing figure of Octavian, border. Legend: CAESAR DIVI F

Source: Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 70-1; plate II, no. 5).



Figure 10. BMCRE 610.

Silver denarius. 34-28 BC (tentative).

Obverse: head of Octavian (right), hint of border, bare.

Reverse: standing figure of Venus, border. Legend: CAESAR DIVI F

Source: Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 70-1; plate II, no. 6).



Figure 11. BMCRE 628.
Silver denarius. 34-28 BC (tentative).
Obverse: head of Octavian (right), border.
Reverse: herm of Jupiter, border. Legend: IMP CAESAR.
Source: Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 70-1; plate II, no. 7).



Figure 12. BMCRE 637.
Silver denarius. 34-28 BC (tentative).
Obverse: head of Jupiter (right), with thunderbolt to the left, border.
Reverse: statue of Octavian on curule chair, border. Legend: IMP CAESAR.
Source: Wallace-Hadrill (1986: 70-1; plate II, no. 8).

Rhoemetalces & Augustus (13-14).



Figure 13. RPC I 1718.

Bronze. 11 BC – 12 AD.

Obverse: head of Rhoemetalces (right), diademed. Legend: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΡΟΙΜΗΤΑΛΚΟΥ.

Reverse: head of Augustus (right), bare. Legend: ΚΑΙΣΑΡΟΣ ΣΕΒΑΣΤΟΥ.

Source: http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/greece/thrace/kings/rhoemetalces_I/i.html (accessed August 20th, 2019), image courtesy of

<https://www.coinarchives.com/a/lotviewer.php?LotID=1443922&AucID=2963&Lot=281&Val=ad444325e613a23b72c48cb3be63e1d9> (accessed August 20th, 2019).



Figure 14. RPC I 1775.

Silver drachm. Ca.10 BC.

Obverse: head of Rhoemetalces (right), diademed, PMTA monogram to right, border of dots.

Reverse: head of Augustus (right), bare, PKA monogram to right, border of dots. Legend: ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΑ.

Source: http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/greece/thrace/kings/rhoemetalces_I/i.html and http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/ric/augustus/RPC_1775.jpg (accessed August 20th, 2019).

Juba & Selene (& Augustus) (15-16).



Figure 15. SNG Cop. 566.

Silver denarius. 25 BC – AD 24.

Obverse: head of Juba (right), diademed, border of dots. Legend: REX IVBA.

Reverse: head of Selene (left), draped, border of dots. Legend: ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΑ ΚΛΕΟΠΑΤΡΑ.

Source:

<https://www.coinarchives.com/a/lotviewer.php?LotID=1466893&AucID=3018&Lot=419&Val=f28a286d47737c326d28285cffe3d20> (accessed August 20th, 2019).



Figure 16. SNG Cop. 592.

Silver denarius. Ca. 20 BC – AD 24.

Obverse: head of Juba (right), diademed, border of dots. Legend: REX IVBA.

Reverse: crocodile (left), standing on line, border of dots. Legend: ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΑ ΚΛΕΟΠΑΤΡΑ.

Source:

<https://www.coinarchives.com/a/lotviewer.php?LotID=1447993&AucID=2975&Lot=334&Val=07efbcedcc3d03e174f2f1728c19a16b> (accessed August 20th, 2019).

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