

AUGUSTUS' SUCCESSION AND OVID:
A TEXTUAL PROBLEM

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At *Met.* XV, 834ff. the text reads as follows:

...inque futuri
temporis aetatem venturorumque nepotum
prospiciens prolem sancta de coniuge natam
ferre simul nomenque suum curamque iubebit.

v.l. curasque

It is generally assumed (cf. lastly Bömer's commentary *ad loc.*) that according to the prophesy Augustus will give his name to his stepson Tiberius and order him to take over the "onus imperii". Bömer accepts the variant reading *curasque*, which word denotes (cf. *Trist.* II, 217f. *curas tuas*) the "Ausübung des Herrscheramtes". The critics take *prolem sancta de coniuge natam* to denote Tiberius, who was born by Augustus' second wife, Livia.

The said interpretation of the lines in question is not possible.

First of all, Tiberius, when adopted by Augustus, of course assumed the name Tiberius Julius Caesar Augustus, but Augustus never abdicated, and the "Ausübung des Herrscheramtes" remained his own prerogative until his death. Secondly, the wording of the passage shows that *prolem* does not go with *sancta de coniuge natam*. *Futuri temporis aetatem* is an invisible unit (cf. the phrases *primi temporis aetas*, *formosi temporis aetas*, quoted by Bömer), and *venturorumque nepotum prolem* is an equally indivisible phrase (cf. Lewis-Short, s.v. *proles* I:

futurorum hominum proles, Teucrorum proles, Brutorum atque Aemiliorum proles, etc.). The sense of the passage, accordingly, is: “looking forward to the future and to the future generation of his grandsons”. The word *natam*, therefore, has nothing to do with *prolem*, and a comma is needed after *prolem*.¹

Natam, consequently, means “daughter”: Ovid is alluding to Augustus’ only child, his daughter Julia, born by his first wife Scribonia².

The prophecy therefore was written when the Emperor, in default of a male descendant, was hoping that his dynasty would be continued by one of his *nepotes* whom Julia would give birth to³. For that reason he ordered Julia to bear his name (she was in fact called Julia) jointly with⁴ his solicitude (*curam*), i.e. his solicitude concerning his *nepotes*, one of whom would be his political inheritor⁵. In other words, Augustus expected Julia to share his solicitude for his succession and consequently to do all she could to promote the political interests of her sons, so that the throne would remain in the family: Livia acted likewise, in promoting the interests of her son Tiberius. On Julia’s “intellectual” ability and political activities cf. Smith, *art.cit.*⁶

Augustus’ hopes were not fulfilled: Julia was banished in A.D.2. Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* were finished in A.D.7 and burnt in A.D.8, but a few copies containing the ill-fated prophecy at XV,834-837 survived⁷.

1. Note the elegant *enjambement*: *futuri* goes with *temporis aetatem*, and *nepotum* goes with *prolem*.

2. Cf. the excellent article *Julia*, 6 in W. Smith, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*, vol. II, p.641f., London 1868. After B.C.23 she had three sons.

3. *Nepotum* means “grandsons”, cf. e.g. Cic.Tusc.I,35,85

Q.Pompeii ex filia nepos, quoted in Lewis-Short, s.v. *nepos*, l.

4. Cf. O.L.D., s.v. *simul* 5 (“combining two factors, which are to be considered in conjunction”). Julia was expected, that is, to bear not only Augustus’ name, but also his solicitude.

5. The reading *curamque* is correct: the variant *curamque* would denote (cf. Bömer, in his commentary, p.479) all the preoccupations of the Emperor “in der Ausübung des Herrscheramtes” (all of which Augustus could not possibly ask Julia to bear).

6. Cf. L.P. Wilkinson. *Ovid Surveyed*, Cambridge 1962, p. 141.

7. Cf. F.J.Miller, in his Loeb edition of the *Metamorphoses*, London 1967, vol.I, p. IX.