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AUGUSTUS MAKES A VOW: COMMENTS ON DIO 55.31.2–3

ABSTRACT

This article examines a report in Dio of a vow made by Augustus in response to a prophecy. It establishes the setting as a festival for the Magna Mater rather than ludi magni*, as has recently been suggested. Based on calendar entries and a passage from Ovid, the article then associates the content of the vow with altars of Ceres and Ops established in 7 C.E.*

Keywords: Magna Mater; Ceres; Ops; Augustus; vow; altar

In his account of urban affairs in the year 7 C.E., Dio includes the following story (55.31.2–3):

κατά τε τῆς πανηγύρεως τῆς μεγάλης ηὔξατο, ὅτι γυνή τις ἐς τὸν βραχίονα γράμματα ἄττα ἐντεμοῦσα ἐθείασέ τινα. ἤσθετο μὲν γὰρ ὅτι οὐκ ἐκ θεοῦ κατέσχητο ἀλλ' ἐκ παρασκευῆς αὐτὸ ἐπεποιήκει· ἐπειδὴ δὲ τὸ πλῆθος ἄλλως τε καὶ διὰ τοὺς πολέμους τόν τε λιμόν, ὃς καὶ τότε αὖθις συνέβη, δεινῶς ἐταράττετο, πιστεύειν τε καὶ αὐτὸς τοῖς λεχθεῖσιν ἐπλάττετο, καὶ πάνθ' ὅσα παραμυθήσεσθαι τὸν ὄμιλον ἤμελλεν ὡς καὶ ἀναγκαῖα ἔπραττε.

He [Augustus] **made a vow in connection with the *Ludi Megalenses* [OR he vowed *ludi magni*]** because some woman carved some sort of letters into her arm and prophesied certain things. He knew that she had not been divinely possessed, but had done it deliberately; nevertheless, since the *plebs* was already upset about the war and the famine, which had returned, he pretended that he also believed what she said and considered it necessary to do anything that might calm the crowd. (All translations are my own.)

The events Dio describes came in the middle of an extended period of unrest among the urban *plebs* that lasted from 5 to 9 C.E. owing to food shortages as well as unease over ongoing wars, especially in nearby Illyria.[1] I examined the prophet in Dio's story and the prophetic routine of self-inscription earlier in another context.[2] This article comments instead on the vow made by Augustus. It aims, first, to resolve a disagreement about whether the clause κατά τε τῆς πανηγύρεως τῆς μεγάλης ηὔξατο refers to *ludi magni* or

[1] There were serious food shortages in 5, 6 and 7 C.E.: P. Garnsey, *Famine and Food Supply in the Graeco-Roman World* (Cambridge, 1988), 219–22, Cass. Dio 55.26.1, Suet. *Aug.* 42.3. The Illyrian revolt caused panic and required extraordinary recruitment measures: J.J. Wilkes, *Dalmatia* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1969), 69–77. By 7 C.E. revolution had spread to Sardinia and Africa, worsening the food shortages in the city. Famine continued until at least 9 C.E. On top of it all, there was also a devastating fire (Cass. Dio 55.27.1–3). Anonymous pamphlets critical of Augustus were published around the time of Dio's story. See P.M. Swan, *The Augustan Succession: An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's* Roman History*, Books 55–56 (9 B.C.–A.D. 14)* (Oxford and New York, 2004), 183–4.

[2] J.B. Lott, 'Women's ritual competence and a self-inscribing prophet at Rome', in M. Dillon, E. Eidinow and L. Maurizio (edd.), *Women and Ritual Competence in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean* (New York, 2017), 199–214. In this piece I focussed on the potential nature of the ritual performed by the prophet and why it might have been convincing to viewers in Rome. I compared it with actions associated with followers of Dea Syria and Magna Mater, whose rites align closely. However, Dea Syria was not well known in Rome before the reign of Nero, so the focus should be placed more on Magna Mater. My general conclusions about ritual competence in that article remain valid if we understand Dio's prophet as a follower of Magna Mater.

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to some festival for the Magna Mater, in favour of the latter possibility. Second, it proposes that the vow can be associated with a pair of votive altars for Ceres Mater and Ops Augusta established on 10 August 7 C.E. on the *uicus iugarius*. The episode thus provides important context for a poorly attested imperial monument erected by Augustus himself in the centre of the city for two agricultural goddesses at a time of popular unrest primarily linked to food shortages.

LVDI MAGNI OR *LVDI MEGALENSES*?

Earlier readers of Dio took the clause κατά τε τῆς πανηγύρεως τῆς μεγάλης ηὔξατο to mean that Augustus made a vow during the Megalesian games, the state festival for the Magna Mater. For example, E. Cary in the Loeb edition translates it as 'he made a vow with reference to the Megalesian games'.[3] However, in his recent commentary on Dio, P. Swan argues that the clause should mean instead 'he vowed *Ludi Magni*', a special kind of votive game.[4] Swan points out that in two other instances Dio calls the festival for the Magna Mater τὰ Μεγαλήσια (37.8.1, 43.48.4) and that in addition to its more generic temporal or circumstantial meanings κατά + genitive could follow εὔχομαι to identify the thing vowed (see LSJ s.v. εὔχομαι II.3 and s.v. κατά A.II.5). However, Dio also regularly uses the structure ἡ πανήγυρις ἡ … to identify public festivals and *ludi* at Rome. Furthermore, it is not a case of one or the other: in the case of the *Ludi Romani*, he uses both formulations for the same festival.[5] There is no reason to suppose that he could not also refer to the festival of Magna Mater using both constructions. Thus, while Swan's understanding of ἡ πανήγυρις ἡ μεγάλη as *ludi magni* is certainly possible, the text is ambiguous.

There are, however, compelling contextual reasons to accept that the story took place in connection with a festival for the Magna Mater. The details Dio provides about the self-cutting prophet align generally with public attitudes towards the cult in Rome and, importantly, with specific public practices of Metroac cult attested during the reign of Augustus. The Magna Mater was imported to Rome from Asia in 204 B.C.E. to ensure victory over Hannibal and thereafter became an important state goddess tied to military victory, having a temple on the Palatine and a state festival.[6] However, the cult is also presented in the Augustan period as not fully assimilated into traditional Roman religion and society, with some of the practices that came with the goddess to Rome considered distasteful—especially the ecstatic, noisy and violent nature of the rites, which were

[3] E. Cary, *Dio's Roman History, with an English Translation*, vol. 4 (Cambridge, MA, 1925), 475. More recently, I. Scott-Kilvert, *Dio Cassius. The Roman History: The Reign of Augustus* (New York, 1987), 219 writes that 'he made a vow in connection with the Megalesian games'.

[4] Swan (n. 1), 206.

[5] For example, Dio calls the *Ludi Romani* τὰ Ῥωμαῖα (37.8.1), τῇ πανηγύρει τῇ τῶν Ῥωμαίων (48.52.2) and τῇ τῶν Ῥωμαίων πανηγύρει (53.30.6). Cf. also 49.42.1, 53.1.4, 54.27.1.

[6] For general information on the cult of Magna Mater, see J. Alvar, *Romanising Oriental Gods: Myth, Salvation, and Ethics in the Cults of Cybele, Isis, and Mithras* (Boston, 2008); P. Borgeaud, *Mother of the Gods: From Cybele to the Virgin Mary* (Baltimore, 2004); L.E. Roller, *In Search of God the Mother: The Cult of Anatolian Cybele* (Berkeley, 1999); M.J. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis. The Myth and the Cult* (London, 1977). The arrival of Magna Mater at Rome has been thoroughly investigated. For recent bibliography and ancient source materials, see S. Satterfield, 'Intention and exoticism in Magna Mater's introduction into Rome', *Latomus* 71 (2012), 373–91, at 373 n. 1; P. Borgeaud, 'Die Mutter der Götter: von Anatolien über Griechenland nach Rom', in C. Hattler (ed.), *Imperium der Götter* (Karlsruhe, 2013), 84–93; P.J. Burton, 'The summoning of the Magna Mater to Rome (205 B.C.)', *Historia* 45 (1996), 36–63, at 36 n. 1.

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believed to have come with the goddess from Asia.[7] Indeed, literary sources convey a strong prejudice against her traditional followers and rites, in both Dio's and Augustus' periods, despite the important role the goddess and her temple played in Augustan ideology.[8] Thus, Dio's editorializing about the emperor's private disbelief aligns with the hostile attitude taken by Roman writers towards particular Metroac followers and rituals. To be more specific, the prophet and her routine match specific distasteful elements of Metroac worship—notably, inspired self-mutilation. The self-castration of the *galli*, which happened in private, is the most well-known form of self-mutilation associated with the Magna Mater. However, cutting the arms with knives is also regularly noted as part of the ecstatic frenzy that devotees of Magna Mater performed in public to demonstrate their divine inspiration.[9] The practice was well known enough in the Augustan period that it could serve as a figure in poetry.[10] Metroac followers are also often depicted as offering up inspired prophecies, divinations and warnings of impending doom to onlookers during their public appearances.[11] Finally, women participated publicly in the cult as leaders, functionaries and worshippers in the Augustan period.[12]

Additionally, the particular history of the goddess' rites at Rome in the reign of Augustus provides an attractive potential contemporary context for Dio's story.[13]

[7] The Augustan author Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Ant. Rom.* 2.19.3–5) expresses the paradox most clearly, stressing that only the goddess' foreign clergy could participate in the native rites. This paradox has also been broadly commented on in modern literature, e.g. F. Van Haeperen, *Étrangère et ancestrale: la mère des dieux dans le monde romains* (Paris, 2019), 57–97. M. Beard, 'The Roman and the foreign: the cult of the "Great Mother" in imperial Rome', in N. Thomas and C. Humphrey (edd.), *Shamanism, History, and the State* (Ann Arbor, 1994), 164–90, at 166 argues convincingly that some Metroac followers and rites were treated as 'dangerously foreign' at the same time as the cult itself was incorporated into 'the symbolic forms of state power'. For a sense that the foreign rites were, in fact, part of the original appeal of the cult, see Satterfield (n. 6).

[8] J. Latham, '"Fabulous clap-trap": Roman masculinity, the cult of Magna Mater, and literary constructions of the *galli* at Rome from the late Republic to Late Antiquity', *The Journal of Religion* 92 (2012), 84–122, especially 101–6 has examined this prejudice, with a focus on the *galli*; see also J. Latham, 'Roman rhetoric, Metroac representation: texts, artifacts, and the cult of Magna Mater in Rome and Ostia', *MAAR* 59/60 (2014), 51–80. On the self-representation of the cult followers on their own dedications and funerary monuments, see A. Klöckner, '*Tertium genus*? Representations of religious practitioners in the cult of Magna Mater', in R.L. Gordon, G. Petridou and J. Rüpke (edd.), *Beyond Priesthood: Religious Entrepreneurs and Innovators in the Roman Empire* (Berlin and Boston, 2017), 343–84.

[9] For public arm cutting by Metroac devotees: *Anth. Pal.* 6.51.7–8, Tib. 1.4.68–70, Prop. 2.22.15, Sen. *Ag*. 687–90, Mart. 11.84.3–4, Val. Flac. 1.3.20 and Stat. *Theb*. 10.170–5, 12.224–6. Cf. also stories about followers of Dea Syria in Lucian (*Syr. D.* 43, 50, *Lucius* 37) and Apuleius (*Met.* 8.27).

[10] When asked why one falls in love, Propertius answers: 'Why does a man slash and cut his own arms with sacred knives to mad Phrygian rhythms?' (2.22.15; cf. Tib. 1.4.68–70). Not much later, Martial insults a barber by claiming that 'white arms are cut with less savage knives when the frenzied throng rages at the Phrygian music' (11.84.3–4).

[11] E.g. Luc. 1.566–7 and Juv. 6.511–21. See generally F. Van Haeperen, 'Les acteurs du culte de «Magna Mater» à Rome et dans les provinces occidentales de l'Empire', in S. Benoist, A. Daguet-Gagey and C. Hoët-Van (edd.), *Figures d'empire, fragments de mémoire: pouvoirs et identités dans le monde romain impérial, II^e s. av. n. è.–VI^e s. de n. è.* (Villeneuve-d'Ascq, 2011), 467–84, at 483–4; cf. Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 7.68.1). κατέχω + ἐκ regularly refers to divine possession or inspiration (LSJ s.v. κατέχω II.10).

[12] E.g. Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom*. 2.19.3–5. For the importance of the role of women in the cult, see W. Spickermann, 'Women and the cult of Magna Mater in the western provinces', in E. Hemelrijk and G. Woolf (edd.), *Women and the Roman City in the Latin West* (Leiden, 2013), 147–68 and F. Van Haeperen, 'Les prêtresses de «Mater Magna» dans le monde romain occidental', in G. Urso (ed.), *«Sacerdos»: figure del sacro nella società romana* (Pisa, 2014), 299–321.

[13] T.P. Wiseman, 'Cybele, Virgil and Augustus', in T. Woodman and D. West (edd.), *Poetry and Politics in the Age of Augustus* (Cambridge, 1984), 117–28 has shown how Virgil first introduced the goddess into the imperial narrative by associating her with the Romans' Trojan ancestry, on the Julian

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The precinct and the temple of Magna Mater stood on the Palatine next to Augustus' house and his temple of Apollo. The cult personnel were evidently confined to this precinct, except for particular times when they interacted with the general population of Rome.[14] One such occasion was, of course, at the beginning of the *Ludi Megalenses* in honour of the goddess' arrival in Rome and the dedication of her temple. The holiday began on 4 April with a procession during which the Metroac devotees, led by a priest and a priestess, carried a statue of the goddess through the city streets begging alms.[15] However, another possible setting for Dio's story can be suggested. The temple on the Palatine burned in 3 C.E. Augustus quickly rebuilt it in his own name, and the new temple then became an important part of the overall presentation of the Augustan Palatine.[16] The rebuilding was evidently also an occasion for ritual innovation. A basin where the cult personnel washed the statue of the goddess in the precinct was removed during the renovation and a new ritual for the cleaning was established.[17] This involved parading the cult statue out of the precinct, through the city, and out of the Porta Capena to the Almo river, a tributary of the Tiber. This new *lauatio* is first noted by Ovid in the *Fasti*.[18] Later calendars suggest that this procession happened in late March.[19] Dio's words τῆς πανηγύρεως τῆς μεγάλης may refer to one of the first instances of this new *lauatio* established in connection with Augustus' rebuilding. In Dio, πανήγυρις is a general term for public celebrations, not just named *ludi* specifically. Associating the story with the new *lauatio* would also remove Swan's objection that Dio does not call the occasion τὰ Μεγαλήσια, since the reference would not be to the Megalesia at all.

This understanding also points to an explanation for why Augustus responded to the woman's prophecy. Her actions disturbed one of the first, if not the first, instances of a new holiday he had established for the Magna Mater in connection with a major building project on the Palatine. The prophet had appeared during a long period of urban unrest owing, as Dio emphasizes, to famine and war. Times of crisis often inspired popular

side; cf. R.M. Wilhelm, 'Cybele: the Great Mother of Augustan order', *Vergilius* 34 (1988), 77–101. Ovid reframed this introduction with an emphasis on the role of Claudia Quinta, who first helped the goddess upon her arrival in Rome. He emphasizes the Claudian aspect of the cult exactly when the Claudii, in the persons of Livia and Tiberius, were ascendant: see P. Knox, 'Representing the Great Mother to Augustus', in G. Herbert-Brown (ed.), *Ovid's* Fasti*: Historical Readings at its Bimillennium* (New York, 2002), 155–74.

[14] Cicero notes that one such occasion was the ability to collect alms on particular holidays (*Leg.* 2.22).

[15] For the *Ludi Megalenses*, see H.H. Scullard, *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic* (London, 1981), 97–101 and F. Bernstein, *Ludi publici* (Stuttgart, 1998), 186–205. For a reminder about the difficulty reconstructing ancient festivals, see Beard (n. 7), 170–2.

[16] Val. Max. 1.8.11, *Res Gestae* 19, Ov. *Fast.* 4.347–8. Cf. Suet. *Aug.* 57 and Cass. Dio 55.12.4. For the history of the temple, see *LTUR* s.v. 'Magna Mater, aedes (Pensabene)'; E.A. Dumser, 'Magna Mater, aedes', in L. Haselberger et al. (edd.), *Mapping Augustan Rome* (Portsmouth, RI, 2002), 163–4; C. Cecamore, *Palatium: Topografia storica del Palatino tra III sec. a.C. e I sec. d.C.* (Rome, 2002). Augustus included the temple by name in the *Res Gestae* (19) in the list of temples and monuments he built. The rebuilt temple appears on the Sorrento Base and as the subject of one of the Valle-Medici reliefs: see R. Bell, 'Revisiting the pediment of the Palatine metroön', *PBSR* 77 (2009), 65–99.

[17] For this argument, see Alvar (n. 6), 284–8 with bibliography. The rebuilding was complete by the time Ovid wrote the *Fasti*.

[18] *Fast.* 4.337–47. For this passage, see C. Edwards, 'Magna Mater and the poet unmanned (Ovid, *Fasti* 4, 179–372)', *Eugesta* 11 (2021), 131–51; Knox (n. 13), 155–74.

[19] The earliest evidence for the date of the festival is *c.*50 C.E.: A. Degrassi, *Inscriptiones Italiae* (Rome, 1963), 287. By the fourth century, it was part of a series of festivals in late March (Degrassi [this note], 243). For ancient references, see Luc. 1.600, Val. Fl. 8.239–40, Sil. *Pun.* 8.363, Stat. *Silu.* 5.1.222–4, Mart. 3.47.2.

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religious fervour that could result in official intervention, especially if it caused riots or other unrest in the city.[20] Augustus himself worked especially hard to centralize and control the production of public prophecy and the interpretation of divine will—this was surely one reason for his general interest in the prophetic cult of Magna Mater.[21] Indeed, uncontrolled rival claims to divine favour and foreknowledge posed real threats to the position of the *princeps* in two ways, one concerning his religious authority and one concerning public order. Augustus' actions in this case should be understood both as an instance of the emperor enforcing a monopolistic claim to special divine knowledge in the context of a favoured cult and as an instance of him ensuring public order at a time of popular unrest. Rather than force, emperors regularly relied on their individual *auctoritas* to quell urban unrest, using personal appeals that redirected the energy of the *plebs* into sanctioned and safer outlets.[22] Through his vow Augustus reclaimed the religious authority of the prophet for himself, redirected attention to the traditional and controllable act of a pubic vow, and defused a dangerous situation by publicly and personally seeking divine assistance to alleviate the famine.

In sum, the details of Dio's story, his commentary and the overall context strongly suggest that it involved a priest or follower of Magna Mater acting during some festival of the goddess when the foreign clergy had an opportunity to disturb the gathered urban *plebs* at a festival closely associated with Augustus personally. To return briefly to Swan's suggestion that Dio meant that Augustus vowed *ludi magni*, *ludi magni* are not a particularly good fit for the circumstances of Dio's story. *ludi magni*, which we know primarily from Livy, were occasional games vowed to Jupiter.[23] The Senate ordered them as part of the mobilization of the army, at first following military defeats but later as part of the orchestrated ceremonies initiating new wars of conquest. Livy presents them as debated and carefully designed in the Senate, with the *pontifex maximus* preparing and dictating the precise formula for the vow.[24] They never appear as an extemporized response to an unwelcome prophecy or prodigy. Finally, Suetonius tells us that Augustus did in fact vow *ludi magni* a few years later in 9 C.E. after the Varrine disaster, adding that this 'had earlier been done in the Cimbric and Social Wars'.[25] This statement of Suetonius, who was looking back over a century to identify precedents for Augustus' action in 9 C.E., would be strange if Augustus had, in fact, made a similar vow just two years earlier.

[20] See P. Ripat, 'Roman omens, Roman audiences, and Roman history', *G&R* 53 (2006), 155–74.

[21] See R. Macmullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Unrest and Alienation in the Empire* (Cambridge, 1966), 128–62.

[22] On the response of emperors to unrest and riots in the city, see B. Kelly, 'Riot control and imperial ideology in the Roman empire', *Phoenix* 61 (2007), 150–76, especially 161–2.

[23] Bernstein (n. 15), 84–115, 142–56 provides a comprehensive list of *ludi magni*. There are ten attested occurrences of the games being vowed before 7 C.E., eight from Livy and one from Suetonius: Livy 4.27.1 (431 B.C.E.), 5.19.6 (396 B.C.E.), 31.9 (360 B.C.E.), 22.9.7–11 (217 B.C.E.), 27.33 (208 B.C.E.), 31.9 (200 B.C.E.), 36.2 (191 B.C.E.), 39.5.7–12 (187 B.C.E.), Suet. *Aug.* 23.2 (during the Social War).

[24] Livy frames the games as ordered and carefully controlled by the Senate, often as part of broader deliberations about the beginning or conduct of a war. Livy provides the text of the vow prepared by the *pontifex maximus* for the consul to make in 191 B.C.E. (36.2.5; cf. 22.10.7, 31.9).

[25] Suet. *Aug.* 23.2 *uouit et magnos ludos Ioui Optimo Maximo, si res p. in meliorem statum uertisset: quod factum Cimbrico Marsicoque bello erat*. Suetonius' accuracy is supported by the fact that he evidently knew the precise language of the vow.

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ALTARS OF CERES MATER AND OPS AUGUSTA

So far, this article has argued that the female prophet in Dio's story was likely a Metroac follower and that the phrase κατά τε τῆς πανηγύρεως τῆς Μεγάλης identifies the occasion of the vow as some public holiday of Magna Mater. In this interpretation Dio does not identify either the target gods of the vow or what Augustus promised in return for their help. Dio also does not mention any later payment of the vow, at least in the portions of the text and the epitomes which survive. However, I propose that two other sources should be linked with this episode to suggest a more complete picture of events, to add further support to the association of the vow with a festival of Magna Mater, and to connect the vow Augustus made at a time of famine to a pair of goddesses especially concerned with the food supply, Ceres and Ops.

First, three marble calendar monuments record 10 August as a holiday because it was the anniversary of the establishment of a pair of altars to Ceres Mater and Ops Augusta.

1. feriae. arae Opis et Cereris in uico iugario constitutae sunt.
   A holiday. Altars of Ops and Ceres were established on the *uicus iugarius*. (Fasti Vallenses)

2. feriae quod eo die arae Cereri Matri et Opi Augustae ex uoto suscepto constituta[e] sunt Cretico et Long(o) c[o(n)s(ulibus).]
   A holiday because on this day altars for Ceres Mater and Ops Augusta were established in fulfilment of a vow when Creticus and Longus were consuls. (Fasti Amiternini)

3. feriae Cereri et Opi Aug(ustae)
   A holiday for Ceres and Ops Augusta. (Fasti Antiates Minores)[26]

We learn from these three entries that altars for Ceres Mater and Ops Augusta were established on the *uicus iugarius* on 10 August 7 C.E.—the same year as Dio's story—as payment for a vow.[27] The language in the calendar from Amiternum, which follows a formula for noting new holidays that was developed in the reign of Augustus, must derive from the language of the senatorial decree that created the holiday.[28] This evidently emphasized the votive nature of these altars, a detail that, I believe, is unique among the texts for new holidays preserved on early imperial marble calendars. The recognition of the anniversary of the establishment (*constituta est*) as well as the dedication (*dedicata est*) of new public altars is attested in only three cases—namely, the altars of Pax Augusta, Fortuna Redux and the pair Ceres Mater and Ops Augusta, all from the Augustan period. This could be due to the fact that the holidays are known only from inscribed calendars, which mostly date to the early Imperial era, but more likely it suggests that placing such public emphasis on the establishment of the site for an altar was an Augustan innovation. What the establishment of the altar involved beyond the demarcation of a precinct (*templum*) by the augurs and the ritual naming of the gods to be

[26] See Degrassi (n. 19), 493 under 10 August for the entries.

[27] On these altars, see *LTUR* s.v. 'Ceres Mater et Ops Augusta, arae'.

[28] On the formula, see J. Rüpke (transl. D.M.B. Richardson), *The Roman Calendar from Numa to Constantine: Time, History, and the* Fasti (Malden, MA, 2011), 126–32 (originally published as *Kalender und Öffentlichkeit: Die Geschichte der Repräsentation und religiösen Qualifikation von Zeit in Rome* [Berlin, 1995]); J. Rüpke, 'Doubling religion in the Augustan Age: shaping time for an empire', in J. Ben-Dov and L. Doering (edd.), *The Construction of Time in Antiquity: Ritual, Art and Identity* (Cambridge, 2017), 50–68, at 61–3 and J.B. Lott, 'Who called the Concordia of Tiberius' temple Concordia Augusta?', *CPh* 118 (2023), 132–42, at 137–8.

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worshipped there is unclear.[29] There is no evidence that the altars were ever completed, which does not mean that they were not.

Second, near the beginning of Book 2 of Ovid's *Tristia*, a long plea for mercy written on his way into exile in 9 C.E., Ovid explains why he believes that a poem might gain him pardon from Augustus. As precedents for his poetic plea Ovid cites two occasions when Augustus himself commissioned *carmina* to address the gods (*Tr.* 2.23–8):

> exorant magnos carmina saepe deos.
> ipse quoque Ausonias Caesar matresque nurusque
> carmina turrigerae dicere iussit Opi.
> iusserat et Phoebo dici, quo tempore ludos
> fecit, quos aetas aspicit una semel.
> his precor exemplis tua nunc, mitissime Caesar,
> fiat ab ingenio mollior ira meo.[30]

Hymns often move great gods. Caesar himself also commanded Ausonian mothers and young wives to sing a hymn to turret-bearing Ops. He had similarly commanded a hymn to Phoebus when he produced the festival that each generation sees a single time. I pray that, in accordance with these examples, your anger, most gentle Caesar, is mollified through my talent.

Ovid's second example refers to the singing of Horace's *carmen* to Apollo at the secular games in 17 B.C.E.[31] The hymn to Ops should also refer to a public occasion well known enough to serve as a recognizable example to Ovid's audience. Given the tenses of *iussit* (perfect) and *iusserat* (pluperfect), it must have occurred later than the secular games. Indeed, the impact of the passage is enhanced if the hymn to Ops had been performed recently when Ovid wrote *Tristia* Book 2 in 9 C.E. As Thomas Wiedemann has suggested, the setting for this hymn to Ops was surely the establishment of the altars recorded in the marble calendars.[32]

Augustus' vow in Dio should, I argue, also be associated with the altars and the hymn to Ops. The coincidence of the year 7 C.E. is suggestive. Even more so is the unusual emphasis on the votive character of the altars in the language of the calendar from Amiternum. The epithet that Ovid gives to Ops, *turrigera*, provides a direct connection. The turreted crown was an important part of the iconography of Magna Mater, interpreted as signifying her role as the earth and as the founder and protector of cities (see *LIMC* VIII s.v. 'Kybele'). It was so closely associated with her in Rome during the reign of Augustus that the goddess was represented on the pediment of Augustus' rebuilt Palatine temple simply by an image of her turreted crown on a throne.[33] The rare word *turrigera* first appears in Virgil, referencing in one case the defences of the city of Antemna and in the other the crown of Magna Mater (Verg. *Aen*. 7.61, 10.253). Propertius uses it again for the crown of Magna Mater (3.17.35). Ovid himself uses it and the related *turrifer*

[29] On establishments of shrines, see D. Fishwick, *The Imperial Cult in the Latin West*, 3 vols. (Leiden, 2005), 1.2.203–13. Before Fishwick, see K. Hanell, 'Das Opfer des Augustus an der Ara Pacis', in *Opuscula Romana II* (Lund, 1960), 33–123, at 62–71 and E. Welin, 'Die beiden Festtage der Ara Pacis Augustae', in *Dragma M.P. Nilsson dedicatum* (Lund, 1939), 500–13.

[30] See J. Ingleheart, *A Commentary on Ovid,* Tristia *Book 2* (Oxford, 2010), 32 with commentary on this passage.

[31] In citing the secular hymn, Ovid repeats a point that Horace himself made about the power of hymns to sway the gods (*Epist*. 2.1.132–7).

[32] 'The political background to Ovid's *Tristia* II', *CQ* 25 (1975), 264–71, at 267–9.

[33] On the temple pediment, see Bell (n. 16), 65–99.

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three times in the *Fasti*, referencing the Magna Mater in each case.[34] Ovid's use of the epithet for Ops in Book 2 of the *Tristia* is thus the only example of the word, which appears to have been an Augustan coinage, as an epithet for a god other than the Magna Mater. Ovid's use in *Tristia* Book 2 reflects not just an association between Ops and the Magna Mater generally—Ops could be closely identified with the Magna Mater because both of them were identified with the Greek Rhea, a syncretism already established in the Augustan period[35]—but a specific association between the Ops of Augustus' hymn and Augustus' new ceremony and temple, where the crown appeared as the primary representation of Magna Mater.

Thus, in *Tristia* Book 2 Ovid refers to a hymn that Augustus commissioned two years earlier as evidence that gods (including by implication Augustus himself) could be successfully implored through verse. Ovid also included the epithet *turrigera* for Ops to point to the original context that had inspired the vow. Ovid's use of the precedent here must rely on the fact that Ops and Ceres had, in fact, lessened the famine that occasioned the vow. On the other hand, Ovid's recollection of the original context could remind his audience of the anxiety of that moment, the content of prophecies which had presumably predicted doom, and especially the fact that serious famine had returned repeatedly in the intervening years between the singing of the hymn and the writing of *Tristia* Book 2. Since famine in the capital continued to recur throughout the period 6–9 C.E., even after Augustus made his vow, this last detail could imply an expectation on Ovid's part that his own entreaty would, in fact, also not be effective. If the altars were never completed, this would have been an especially biting innuendo.

Ovid returns to the worship of Magna Mater as precedent for his own actions again in the first poem of his *Epistulae ex Ponto*, written three years later in 12 C.E. There he argues that his work should find an audience in Rome because it contains the 'sacred names of the Julian race' just as followers of Isis or the Magna Mater are welcome when they appear bearing their divine instruments: 'Is anyone so shameless that he would drive away from his doorstep someone shaking the jangling sistrum of Pharos in their hand? When the flute-player pipes on his curved horn before the Mother of the Gods, who refuses to offer him a few small coins' (*Pont.* 1.1.37–40). Noisiness was one of the aspects of Eastern cults that is regularly cited as distasteful. The point is partly that Ovid's presence through his works in Rome could be distasteful to proper Romans just as the foreign and strange priests of Isis shaking rattles and of Magna Mater playing pipes might be unwelcome. However, just as no one dares rebuff these priests doing holy work, so, Ovid says, should his works bearing holy names be accepted. The choice of Magna Mater reminded readers that Augustus had himself interacted with a prophet of Magna Mater a few years before and had chosen to respond rather than reject her. Ovid emphasizes the connection by describing his own activity a few lines later with a doublet reminiscent of religious prophecy, *uaticinor et moneo* (50). Dio says that Augustus did not personally accept that the prophet was divinely inspired in 7 C.E., so perhaps Ovid's passage also is a reminder that Augustus had, in fact, been 'so brazen' as to reject a follower of Magna Mater at his door.

[34] He calls Magna Mater *turrigera dea* in his discussion of the Megalesia on 4 April and for 6 June he calls her *turrigera frontem Cybele redimita corona* (*Fast.* 4.224, 6.321). In asking directly for an explanation why Magna Mater wears the turreted crown, he also uses the related word *turrifer*: '*at cur turrifera caput est onerata corona?'* (*Fast.* 4.219). After Ovid, Statius uses the word as an epithet for Cybele once, calling her *mater turrigera* (*Achil.* 2.61). The few other cases refer to actual fortifications: Luc. 1.188, 3.514, 4.226; Plin. *HN* 11.4.1; Sil. *Pun*. 4.408, 9.560, 14.500.

[35] E.g. Tib. 1.4.68.

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CONCLUSION

By directing his vow to Ceres and Ops, Augustus separated his response from prophecies made in a strange and unofficial way by a foreign priestess. Approaching Ops and Ceres together for relief from famine was an understandable choice. Both were associated with agricultural fertility and abundance.[36] Ceres was an important goddess closely associated with the imperial family and the benefits of Augustus' rule, especially peace.[37] At some point in this period Augustus also undertook to restore her temple on the Aventine, which had also been destroyed by fire.[38] Ops was an old personification whose worship the Romans traced back to the regal period. In addition to a temple on the Capitol, she had a shrine in the *regia*, which could only be entered by the Vestals and the *pontifex maximus* (Varro, *Ling.* 6.3). This direct association with the *pontifex maximus*—Augustus himself—may have suggested the inclusion of Ops in Augustus' vow. Indeed, the addition of the epithet *Augusta* to Ops created only the second state cult at Rome to bear the eponymous epithet, after Pax Augusta. More to the point, Augustus, by directing his vow towards Ceres and Ops, removed the matter from the context of the unusual cult of Magna Mater and placed it back within the controlled structures and forms of traditional state religion. The use of a public vow looked forward and offered hope that Ceres and Ops would, in fact, relieve the famine. Prophecies associated with Magna Mater evidently often foretold impending doom. The change may have been calculated to calm rather than inflame the *plebs.*

Finally, it is worth summarizing the reconstruction proposed here. During the spring of 7 C.E. there was famine in Rome which, coupled with the war in nearby Illyria, provoked unrest among the populace. At one of the spring holidays for Magna Mater, either the *Ludi Megalenses* or the new *lauatio*, a follower of the goddess cut herself and offered inspired prophecies that had the effect of further inflaming the *plebs*. This garnered enough attention that Augustus responded personally with a vow to build new altars for Ops and Ceres, if the goddesses would help to end the famine. Dio reports the affair but is more interested in the strange ritual routine of the prophet than in either the contents of the prophecy or the specifics of Augustus' vow. Later in the same year on 10 August, presumably after the immediate shortage had been addressed, the vow was paid with the establishment of a precinct to hold the altars on the *uicus iugarius*. The occasion was significant enough that the Senate declared its anniversary a holiday, just as it had the establishment of the altars of Fortuna Redux and Pax Augusta. The formal language of this declaration, the source of the surviving calendar entries, emphasized the votive origins of the new shrine. Augustus himself commissioned a hymn to be sung as part of the ceremony. The singing of the hymn provides new evidence for just what could be involved in the innovative Augustan practice of publicly celebrating the establishment of new altars at the beginning of their construction. We cannot say if the altars were ever

[36] They were also linked by genealogy: Ovid calls Ops the mother of Ceres and wife of Saturn (*Fast.* 6.285–6). Ovid's understanding is dependent upon Varro's discussion (*Ling.* 57.2–4). The story is slightly different in Ennius, where Ops and Ceres are sisters: see P. Pouthier, *Ops et la conception divine de l'abondance dans la religion romaine jusqu'à la mort d'Auguste* (Paris, 1981), 220–6, 259–70.

[37] For Ceres, see generally B. Spaeth, *The Roman Goddess Ceres* (Austin, TX, 1996) and H. le Bonniec, *Le culte de Cérès à Rome des origins à la fin de la République* (Paris, 1958), with a short discussion of our altars at 193–5. For Ops, see Pouthier (n. 36), with a brief discussion of our altars at 282–92.

[38] Tac. *Ann.* 2.49.1. On the temple, see *LTUR* s.v. 'Ceres, Liber, Liberaque, aedes'. The restoration must have been started in the later part of his reign. Tiberius completed it in 17 C.E.

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completed or dedicated, although the return of famine in following years raises the possibility that the project was abandoned or delayed. Two years later, Ovid refers to the hymn, placing it alongside Horace's *carmen saeculare*, to provide a precedent for his own poetic appeal for relief, equally unsuccessful in the end.

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