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## ATHENA SPITS BLOOD AT ROME, VICTORIA FLEES FROM THE ENEMY: *PORTENTA* AND IDENTITY IN THE EARLY PRINCIPATE\*

Despite early imperial *portenta* being largely ignored in secondary literature, the reports of such incidents demand increased scholarly attention. This paper contends that decoding reports of portents from the early empire can give us fundamental insights into key moments of identity negotiation in this period. This paper will primarily focus on two such reports, signs of divine displeasure reported in Athens and in Camulodunum. This paper contends that within such reports we can glimpse complex and contested issues of identity creation and redefinition at intra-local, trans-local, and global levels.

**Keywords:** prodigies, portents, Imperial Rome, Roman provinces, provincial identity, Athens, Athena, Britannia, Boudicca, Victoria

### Introduction

In a recent paper,<sup>1</sup> Federico Santangelo has reminded us of the necessity for studies of early imperial *prodigia* ('prodigies').<sup>2</sup> Our understanding of

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<sup>1</sup> F. Santangelo, 'Prodigies in the Early Principate?', in L. G. Driediger-Murphy and E. Eidinow (eds.), *Ancient Divination and Experience* (Oxford, 2019), 154–77. Similar observations have recently been made by S. Satterfield, 'Livy, Cassius Dio, and Prodigies in the Early Roman Empire', *Klio* 104 (2022), 253–76.

<sup>2</sup> Two terms are here used to describe divinely sent signs: *prodigia* ('prodigies') for signs the Roman senate officially recognized as meriting expiation, and *portenta* ('portents') for those not recognized as such. I nonetheless appreciate that a wide variety of terms were used to describe signs from the gods (i.e. *prodigia*, *portenta*, *ostenta* ['wonders'], *omina* ['signs'], *τὰ τέρατα* ['marvels']), and that they were often used interchangeably. Technical distinctions in the use of these terms are (and were, potentially, for the Romans of the late republic/early principate) unrecoverable. On these terms and their (possible) distinctions: Cic. *Div.* 1.94, *Nat. D.* 2.7; Fest. 254L, 284L; C. Thulin, 'Synonyma quaedam latina (*prodigium*, *portentum*, *ostentum*, *monstrum*)', in *Commentationes Philologicae in Honorem Iohannis Paulson* (Gotoburgi, 1905), 194–213; R. Bloch, *Les Prodiges dans l'Antiquité Classique* (Paris, 1963), 83–5; C. Moussy, 'Esquisse de l'histoire de *monstrum*', *REL* 55 (1977), 345–69; F. Guillaumont, 'La nature et les prodigies

republican *prodigia* is, by now, comprehensive.<sup>3</sup> We know well the standard ways in which the appearances of unnatural signs were reported, classified by the senate as *prodigia publica* ('public prodigies'), and referred to various priesthoods for their recommendations on the appropriate expiatory rites, and how breaches to the *pax deorum* ('peace of the gods') were perceived to have been restored through those rites.<sup>4</sup> As Santangelo stresses, most monographs devoted to Roman portents finish with the republic,<sup>5</sup> and do so on the basis of two assumptions.<sup>6</sup> First, that the occurrence or reporting of *portenta* ('portents') had diminished (or vanished) by the late republic. Second, that there had been a seismic shift in the nature of *portenta*, such that the only significant occurrences of this nature were those that can be classed as *omina imperii* ('imperial signs') – signs and omens that centred on the fortunes of the Roman *principes* ('emperors').<sup>7</sup> These *omina imperii* do indeed appear frequently in our sources for the principate. They reflect the overwhelming importance of the Roman *principes* in both the religious and historiographical landscape of the Roman empire.<sup>8</sup>

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dans la religion et la philosophie romaines', in C. Lévy (ed.), *Le Concept de nature à Rome* (Paris, 1996), 43–63; C. Moussy, 'Un problème de synonymie: *ostentum* et *portentum*', *RPh* 64 (1990), 47–60; D. Engels, *Das römische Vorzeichenwesen (753–27 v. Chr.)* (Stuttgart, 2007), 259–82; C. E. Schultz, 'Roman Sacrifice, Inside and Out', *JRS* 106 (2016), 58–76, 73 and esp. n. 101.

<sup>3</sup> For definitions of *portenta/prodigia*, see e.g. M. Beard, J. North, and S. R. F. Price, *Religions of Rome* (Cambridge, 1998), i.37–8; V. Rosenberger, *Gezähmte Götter: das Prodigienwesen der Römischen Republik* (Stuttgart, 1998), 97–126; A. Chalupa, 'The Religio-Political Change in the Reign of Augustus: The Disappearance of Public Prodigies', *GLB* 17 (2012), 57–67, 58–9.

<sup>4</sup> On the *pax deorum* cf. F. Santangelo, 'Pax Deorum and Pontiffs', in J. H. Richardson and F. Santangelo (eds.), *Priests and State in the Roman World* (Stuttgart, 2011), 161–86, 162–71; M. Requena Jiménez, 'Prodigies in Republican Rome: The Absence of God', *Klio* 100 (2018), 480–500.

<sup>5</sup> Notable exceptions: A. Vigourt, *Les presages impériaux d'Auguste à Domitien* (Paris, 2001); R. Lorient, 'Les prodiges comme géographie sous Antonin le Pieux et Théodose', *MEFRA* 129 (2017), 613–34.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. B. MacBain, *Prodigy and Expiation: A Study in Religion and Politics in Republican Rome* (Bruxelles, 1982); S. Rasmussen, *Public Portents in Republican Rome* (Rome, 2003); Engels (n. 2).

<sup>7</sup> Focus is directed towards Liv. 43.13.1–2, which appears to suggest that neglect resulted in a lack of reported *portenta*. See esp. J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* (Oxford, 1979), 57–8, 159–61; MacBain (n. 6), 80–1; D. S. Levene, *Religion in Livy* (Leiden, 1993), 22–4; Rosenberger (n. 3), 210–40; Rasmussen (n. 6), 255–6; J. P. Davies, *Rome's Religious History: Livy, Tacitus and Ammianus on Their Gods* (Cambridge, 2004), 46–51, 160–2; Engels (n. 2), 795–7. Cf. F. Santangelo, *Divination, Prediction and the End of the Roman Republic* (Cambridge, 2013), 201–2; Santangelo (n. 1), 155–6; Satterfield (n. 1).

<sup>8</sup> Santangelo (n. 7), esp. 154–5. On *omina imperii*: R. S. Lorsch, *Omina Imperii: The Omens of Power Received by the Roman Emperors from Augustus to Domitian, their Religious Interpretation and Political Influence*, Diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (1993); R. L. Wildfang, 'The Propaganda of Omens: Six Dreams Involving Augustus', in R. L. Wildfang and J. Isager (eds.), *Divination & Portents in the Roman World* (Odense, 2000), 43–55; Chalupa (n. 3), 64.

Against this well-trodden understanding, Santangelo has shone fresh light on the largely neglected corpus of evidence of portents from the early principate. He does so in order to emphasize that, whilst there were shifts in the divinatory culture of the early principate, there was generally a continuity in the reporting and meaning of divine signs between the late republic and the early principate.<sup>9</sup>

In this article, I take up Santangelo's challenge that more attention must be given to divine signs of the early imperial period, and build upon his thesis that, throughout the late republic and early principate, there had been a continuity of divine signs. This paper suggests that embedded within reports of early imperial *portenta* are glimpses of complex and contested issues of identity on intra-local, trans-local, and global levels. This paper decodes just two portent reports, that of a statue of Athena on the Athenian Acropolis turning and spitting blood, and that of the various signs reported during the uprising of Boudicca in Camulodunum.

### Identity

Before decoding these *portenta*, it is fundamental first to consider how *portenta* might allow us insight into issues of identity. In their landmark studies, both MacBain and Rasmussen highlighted the importance of identity construction in the reporting and expiation of republican *prodigia*.<sup>10</sup> Both recognized that the Roman senate primarily began to identify *prodigia* in the Italian peninsula from the time of the Second Punic War, principally during Hannibal's invasion of Italy. They reason that the act of the senate recognizing divine signs from across Italy sent a strong message that Italian religious concerns were of importance to Rome, thereby developing and reinforcing a collective Romano-Italian *pax deorum*. By acknowledging that the sphere of their religious outlook was not limited to Rome (or even the *ager Romanus* ['Roman land']) but also incorporated key parts of the Italian peninsula, the Roman senate symbolically demonstrated to some Italians that there was a burgeoning synthesis between Roman and Italian identity.<sup>11</sup> In so doing, the senate was able to strengthen the

<sup>9</sup> Santangelo (n. 1), esp. 173: '[p]rodigies, far from being a vestigial presence, are the symptom of a long-term dynamic in Roman divination and of an important level of continuity'.

<sup>10</sup> MacBain (n. 6) and Rasmussen (n. 6).

<sup>11</sup> I acknowledge the complications of speaking of 'Italy' and 'Italians', esp. in this period. See esp. E. Dench, *Romulus' Asylum* (Oxford, 2005), 152–221.

symbolic unification of the peninsula. For MacBain, this was a process of *communication*, a ‘signalling system’ whereby the senate ‘could acknowledge the anxieties and identify with the religious sensibilities of Italians’.<sup>12</sup> Whilst he revised MacBain’s conclusions,<sup>13</sup> Rosenberger similarly conceived of *prodigia* as a ‘*Kommunikationsmedium*’,<sup>14</sup> emphasizing that, amongst other communicative forms, *prodigia* were used for religious communication with Italians, and that this could form the basis of stronger commonality between Rome and other areas.<sup>15</sup>

For Rasmussen, this was more specifically a process of Romanization and identity (re)creation or (re)construction. Highlighting not only the acceptance of Italian *prodigia*, but also those instances where the senate found that certain divine signs were *not* of concern to the collective Romano-Italian *pax deorum*, Rasmussen argues that ritual expiations of Italian *prodigia* became ‘an expression of transformation as well as incorporation: it turned a foreign matter into a matter of Roman concern...this process was both a manifestation and extension of Roman identity’.<sup>16</sup> Thus, in recognizing or rejecting divine signs as *prodigia*, the senate set limits on Roman identity and carved divisions between those Italian communities that were recognized as within the Roman *pax deorum* and those that did not have a share in Roman identity.<sup>17</sup> By Roman identity, Rasmussen specifically invokes the concept of a society’s *Selbstbild* – its self-image – the ‘collective, official picture a society paints of itself, and which is used to identify that society, its distinctive characteristics, and its members in relation to other cultures’.<sup>18</sup> Thus, Rasmussen conceives of the acceptance of

<sup>12</sup> MacBain (n. 6), 1 and further at 41–2.

<sup>13</sup> V. Rosenberger, ‘Prodigien aus Italien: Geographische Verteilung und Religiöse Kommunikation’, *CCG* 16 (2005), 235–57, 249. Cf. Rosenberger (n. 3), 210–23.

<sup>14</sup> Rosenberger (n. 13), 235.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>16</sup> S. Rasmussen, ‘Ritual and Identity: A Sociological Perspective on the Expiation of Public Portents in Ancient Rome’, in A. Rasmussen and S. Rasmussen (eds.), *Religion and Society: Resources and Identity in the Ancient Graeco-Roman World* (Rome, 2008), 37–42, 40. Also Rasmussen (n. 6), esp. 241–2, 254.

<sup>17</sup> Whilst Rasmussen’s categorization of *ager Romanus* and *ager publicus* (‘public land’) were challenged by C. J. Dart, ‘The Address of Italian Portents by Rome and the *Ager Publicus*’, *AC* 81 (2012), 111–24 – conclusions subsequently challenged by Y. Berthelet, ‘Expiation, par Rome, de prodiges survenus dans ces cités alliées du *nomen Latinum* ou des cités alliées italiennes non-latines’, *AC* 82 (2013), 91–109 – Rasmussen’s conclusions on *identity* remain valid. Cf. Davies (n. 7), 42.

<sup>18</sup> Rasmussen (n. 6), 241–2.

*prodigia* as a prominent and evocative sign that the Roman *Selbstbild* had come to include communities of the Italian peninsula.<sup>19</sup>

The intersection between divine signs and identity did not, I believe, end with the republic, but rather continued (at the very least) into the early principate. Whilst these treatments of *prodigia* and identity place the overwhelming importance on ‘Roman’ identity as viewed from, and controlled by, the Roman centre, these studies can, I think, be built upon to conceptualize a relationship between divine signs and identity-communication on a variety of different levels. Not only can we conceptualize the importance of divine signs for Rome and its *principes* in the construction of a Roman *Selbstbild* (from the lens of the centre, especially the *princeps*), but I suggest that reports of various *portenta* could also function (and be seen to function) as part as the constant (re)negotiation of local, trans-local, and global identities for provinces, communities, and individuals.<sup>20</sup> Whilst we can see these functions playing out in a variety of *portenta* reports, I intend to focus here on just two case studies: a portent reported in the early Augustan period of the statue of Athena on the Athenian Acropolis turning and spitting blood, and the various *portenta* reported during Boudicca’s rebellion at Camulodunum in 60 CE. By decoding the similarities between these otherwise distant reports of *portenta*, at a distance that is both temporal – Augustan as opposed to Neronian – and geographical – Athens as opposed to Camulodunum – we can both see the widespread possibilities of examining how *portenta* intersected with identity and can glimpse the continuity of these concepts over time. I turn now to the first of these case studies: that of the statue of Athena spitting blood on the Acropolis.

### Athena on the Acropolis

Cassius Dio, whilst recounting Octavian’s tour of the East after the battle of Actium, recounts a unique interaction between the Athenians and Octavian:<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Cf. S. Satterfield, ‘Livy and the Timing of Expiation in Rome’, *Histos* 6 (2012), 67–90, 86.

<sup>20</sup> For identity, esp. in the Greek East: G. Woolf, ‘Afterword: The Local and the Global in the Graeco-Roman East’, in T. Whitmarsh (ed.), *Local Knowledge and Microidentities in the Imperial Greek World* (Cambridge, 2010), 189–200; T. Whitmarsh, ‘The Mnemology of Empire and Resistance: Memory, Oblivion, and Perigesis in Imperial Greek Culture’, in K. Galinsky and K. Lapatin (eds.), *Cultural Memories in the Roman Empire* (Los Angeles, 2015), 49–64.

<sup>21</sup> Consistent with our lack of clarity on Dio’s sources, his source for this episode is unrecoverable: F. Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio* (Oxford, 1964), 34–8, 84–5; M. Reinhold, *From Republic to*

Ἀθηναίων δὲ τὴν τε Αἴγινα καὶ τὴν Ἐρέτριαν (ἐκαρποῦντο γὰρ αὐτάς), ὡς τινὲς φασιν, ἀφείλετο, ὅτι τὸν Ἀντώνιον ἐσπούδασαν, καὶ προσέτι καὶ ἀπηγόρευσέ σφισι μηδένα πολίτην ἀργυρίου ποιεῖσθαι. καὶ αὐτοῖς ἐς ταῦτα ἔδοξε τὸ τῷ τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς ἀγάλματι συμβᾶν ἀποσκήψαι· ἐν γὰρ τῇ ἀκροπόλει πρὸς ἀνατολῶν ἰδρυμένον πρὸς τε τὰς δυσμὰς μετεστράφη καὶ αἶμα ἀπέπτυσεν. (Cass. Dio 54.7.2–4).<sup>22</sup>

But from the Athenians [Octavian] took away both Aegina and Eretria (for the Athenians were enjoying profits from them), because, as some say, they had courted [Marcus] Antonius, and besides, he also forbade them to make anyone a citizen for money. And it seemed to them that the thing which suddenly fell upon them had happened because of the statue of Athena; for the statue, on the Acropolis, having been erected facing the East, had turned around to the West and spat blood.<sup>23</sup>

Various historiographical objections have been made to discredit the accuracy of Dio's account,<sup>24</sup> not least of which is the existence of a passage in Plutarch, commonly believed to refer to the same events:

τοῦ δὲ Ἀθηναίων δήμου ἐξημαρτηκέναι τι δόξαντος, ἔγραψεν ἀπ' Αἰγίνης οἶεσθαι μὴ λανθάνειν αὐτοὺς ὀργιζόμενος, οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἐν Αἰγίνῃ διαχειμάσαι. ἄλλο δὲ οὐδὲν οὔτε εἶπεν αὐτοὺς οὔτε ἐποίησε. (Plut. *Mor. Ap. Rom.* 207F).<sup>25</sup>

When the Athenian people believed that they had committed a certain fault, [Octavian] wrote from Aegina that he supposed that it had not escaped their attention that he was angry, for otherwise he would not have passed the winter on Aegina. But he neither said nor did anything else to them.

Bowersock and Hoff, believing that Dio and Plutarch describe the same episode, posit that it must have occurred in the winter of 22/21 BCE as it was the only winter when Augustus could have stayed on

*Principate: An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History Books 49–52 (36–29 BC)* (Atlanta, 1988), 6–9; J. W. Rich, *Cassius Dio: The Augustan Settlement (Roman History 53–55.9)* (Warminster, 1990), 5–8. Cf. R. Westall, 'The Sources of Cassius Dio for the Roman Civil Wars of 49–30 BC', in C. H. Lange and J. M. Madsen (eds.), *Cassius Dio: Greek Intellectual and Roman Politician* (Leiden, 2016), 51–75.

<sup>22</sup> Text and references of Dio follow E. Cary (ed. and transl.), *Dio Cassius: Roman History* (Cambridge MA, 1914).

<sup>23</sup> Own translations throughout.

<sup>24</sup> See esp. K. Hendrick, *Roman Emperors and Athenian Life, from Augustus to Hadrian*, Diss., University of California (2006), 22–39. For the accuracy of Dio's assertion that Octavian removed Aegina and Eretria from Athens' control: P. Graindor, *Athènes sous Auguste* (Cairo, 1927), 5–7. A. N. Oikonomides, 'Defeated Athens, the Land of Oropos, Caesar, and Augustus', *AncW* 2 (1979), 97–103, 97, 101–3, questions if Eretria was simply a copyist error for Oropos.

<sup>25</sup> Text follows F. C. Babbitt (ed. and transl.) *Plutarch: Moralia* (Cambridge MA, 1931), but note various restorations of ἂν...διαχειμάσαι. On these restorations and the possibility of re-reading this passage, see G. C. R. Schmalz, 'Athens, Augustus, and the Settlement of 21 BC', *GRBS* 37 (1996), 381–98, 389–91. Cf. Hendrick (n. 24), 25.

Aegina.<sup>26</sup> Both Dio and Plutarch agree that a fault had been committed – responsibility for which was ascribed to the Athenians – which prompted Octavian’s ire. Dio provides two potential reasons for Octavian’s anger, but makes no explicit authorial judgement on which of the two was more likely. Such ambivalence is likely the result of Dio’s overall intention here to contrast Octavian’s negative attitude towards the Athenians with his positive disposition towards the Lacedaemonians.<sup>27</sup> Plutarch, meanwhile, does not furnish us with details of the fault and simply records that one had been committed (ἐξομαρτόνω). There is, however, an obvious inconsistency between the sources. While Dio recounts a series of punitive economic sanctions taken against Athens, Plutarch claims that Octavian merely wintered in Aegina but otherwise neither said nor did anything else to Athens or the Athenians. Even if we must read these two accounts as relating to the same events, I see no reason to *assume* historicity for Plutarch rather than for Dio.<sup>28</sup> In compiling his compendium of *apophthegmata* (‘sayings’) – anecdotes destined for inclusion in his (now lost) *Life of Augustus* – Plutarch deliberately sought to depict Augustus as a calm, moderate ruler, capable of controlling his anger and demonstrating his *moderatio* (‘moderation’) – or at least found these themes already evident in his source material.<sup>29</sup> Dio, too, may have had reasons to invent, or at the very least creatively interpolate, the incident with the statue of Athena. However, I find the possibility of complete fabrication unlikely, especially given Dio’s well-known fascination with the

<sup>26</sup> G. W. Bowersock, ‘Augustus on Aegina’, *CQ* 14 (1964), 120–1; M. Hoff, ‘Civil Disobedience and Unrest in Augustan Athens’, *Hesperia* 58.3 (1989), 267–76, 268. Cf. Graindor (n. 24) 17–18 for 31 BCE and Schmalz (n. 25), who disentangles Plutarch and Dio, placing Augustus in Athens and Aegina in the winter of 21 BCE. For issues with dating: Hendrick (n. 24), 23–39.

<sup>27</sup> In giving two explanations without a preference for either, Dio does not conform to his standard approach to historical causation, on which: J. C. Edmondson, *Dio: the Julio-Claudians. Selections from Books 58–63 of the Roman History of Cassius Dio* (London, 1992), 47–8.

<sup>28</sup> As Hendrick (n. 24), does, implicitly, at 32. Cf. Schmalz (n. 25).

<sup>29</sup> Hendrick (n. 24), 34–8. On *apophthegmata* of Augustus used for Plutarch’s *Life of Augustus*, see Babbitt (n. 25), 229 n.e., and those used in his *Lives* generally, see P. A. Stadter, ‘Notes and Anecdotes: Observations on Cross-Genre *Apophthegmata*’, in A. G. Nikolaidis (ed.), *The Unity of Plutarch’s Work: ‘Moralia’ Themes in the ‘Lives’, Features of the ‘Lives’ in the ‘Moralia’* (Berlin/New York, 2008), 53–66. The particular resonance of *moderatio* with Tiberius – see e.g. H. Westphal, ‘*Imperium suum paulatim destruxit*: The Concept of *Moderatio* in Valerius Maximus’ *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia* 4.1’, *AClass* 58 (2015), 191–208; E. Cowan, ‘Tiberius and Augustus in Tiberian Sources’, *Historia* 58 (2009), 468–85, 480–3 – does not preclude its importance for others, namely Augustus.



occurrence of *portenta* in his source material.<sup>30</sup> Thus, I take Dio at face value and assume that there was a contemporary report of the extraordinary behaviour of the statue of Athena.<sup>31</sup>

It is well accepted that Dio recounts a remarkable event that was likely to have been interpreted as a *portentum*, that is, a sign of divine displeasure indicating a breach in the *pax deorum*. Here, however, is where agreement between most modern treatments of the incident ends. There is, perhaps most importantly, no consensus on how this *portentum* might have been interpreted. To fully understand this report of a divine sign and to decode it as a moment of contested identity, we must deconstruct the various elements of the *portentum* and analyse comparable instances of statue *portenta* and the various interpretations given to those reports. Whilst Santangelo rightly urges us to remember the potential for competing views in our interpretation of portents, our sources imply – at least for statue *portenta* – that there were standard (or at least relatively common) ways that these incidents were interpreted.<sup>32</sup>

Based on comparable evidence, we can delineate and characterize two main types of statue portent. The first type are incidents where statues were externally afflicted; most commonly where they had toppled or been blown over, or had been struck by lightning.<sup>33</sup> The second type are statues said to have behaved in some way like animate humans. Common manifestations of this are reports of statues sweating, crying, or independently moving. The interpretations given to occurrences belonging to either category seem to depend entirely on whether the affected statue depicted a human or a divinity. Where

<sup>30</sup> For Dio's interest in portents: Cass. Dio 73.23; Millar (n. 21), 77; Rich (n. 21), 12; Edmondson (n. 27), 39, 44; Satterfield (n. 1).

<sup>31</sup> The identity of the statue is still in question. Both J. Bremmer, 'The Agency of Greek and Roman Statues: From Homer to Constantine', *Opuscula* 6 (2013), 7–21, 10, 14, and B. S. Ridgway, 'Images of Athena on the Akropolis', in J. Neils (ed.), *Goddess and Polis: The Panathenaic Festival in Ancient Athens* (Princeton, 1992), 119–42, 126–7, believe it to be the small (thus portable) olive-wood statue of Athena Polias. N. Robertson, 'Athena's Statues and Festivals', in J. Neils (ed.), *Worshipping Athena* (Wisconsin, 1996), 27–77, 47, insists it was the statue of Athena Hygieia, believing Dio would only reference compass points for an outdoor statue. H. Whittaker, 'Some Reflections on the Temple to the Goddess Roma and Augustus on the Acropolis at Athens', in E. Ostenfeld (ed.), *Greek Romans and Roman Greeks* (Aarhus, 2002), 25–39, 37, denies the possibility it was the statue of Athena Promachos, as it already faced towards the West and would have been 'too heavy to shift'.

<sup>32</sup> Santangelo (n. 1), 161, 167, 169. Cf. Cic. *Div.* 2.58; Plut. *Vit. Cor.* 38.1–4 for 'rational' explanations of statue portents.

<sup>33</sup> E. Perry, 'Human Interactions with Statues', in E. Friedland, M. Sobocinski, and E. Gazda (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Sculpture* (Oxford, 2015), 653–66, 660. See e.g. Cass. Dio 37.9.1, 40.17.1, 44.18.2, 48.43.4–6, 50.8.6, 57.18.4.



statues of humans were afflicted, the most common interpretation appears to be that the gods were angry at the persons depicted by the statues. Incidents concerning statues of Cleopatra and M. Antonius are useful illustrations of this. As Dio recounts, during the civil war with Antonius, ‘the statues of [Antonius and Cleopatra] which the Athenians set up on the Acropolis bearing the form of gods, were struck by thunderbolts into the theatre [below]’ (τάς τε εἰκόνας αὐτῶν, ὅς οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι ἐν τῇ ἀκροπόλει τὸ τῶν θεῶν σχῆμα ἐχούσας ἔστησαν, κεραυνοὶ ἐς τὸ θέατρον κατήραζαν, 50.15.2–3).<sup>34</sup> Dio implies that this external affliction to their statues (amongst other omens) was interpreted by Cleopatra as a sign that they would be defeated at Actium, prompting her hasty retreat from the battle.<sup>35</sup> Plutarch also recounts a statue of Antonius behaving in sentient fashion, which, he implies, foretold the result of the battle of Actium before it had even begun: ‘one of the stone statues of Antonius near the Alban hills was oozing sweat for many days, and though it was wiped away it did not abate’ (τῶν δὲ περὶ Ἄλβαν Ἀντωνίου λιθίνων ἀνδριάντων ἐνὸς ἰδρῶς ἀνεπίδυνεν ἡμέρας πολλάς, ἀποματτόντων τινῶν οὐ παυόμενος, *Vit. Ant.* 60.2).<sup>36</sup>

In contrast, human reactions and agency expressed in statues of divinities seem to have been interpreted as pathetic responses from divinities *themselves*.<sup>37</sup> Such a belief, that statues of the gods might be vehicles for divine agency, seems to align with what we understand about Graeco-Roman conceptions of the relationship between statue and divinity.<sup>38</sup> Whilst divine representations generally seem to have been understood as not being divine in themselves, Rüpke has suggested that acts of binding or flogging of statues evinces an understanding that statues could represent a divinity’s agency.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 60.2–3.

<sup>35</sup> 50.15.1: ταύτην γὰρ τὴν γνώμην ἔσχεν, ἐπειδὴ ὑπὸ σημείων ἐταράχθη (‘for [Cleopatra] had this opinion as a result of being disturbed by signs’); 50.15.3: ἕκ τε οὖν τούτων... ἡ Κλεοπάτρα αὐτὴ τε ἔδεισε (‘therefore, from these things... Cleopatra herself became scared’).

<sup>36</sup> For Plutarch’s attitudes towards portents: J. Mossman, ‘Plutarch’s Use of Statues’, in M. A. Flower and M. Toher (eds.), *Georgica: Greek Studies in Honour of George Cavvewell* (London, 1991), 98–119, 112–13. Cf. F. E. Brenk, *In Mist Apparellled: Religious Themes in Plutarch’s Moralia and Lives* (Lugduni Batavorum, 1977), 30–8.

<sup>37</sup> See Bremmer (n. 31), esp. 14.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. F. Graf, ‘Plutarch und die Götterbilder’, in R. Hirsch-Luipold (ed.), *Gott und die Götter bei Plutarch* (Berlin, 2005), 251–66, for Plutarch’s unease with statues as representations of gods.

<sup>39</sup> J. Rüpke, *On Roman Religion: Lived Religion and the Individual in Ancient Rome* (Ithaca, 2016), 123. Cf. P. Stewart, *Statues in Roman Society: Representation and Response* (Oxford, 2003); F. Hölscher, ‘Gods and Statues: An Approach to Archaistic Images in the Fifth Century BCE’,

Further, Chaniotis has recently argued that a statue of a god represented a ‘privileged medium of epiphany’, a nexus of easy visitation for the gods to access the mortal realm (and vice versa).<sup>40</sup> Thus, although these kinds of statue portents are rare,<sup>41</sup> it is reasonable to assume that when a statue is seen to have expressed a physical, pathetic response, it could be seen as the expression of the divinity’s *own* emotions.

Indeed, statues that were believed to have turned themselves around seem to have frequently been interpreted as having expressed the opinions of the represented divinity. When recounting the portents that were said to indicate the victory of Caesar over Pompey at Pharsalus, Dio mentions that ‘in Tralles a palm tree grew up in the temple of Nike and the goddess herself turned around to the likeness of Caesar placed beside her’ (ἐν Τράλλεσι φοινικά τε ἐν τῷ τῆς Νίκης ναῶ ἀναφῦναι καὶ τὴν θεὸν αὐτὴν πρὸς εἰκόνα τοῦ Καίσαρος ἐν πλαγίῳ που κεκμήνην μεταστραφῆναι, 41.61.4).<sup>42</sup> The interpretation is unambiguous: Nike turned towards Caesar to indicate that he had her favour, and thus that he would claim victory. Interpretations of similar portents seem to place more importance on the act of turning away, as if the god was abandoning particular individuals. Dio reports a portent from Germania concerning P. Quinctilius Varus: ‘and a statue of Nike which was in Germany and looked towards the land of the enemy turned around towards Italy’ (καὶ Νίκης τι ἄγαλμα ἐν τε τῇ Γερμανίᾳ ὄν καὶ πρὸς τὴν πολεμίαν βλέπον πρὸς τὴν Ἰταλίαν μετεστράφη, 56.24.4). In turning away from Germany, Victoria had abandoned Varus. In this context, where Victoria turns to indicate her favour for one side rather than another, it is important to remember Ripat’s caution: ‘[o]ne person’s dire prodigy could be another person’s

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in J. Mylonopoulos (ed.), *Divine Images and Human Imaginations in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Leiden, 2010), 105–20.

<sup>40</sup> A. Chaniotis, ‘The Life of Statues of Gods in the Greek World’, *Kernos* 30 (2017), 1–20, 10. Cf. J. Rüpke, ‘Representation or Presence? Picturing the Divine in Ancient Rome’, *ARG* 12 (2010), 181–96, 191; A. Corbeill, ‘Weeping Statues, Weeping Gods, and Prodigies from Republican to Early-Christian Rome’, in T. Fögen (ed.), *Tears in the Graeco-Roman World* (Berlin/New York, 2009), 297–310, 299–300.

<sup>41</sup> Bremmer (n. 31), 14.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Caes. *BCiv.* 3.105 where the palm tree portent and the existence of the statue of Caesar are mentioned, but not the statue turning. A turning statue of Victoria in Elis is mentioned instead. On portents in Caesar’s *Commentaries*: D. Feeney, *Literature and Religion in Rome: Cultures, Contexts, and Beliefs* (Cambridge, 1998), 19–20. That Caesar was not Dio’s source: Westall (n. 21), 53–7. Cf. Val. Max. 1.6.12; Plut. *Vit. Caes.* 47.1–2.

good omen'.<sup>43</sup> The turning of Victoria towards Caesar was necessarily Victoria's abandonment of Pompey.

It is not only statues of Victoria that were reported to have turned to demonstrate their disapproval. Dio tells of 'a statue of Tyche... Sejanus himself saw the statue turn around [turn its back on him] whilst he was sacrificing' (Τύχης τέ τι ἄγαλμα [...ὁ Σεῖανός] αὐτός τε θύων εἶδεν ἀποστρεφόμενον, 58.7.2–3).<sup>44</sup> Tyche turned her back upon Sejanus just as his 'fortunes' were reversing.<sup>45</sup> Thus, we see in Dio a cluster of references whereby divine qualities turned to indicate their favour or lack thereof. Given the nature of divine qualities, such interpretations must have been readily apparent.<sup>46</sup> As divine qualities given physical form, the unusual movements of these statues could easily and immediately indicate that these qualities were abandoning or favouring certain individuals.

The turning of divine statues takes on a new dimension when considering the movements of statues of the divine Iulius. One such moment, from 69 CE, is recounted in Tacitus, Suetonius, and Plutarch:

*in vestibulo Capitolii omissas habenas bigae, cui Victoria institerat, erupisse cella Iunonis maiorem humana speciem, statuam divi Iulii in insula Tiberini amnis sereno et inmoto die ab occidente in orientem conversam...* (Tac. Hist. 1.86).

[it was said that] in the vestibule of the Capitolium the reins of the chariot on which Victoria stood had fallen [from her hands], a likeness greater than a man had burst out of the cella of Iuno, a statue of the divine Iulius on the island of the Tiber river had turned from the West to the East on a clear and undisturbed day...

<sup>43</sup> P. Ripat, 'Roman Omens, Roman Audiences, and Roman History', *G&R* 53 (2006), 155–74, 162.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Cass. Dio 8.28 (Zonaras 8.1), of a statue of Victoria in the forum falling, facing in the direction from which the Gauls approached. Whilst originally seen to foretell Roman defeat, it was given a more favourable interpretation by a certain Manius, who 'declared that Victory, even if she had descended, had also gone forward, and now established more steadily on the earth, indicated to them mastery over the war' (εἰπὼν τὴν τε Νίκην, εἰ καὶ κατέβη, ἀλλ' εἰς τὸ πρόσθεν προχωρήσασαν καὶ βεβαιότερον ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἰδρυθεῖσαν τὸ κράτος σφίσι προδηλοῦν τοῦ πολέμου), with A. J. Clark, *Divine Qualities: Cult and Community in Republican Rome* (Oxford, 2007), 187–9.

<sup>45</sup> As Edmondson (n. 27), 44 suggests, reversals of fortune are recurrent in Dio and receive no greater treatment than with Sejanus.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Cass. Dio 46.33.3: before the battle of Mutina, 'the statue of the Mother of the Gods on the Palatine, which looked to the East verily turned around of its own accord to the West' (τό τε τῆς Μητρὸς τῶν θεῶν ἄγαλμα τὸ ἐν τῷ παλατίῳ ὄν (πρὸς γὰρ τοὶ τὰς τοῦ ἡλίου ἀνατολάς πρότερον βλέπον πρὸς δυσμὰς ἀπὸ ταυτομάτου μετεστράφη)). For the intersection between divine qualities and portents, and – more generally – the visibility of divine qualities and the range of engagements with them: Clark (n. 44), esp. 10–11, 17, 182–94. For the nature of Victoria, cf. Vigourt (n. 5), 219–20.

σημείων δὲ καὶ φαντασμάτων πολλῶν λεγομένων, τὰ μὲν ἄλλα φήμας ἀδεσπότους καὶ ἀμφιβόλους εἶχεν, ἐν δὲ Καπιτωλίῳ Νίκης ἐφεστῶσης ἄρματι τὰς ἡνίας πάντες εἶδον ἀφειμένους ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν, ὥσπερ κρατεῖν μὴ δυναμένης, καὶ τὸν ἐν μεσοποταμίᾳ νήσῳ Γαίου Καίσαρος ἀνδριάντα μῆτε σεισμοῦ γεγονότος μῆτε πνεύματος ἀφ' ἐσπέρας μεταστραφέντα πρὸς τὰς ἀνατολάς· ὃ φασι συμβῆναι περὶ τὰς ἡμέρας ἐκείνας ἐν αἷς οἱ περὶ Οὐεσπεσιανὸν ἐμφανῶς ἤδη τῶν πραγμάτων ἀντελαμβάνοντο.

(Plut. *Vit. Otho.* 4.4–5).

There were many reports of signs and apparitions, and the omens were without origin and dubious; but many saw that the Nike set up in a chariot on the Capitolium had dropped the reins from her hands, as if she no longer had any power, and that a statue of Gaius Caesar on the island of Tiber, without the occurrence of an earthquake or wind, had turned around from the West to the East, which is said to have happened during those days in which Vespasian was at last openly reaching out to seize the supreme power.

...ac non multo post comitia secundi consulatus ineunte Galba statuam Divi Iuli ad Orientem sponte conversam  
(Suet. *Vesp.* 5.7).

...and not long afterwards, when Galba was on his way to the elections for his second consulship, a statue of the divine Iulius of its own accord turned around towards the East.

The implication shared in all versions is that the statue of the divine Iulius turned away from Italy and towards the East to indicate that the divine Iulius was turning away from Otho, and towards Vespasian, stationed in Jerusalem. Although there is no small degree of *ex post facto* interpretation of this portent of Vespasian's fate,<sup>47</sup> the logic of these portent reports is instructive. The movement of a statue of the deified Iulius Caesar, the progenitor of imperial power, could easily be seen as commenting on the fortunes of current and future emperors. The divine Iulius Caesar himself was seen as dictating (or at the very least suggesting) the appropriate home for imperial power.

Although Dio's account of the Athena portent on the Acropolis is frustratingly brief, on the weight of these *exempla* I contend that the movement of Athena's statue would most obviously have been seen to indicate the feelings of Athena herself. Athena, the patron deity of Athens, had a message for the mortal realm. Nevertheless, as we have seen, the act of turning could be variously interpreted. Given this ambiguity, some have suggested that, because Athena turned away

<sup>47</sup> Esp. in Plutarch's version: G. E. F. Chilver, *A Historical Commentary on Tacitus' Histories I and II* (Oxford, 1979), 154. Cf. G. Morgan, 'Omens in Tacitus' *Histories* I–III', in R. L. Wildfang and J. Isager (eds.), *Divination & Portents in the Roman World* (Odense, 2000), 25–42, 33.

from Antonius in the East, she turned towards Octavian in the West to indicate her favour for him, thus portending Octavian's victory at Actium.<sup>48</sup> This interpretation fits those instances reported above, where divine statues apparently turned in the direction of their favour, and thus turned away from disfavoured parties.<sup>49</sup> Whilst such an interpretation is possible on the basis of the turning of the statue alone, we cannot ignore the spitting of blood in our overall interpretation of the portent.<sup>50</sup>

Examples of statues spitting or otherwise emitting blood are, however, relatively rare. More common are instances of statues exuding sweat or crying.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, we can draw on a handful of comparable instances. As preserved in Zonaras (8.22), Dio records that blood issued from statues of divinities upon Hannibal's crossing into Italy (13.56).<sup>52</sup> Livy too recounts that, when Hannibal had invaded Italy, in the temple of Iuno Sospita at Lanuvium, the *signa* ('statues') of the gods dripped with blood (23.31.15).<sup>53</sup> From a later period, Dio relates that, during the battle at Mutina, a statue of Athena that was worshipped nearby sent forth blood and milk (46.33.4),<sup>54</sup> that a statue of Jupiter on the Alban Mount sent forth blood from its right shoulder and right hand to foretell the downfall of democracy in the defeat at Philippi (47.40.4–5),<sup>55</sup> and that a marble statue of Antonius on the Alban Mount sent forth blood to portend his own death after the battle

<sup>48</sup> Schmalz (n. 25), 384; Robertson (n. 31), 47; Hendrick (n. 24), 31; Bremmer (n. 31), 14. In his argument, Hendrick also draws on the tradition that Antonius and Athena Polias were 'married' (Sen. *Suas.* 1.6–7; Cass. Dio 48.39.2).

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Hendrick (n. 24), 30; Vigour (n. 5), 39 no. 136, 103.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Robertson (n. 31), 47; Hendrick (n. 24), 31; Bremmer (n. 31), 14.

<sup>51</sup> For statues sweating: e.g. Cass. Dio 40.17.2, 40.47.2, 43.35.3, 48.50.4. For statues crying: e.g. Liv. 40.19.2, 43.13.4; Obseq. 28. Corbeil (n. 40), 304, interprets these crying statues as reflecting 'the sadness of the god' and as portending 'the deaths that will be soon inflicted upon mortals'.

<sup>52</sup> ... και αίμα τὸ μὲν ἐξ ἀγαλμάτων ὄφθη ('... and blood was seen coming from sacred statues'). On relying on Zonaras: C. Burden-Strevens, 'Introduction', in C. Burden-Strevens and M. O. Lindholmer (eds.), *Cassius Dio's Forgotten History of Early Rome* (Leiden, 2019), 1–23, 14–15; B. Simons, *Cassius Dio and die Römische Republik* (Berlin, 2009), esp. 32.

<sup>53</sup> *signa Lanuvi ad Iunonis Sospitae cruore manvere* ('the statues at Lanuvium in the temple of Iuno Sospita dripped with blood').

<sup>54</sup> και τὸ τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς τὸ πρὸς τῇ Μουτινῇ, παρ' ἧ καὶ τὰ μάλιστα ἐμαχέσαντο, τιμώμενον (αἷμα τε γὰρ πολὺ καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο καὶ γάλα ἀνήκε) ('and the statue of Athena worshipped near Mutina, near which they fought excessively, sent forth much blood and milk').

<sup>55</sup> τὸ τε ἄγαλμα τὸ τοῦ Διὸς τὸ ἐν τῷ Ἀλβανῷ ὃν αίμα παρ' αὐτὰς τὰς ἀνοχὰς ἐκ τε τοῦ δεξιῶ ὀμοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῆς δεξιᾶς χειρὸς ἀνέδωκε ('the statue of Jupiter on the Alban Mount which, during the *feriae* ('festivals'), yielded blood out of both its right shoulder and right hand'). On Dio's inconsistent attitude towards the downfall of the republic and the emergence of the principate: Westall (n. 21), 68–70.

of Actium (50.8.6).<sup>56</sup> Thus, statues emitting blood generally portended disaster for Rome and the shedding of blood in war. This mirrors the predominant interpretation of blood portents generally (not necessarily involving statues), where the emission or appearance of blood is generally ‘regarded as the forerunner of the shedding of blood’.<sup>57</sup>

Athena’s emission of blood could therefore be intended to portend Antonius’ defeat at the battle of Actium. Yet, as in the other examples we have already seen, where the statue represented a deity, the agency of that deity is crucial to the interpretation of the *portentum*. Blood had not simply appeared to portend disaster and the loss of life. Rather, Athena herself actively turned towards the West and then spat blood. The implication *must* be that Athena was spitting blood at the West, and thus, *at* Octavian himself, presumably in disgust and loathing. This interpretation is strengthened when we consider Dio’s verb, ἀποπτύω (‘spew forth’), and compare it with the neutral terminology used to describe the emission of blood in the statue portents previously considered.<sup>58</sup> It follows that the portent must have occurred *after* the battle of Actium.<sup>59</sup> This interpretation also fits with Octavian’s reported reaction to the statue portent moving and spitting. Whilst Dio reports that there were two potential reasons perceived for Octavian’s anger, the Athenians’ support of Antonius and the portent report, the latter of these seems far more likely to have aroused Octavian’s ire. In his previous visit to Athens, Octavian had already had the opportunity, if he had wanted it, to rebuke the city for supporting Antonius.<sup>60</sup> More likely is that Octavian was incensed by the report of this portent, and indeed viewed the portent as a personal attack against him, and his authority, in Athens.

<sup>56</sup> προεμαντεύσαντο... τὸν δ’ ὄλεθρον εἰκὼν τις αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ Ἀλβανῶ παρὰ τῷ Διὶ ἀνακειμένη-  
λιθίνῃ γὰρ οὕσα αἷμα πολὺ ἀνήκε (‘and his death was foretold: a certain likeness of him set up  
on the Alban Mount beside Jupiter, for although it was made of stone, much blood was sent  
forth from it’).

<sup>57</sup> F. B. Krauss, *An Interpretation of the Omens, Portents, and Prodiges Recorded by Livy, Tacitus,  
and Suetonius*, Diss., University of Pennsylvania (1930), 94. Cf. A. Nice, ‘Superstition and  
Religion in Tacitus’ and Dio’s Accounts of the Boudican Revolt’, *Pegasus* 36 (1993), 15–18, 16.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Cass. Dio 13.56 (Zonaras 8.22): ὁράω (‘see’), 47.40.5; ἀναδίδωμι (‘give forth’), 46.33.4  
and 50.8.6; ἀνίημι (‘send up’); Liv. 23.31.15: *mano* (‘flow’).

<sup>59</sup> We could *potentially* follow the dating of Bowersock (n. 26) and Hoff (n. 26), and place this in  
the winter of 22/21 BCE, but on the issues of this, see n. 26 above.

<sup>60</sup> Re-emphasizing that Athens favoured Antonius is convenient for Dio in evoking the contrast  
between the Athenians and the Lacedaemonians: Graindor (n. 24), 17; Oikonomides (n. 24), 97;  
Whittaker (n. 31), 31; Hendrick (n. 24), 26–7.

On this reading, Octavian's reaction to the occurrence of the portent seems anomalous. Why should Octavian have been angry with the Athenians for an act that, ostensibly, was that of a goddess? As we know from Suetonius, Octavian was particularly sensitive to the occurrence of divine signs.<sup>61</sup> I suggest that Octavian's reaction to this incident reveals that *he* did not interpret it as a sign of displeasure from the gods. Rather, his reaction shows that Augustus viewed this incident as a personal attack and rebuke. Indeed, Octavian's reaction lends support to modern, cynical views of religious interventions<sup>62</sup> – that this incident was orchestrated by the Athenians to personally slight Octavian.<sup>63</sup> Hoff, for instance, recreates the portent pragmatically as an Athenian intervention:

a statue of Athena on the Akropolis...which had been facing east, was discovered to have been deliberately turned to face the west in the direction of Rome, and blood had been splattered down the front and mouth of the statue to give the impression that Athena, the protectress and patron goddess of Athens, had spat blood at Rome.<sup>64</sup>

Rather than follow standard 'republican' methods for reporting and expiating *prodigia*, Octavian's anger at the report of the portent gives scholars the latitude to consider the potentially manipulative ways in which divine signs might have been used. Yet, even if Octavian believed that this portent was choreographed, he was not *necessarily* denying the sign's religious potency. Indeed, within Octavian's reaction is embedded an important exchange of power between Athens and Octavian, expressed on the level of the divine.

In reacting as if the Athenians had personally slighted him, Octavian unilaterally declared that the occurrence was not a *prodigium publicum*, and thus was not worthy of Roman intervention and expiation. In so doing, Octavian sidelined and subsumed the powers of the senate, which was traditionally responsible for confirming *prodigia publica* and appointing the best priesthood to recommend an expiation. Octavian was therefore making an explicit statement (both

<sup>61</sup> *Aug.* 90.1.

<sup>62</sup> As Ripat (n. 43), 173, emphasizes, in considering Roman portents we cannot forget the caution of K. Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* (Cambridge, 1978), 233, that '[i]n our attempts to find out what "really happened", we should be careful not to suppress what Romans thought was happening'. As Ripat stresses, 'Roman interpretations of the facts are often more significant than the facts themselves... and Roman stories about omens are a case in point'.

<sup>63</sup> Whittaker (n. 31), 31.

<sup>64</sup> Hoff (n. 26), 269.



to Athens and to the Roman senate) of his own supremacy as the interpreter of divine will. If correct, this allows us to glimpse the extent of Octavian's *auctoritas* ('social persuasiveness'). Even at this early stage, Octavian believed he had the *auctoritas* to sideline and commandeer the senate's authority<sup>65</sup> – an *auctoritas* that may have been strengthened by (but did not wholly rely on) a specific priestly authority, regardless of Octavian's gradual (and unprecedented) accumulation of priestly offices.<sup>66</sup> Another layer to this interaction is that Octavian did not simply reject a *portentum* that had occurred in Athenian territory. Rather, given the identity of the statue, Octavian was rejecting Athena herself, the Athenian goddess par excellence. In denying Athena, Octavian deprived Athens of divine autonomy. In a similar vein to the senate accepting or rejecting Italian *portenta* as being of concern to the Roman *pax deorum* 200 years earlier, Octavian here authoritatively rejected an Athenian *portentum*, and the authority of Athena herself, from the Roman worldview. Thus, within this apparently simple action we can decode a powerful and poignant statement: whilst Athens was being incorporated into the Roman empire, they were not joining on equal terms. Rather, Octavian's message was that the new *Selbstbild* of the Roman empire would (at least for the moment) explicitly exclude the Athenian gods.

Octavian's refusal to accept Athens' divine autonomy, and his refusal to incorporate it within the Roman *Selbstbild*, is striking considering that Athens' symbolic and religious 'capital' was the most potent tool in its arsenal for its negotiations with Rome. As Alcock has stressed, 'Athens, more than any other Greek city, possessed a stock of symbolic capital with which to negotiate its position with Rome'.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, alongside Octavian's rejection of Athena and her active input, it has been argued that the Athenian agora during the Roman period became – with the help of Augustus and Agrippa – a kind of cultural and religious museum where temples, altars, and statues were brought

<sup>65</sup> On the importance of *auctoritas* for Augustus: K. Galinsky, *Augustan Culture: An Interpretative Introduction* (Princeton, 1996), esp. 10–20; A. E. Cooley, 'From the Augustan Principate to the Invention of the Age of Augustus', *JRS* 109 (2019), 71–87. Cf. G. Rowe, 'Reconsidering the *Auctoritas* of Augustus', *JRS* 103 (2013), 1–15.

<sup>66</sup> For intersections of personal and priestly *auctoritas*: F. Santangelo, 'Priestly *Auctoritas* in the Roman Republic', *CQ* 63 (2013), 743–63.

<sup>67</sup> S. E. Alcock, 'The Problem of Romanization, the Power of Athens', in M. Hoff and S. Rotroff (eds.), *The Romanization of Athens* (Oxford, 1997), 1–7, 3. Cf. G. W. Bowersock, *Augustus and the Greek World* (Oxford, 1965), 90–1; E. M. Grijalvo, 'Elites and Religious Change in Roman Athens', *Numen* 52 (2005), 255–82.

and reassembled.<sup>68</sup> In redefining this public space, Augustus and Agrippa contributed to the reconfiguration of Athens' cultural and religious heritage.<sup>69</sup> At least from the perspective of Augustus and the imperial administration, the divine world of 'Roman Athens' should no longer be active, but rather passive, under the remit of the *princeps*.

I am not the first to consider this portent within a framework of Athenian identity. It plays a starring role in Hoff's influential picture of 'Roman Athens', where Athens is transformed from passionately pro-Antonian during the civil wars to passively submissive to Augustus by 14 CE.<sup>70</sup> The Athena portent is perceived as a major milestone along this continuum. Hoff views the incident with the statue as a symptom of greater civic unrest in Athens, an outpouring of anti-Roman sentiment orchestrated by an anti-Roman faction within the city.<sup>71</sup> The construction of the monopteros to *Roma* and Augustus on the Acropolis is perceived as the next turning point; it represented an apology and an attempt at reconciliation with Augustus.<sup>72</sup> For Hoff in particular, the temple represents how the Athenians were 'quickly brought to heel'.<sup>73</sup> Impassioned and evocative,

<sup>68</sup> See e.g. H. A. Thompson, 'Itinerant Temples of Attica', *AJA* 66 (1962), 200; T. Shear Jr., 'Athens: From City-State to Provincial Town', *Hesperia* 50 (1981), 356–77, 361–2; G. W. Bowersock, 'Augustus in the East: The Problem of Succession', in F. Millar and E. Segal (eds.), *Caesar Augustus: Seven Aspects* (Oxford, 1984), 169–88, 174; S. E. Alcock, *Graecia Capta: The Landscapes of Roman Greece* (Cambridge, 1993), 192–6.

<sup>69</sup> We should be cautious of the implications of the word 'museum' in this context, as it has the effect of draining the life and vitality from these spaces and the individuals who created and experienced them. See e.g. S. E. Alcock, 'Classical Order, Alternative Orders, and the Uses of Nostalgia', in J. Richards and M. van Buren (eds.), *Order, Legitimacy, and Wealth in Ancient States* (Cambridge, 2000), 110–19, 112–13; V. Evangelidis, 'Agoras and Fora: Developments in the Central Public Space of the Cities of Greece During the Roman Period', *ABSA* 109 (2014), 335–56; C. Dickenson, *On the Agora: The Evolution of a Public Space in Hellenistic and Roman Greece (c. 323 BC–267 AD)* (Leiden, 2016), 276–83.

<sup>70</sup> Hoff (n. 26), esp. 276; M. Hoff, 'The Early History of the Roman Agora at Athens', in S. Walker and A. Cameron (eds.), *The Greek Renaissance in the Roman Empire* (London, 1989), 1–8, esp. 4–8.

<sup>71</sup> Hoff (n. 26), esp. 269; Hoff (n. 70).

<sup>72</sup> *IG<sup>2</sup>* 3173. On the involvement of the *demos* in the dedication and construction of the temple: T. Stefanidou-Tiveriou, 'Tradition and Romanization in the Monumental Landscape of Athens', in S. Vlizos (ed.), *Athens During the Roman Period* (Athens, 2008), 11–40, 20–3; N. Evans, 'Embedding Rome in Athens', in J. Brodd and J. Reed (eds.), *Rome and Religion: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Imperial Cult* (Atlanta, 2011), 83–98. Cf. F. A. Morales, 'The Monument of Roma and Augustus on the Athenian Acropolis', in W. Vanacker and A. Zuiderhoek (eds.), *Imperial Identities in the Roman World* (London, 2017), 141–61, 142, who problematizes the identification of this monument as a temple.

<sup>73</sup> Hoff (n. 70), 8. See also, M. Hoff, 'The Politics and Architecture of the Athenian Imperial Cult', in A. Small (ed.), *Subject and Ruler: The Cult of the Ruling Power in Classical Antiquity* (Ann Arbor, 1996), 185–200, esp. 193. Unfortunately, the agency of Athenians in the temple's construction is often denied as it is seen as an imperial imposition or a symbol of imperial

the linearity of this narrative is enticingly simple yet brushes over negotiations and interactions throughout this period that must have been messy and complicated. Approaches to various manifestations of emperor worship have demonstrated that there was *always* a range of voices, pressures, and motivations in the invocation of the divine authority of Rome and/or Augustus, and to focus only on one side of the coin is misleading.<sup>74</sup> Such insights should be extended to consider the entire period of ‘Augustan’ Athens. Even if we adopt the wholly pragmatic approach – that the portent was orchestrated and engineered by Athenians – we should not imagine that such an expression of hatred was wholeheartedly supported by the entirety of the Athenian élite.<sup>75</sup> Rather, this incident might simply have been a potent utilization of divine symbols and signs by a group of dissatisfied Athenian citizens who sought to frame themselves by their religious identity, the most powerful tool at their disposal. Whilst Athena might naturally be perceived to represent the feelings of Athens as a whole, the invocation of Athens’ patron goddess obscures the realities of what must have been complex, contested, and evolving discussions around the nature of their identity – both of individuals and the collective – in this period.

### *Arx aeternae dominationis* (‘the citadel of eternal domination’)

The capacity for portent reports to provide insights into issues of identity is not, I contend, simply limited to ‘Augustan’ Athens nor to Dio’s historiographical methods. This can most evocatively be seen in the portent reports – contained in both Tacitus and Dio – that

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domination: M. Weber, *Baldachine und Statuenschreine* (Roma, 1990), 113; T. Schäfer, *Spoila et Signa: Baupolitik und Reichskultur nach dem Parthererfolg des Augustus* (Göttingen, 1998), esp. 58; J. Fouquet, ‘Der Roma-Augustus-Monopteros auf der Athener Akropolis Herrscherkult und Memoria, *ad Palladis templi vestibulum?*’, *Thetis* 19 (2012), 35–83.

<sup>74</sup> Esp. Whitmarsh (n. 20); Morales (n. 72); F. A. Morales, ‘Continuity and Rupture in Augustan Athens: Euergetism and Public Building’, in M. B. B. Florenzano (ed.), *KHORÍON – ΧΩΡΙÓN. Cidade e Território na Grécia Antiga* (São Paulo, 2019), 245–58. For manifestations of emperor worship stemming from a variety of different motivations, see definitively: S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge, 1984).

<sup>75</sup> For divisions among the Athenian élite and the voices in play, see e.g. A. J. S. Spawforth, ‘The Early Reception of the Imperial Cult at Athens: Problems and Ambiguities’, in M. Hoff and S. Rotroff (eds.), *The Romanization of Athens* (Oxford, 1997), 183–201, esp. 191–2; and, with caution, D. J. Geagan, ‘The Athenian Elite: Romanization, Resistance, and the Exercise of Power’, in M. C. Hoff and S. I. Rotroff (eds.), *The Romanization of Athens* (Oxford, 1997), 19–32.

surrounded the uprising of Boudicca in Camulodunum in 60/61 CE. Tacitus provides us with an emotive series of *portenta*:<sup>76</sup>

*inter quae nulla palam causa delapsum Camuloduni simulacrum Victoriae ac retro conversum, quasi cederet hostibus. et feminae in furorem turbatae adesse exitium canebant, externosque fremitus in curia eorum auditos; consonuisse ululatibus theatrum visamque speciem in aestuario Tamesae subversae coloniae: iam Oceanus cruento aspectu, dilabente aestu humanorum corporum effigies relictas, ut Britannis ad spem, ita veteranis ad metum trahebantur.*

(Tac. *Ann.* 14.32.1).

Meanwhile, for no evident reason, a statue of Victoria at Camulodunum collapsed and turned its back, as if withdrawing from the enemy. Women, disturbed into madness, cried that destruction was at hand and that foreign cries had been heard in their senate-house, the theatre had rung with shrieks, and the appearance of the colony overthrown had been seen in the Thames's estuary. Now Oceanus had appeared bloody, and that likenesses of human bodies had been left by the ebbing tide. Thus, the Britons were drawn toward hope, the veterans toward dread.

The first of these portents is strikingly similar to the portent in Athens: a statue representing the divine quality of Victory was said to have turned and fallen. Tacitus himself suggests the interpretation of the portent: that Victory fell in the process of running from Boudicca and the province of *Britannia*.<sup>77</sup> Fishwick intimated that this statue of Victoria had been set up in the context of the temple of Claudius,<sup>78</sup> the very temple that was (according to Tacitus) seen to have been the 'citadel of eternal domination' (*arx aeternae dominationis*, *Ann.* 14.31) by the population of *Britannia*.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, the *portenta* as Tacitus recounts them cluster around ostensible elements of the Roman *colonia* of Camulodunum – namely the senate-house and theatre – an image that is reinforced by the entire colony appearing ruined in the Thames. Whilst the statue portent is not given by Dio (or at least not in Xiphilinus' version), his list of *portenta* similarly coalesces around

<sup>76</sup> For Tacitus and portents, see generally Davies (n. 7), 160–5; K. E. Shannon-Henderson, *Religion and Memory in Tacitus' Annals* (Oxford, 2019).

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Cass. Dio 56.24. For portents of bloody rivers and seas, cf. Liv. 23.31.15, 24.10.7, 24.44.8; Cass. Dio 68.26.5.

<sup>78</sup> D. Fishwick, 'Templum Divo Claudio Constitutum', *Britannia* 3 (1972), 164–81, 168. Cf. C. M. Bulst, 'The Revolt of Queen Boudicca in AD 60', *Historia* 10 (1961), 496–509, 501; C. J. Simpson, 'The Statue of Victory at Colchester', *Britannia* 27 (1996), 386–7.

<sup>79</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 14.31. Cf. Sen. *Apocol.* 83. On the temple, its dedication, and its perceptions: M. P. Charlesworth, 'Deus Noster Caesar', *CR* 29 (1925), 113–15, 114–15; Fishwick (n. 78); J. Webster, 'Negotiated Syncretism: Romano-Celtic Religion', in D. J. Mattingly (ed.), *Dialogues in Roman Imperialism: Power, Discourse and Discrepant Experience in the Roman Empire* (Rhode Island, 1997), 165–84, 165–6.

the very identity of the colony itself (62.1.1–2).<sup>80</sup> Except for the statue portent, the portents recorded are so similar that they must have come from common source.<sup>81</sup> Only a handful of chapters later, Dio depicts Boudicca as a diviner summoning an omen to stir her army into revolt, before thanking Andraste for the sign (62.6.1–2).<sup>82</sup> Several lines later, Dio evokes Boudicca in the grove of Andate – who Dio recognizes was the Britons’ name for Nike – and claims she was given exceptional reverence (62.7.3).<sup>83</sup> It has persuasively been suggested that, despite the different names (Andate/Andraste), Dio is referring to a single goddess, a divinity who (at least for Dio) resembled Nike/Victoria.<sup>84</sup> Thus, whilst Dio eschews the statue portent, he constructs a narrative whereby Boudicca emerges as a devotee of British Victoria, and that the divine quality was so enraptured by her devotee that she even summoned divine signs at Boudicca’s command.<sup>85</sup> In both accounts of the conflict,

<sup>80</sup> ὡς που καὶ τὸ θεῖον τὴν συμφορὰν αὐτοῖς προεσήμανεν· ἕκ τε γὰρ τοῦ βουλευτηρίου θροῦς νυκτὸς βαρβαρικός μετὰ γέλωτος καὶ ἐκ τοῦ θεάτρου θόρυβος μετ’ οἰμωγῆς ἐξηκούετο, μηδενὸς ἀνθρώπων μῆτε φθειγγομένου μῆτε στένοντος, οἰκίαί τε τινες ἐν τῷ Ταμέσῳ ποταμῷ ὑψυδροὶ ἐωρῶντο, καὶ ὁ ὠκεανὸς ὁ μεταξὺ τῆς τε νήσου καὶ τῆς Γαλατίας αἰματώδης ποτὲ ἐν τῇ πλημμυρίδι ἠυζήθη (‘Indeed, the gods foretold the misfortune to them, for at night was heard a barbarian murmur along with laughter from the senate-house and an uproar along with lamentations from the theatre, though no one uttered words nor groaned, and some houses were seen under the water in the river Thames, and Oceanus, he who stretches between the island and Gaul, at the time of the flood-tide grew blood-red’). For the accuracy of Xiphilinus’ epitome here: P. A. Brunt, ‘On Historical Fragments and Epitomes’, *CQ* 30 (1980), 477–94, 491. Cf. Bulst (n. 78), 496, 508, and generally: C. Mallan, ‘The Style, Method, and Programme of Xiphilinus’ *Epitome of Cassius Dio’s Roman History*’, *GRBS* 53 (2013), 610–44.

<sup>81</sup> On Tacitus’ and Dio’s accounts of the revolt, including the abbreviated version in Tac. *Agr.* 14.3–16.2, and their sources: E. Adler, ‘Boudicca’s Speeches in Tacitus and Dio’, *CW* 101 (2008), 173–95, 176; N. Reed, ‘The Sources of Tacitus and Dio for the Boudiccan Revolt’, *Latomus* 33 (1974), 926–33; Nice (n. 57), 15–16. Cf. Bulst (n. 78), 496, 508.

<sup>82</sup> ταῦτα εἰπούσα λαγὼν μὲν ἐκ τοῦ κόλπου προήκατο μαντεία τινὶ χρωμένη, καὶ ἐπειδὴ ἐν αἰσίῳ σφίσειν ἔδραμε, τὸ τε πλῆθος πᾶν ἡσθὲν ἀνεβόησε, καὶ ἡ Βουδοῦικα τὴν χεῖρα ἐς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀνατείνασα εἶπε “χάριν τέ σοι ἔχω, ὦ Ἀνδράστη... (“These things said, she let loose a hare from the fold of her robe, furnishing a species of divination, and since they thought it ran on an auspicious side, the great multitude all cried out in delight, and Boudicca stretched out a hand toward heaven and said “I give thanks to you, Andraste...”)). On Dio’s Boudiccan speeches: Adler (n. 81).

<sup>83</sup> καὶ ταῦτα πάντα, θύοντές τε ἅμα καὶ ἐστιάμενοι καὶ ὑβρίζοντες, ἐν τε τοῖς ἄλλοις σφῶν ἱεροῖς καὶ ἐν τῷ τῆς Ἀνδάτης μάλιστα ἄλσει ἐποίουν. οὕτω τε γὰρ τὴν Νίκην ὀνόμαζον, καὶ ἔσεβον αὐτὴν περιτότατα (‘and they made all these things at the same time, offering sacrifices, feasting and running riot, in their other consecrated places and particularly in the grove of Andate, for this was their name for Nike and they worshipped her most exceptionally’).

<sup>84</sup> C. C. Gillespie, *Boudicca: Warrior Woman of Roman Britain* (Oxford, 2018), 109; Adler (n. 81), 190 and n. 44. Cf. U. P. Boissevain, *Cassii Dionis Cocceiani. Historiarum Romanarum quae supersunt* (Berolini, 1901), iii.48; D. R. Dudley and G. Webster, *The Rebellion of Boudicca* (London, 1962), 68, 151–2 n. 2; Nice (n. 57), 17.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Nice (n. 57), 17: ‘[i]s Dio implying a comparison with the collapse of the Roman Victory compared with the rise of the British goddess?’.

therefore, the divine quality of Victory emerges as being – at least in the Roman imagination – emblematic of the contest between Britons and Rome. Such sentiments can even be glimpsed in other media. Given that the epithet *Victricensis* came to be added to the official titulature of the colony of Camulodunum after Boudicca's defeat (previously only *colonia Claudia*),<sup>86</sup> it is possible that Victoria was used as a rallying cry for the Roman forces in the conflict, or that she became the patron deity for the recaptured colony.<sup>87</sup> Thus *Victoria* seems to have been a central *locus* around which the uprising revolved, both before and after the conflict. Much of this attention manifested itself in the reporting of divine signs – *portenta* that gravitated around Roman and British claims to victory, and indeed, the visible signs of the Roman *colonia* itself.<sup>88</sup>

### Conclusion

In this conflict between Rome and the Iceni, on the borders of the Roman empire, *portenta* again emerge as one way in which competing identities could be understood and negotiated. Although the circumstances differed radically from those in Athens in the early days of the principate, *portenta* appear in Britannia during this volatile period of transition and conflict as a vehicle through which identity was challenged and negotiated. Here, however, the *princeps* is entirely removed from the narrative. The matter is simply one between rebellious locals and Roman forces, in a fierce struggle to assert their identity.

The *portenta* explored in these contexts – Athens and Britannia – demonstrate that whilst imperial portents are less common, they are no less worthy of our attention than republican *prodigia*. Whilst these kinds of reports are often neglected, they are vital in enabling us to hear voices from across the empire often silenced in the historiographical record. The appearance of these *portenta* in the narratives of Tacitus and Cassius Dio demonstrate not only that

<sup>86</sup> R. S. O. Tomlin, *Britannia Romana: Roman Inscriptions and Roman Britain* (Oxford, 2018), 250–1; *AE* 1996, 954a, with M. W. C. Hassall and R. S. O. Tomlin, 'Inscriptions', *Britannia* 27 (1996), 439–57, 443 n. 21; *RIB* 3.3005, with R. P. Wright, 'Roman Britain in 1961', *JRS* 51 (1962), 169–99, 191 n. 4; *CIL* 14.3955 = *ILS* 2740. Cf. *CIL* 3.11233.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Clark (n. 44), 251–2.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Vigourt (n. 5), 291.

these kinds of reports were foundational to the ways in which Romans understood *their* identity and *their* place in the world, but also that provincials could draw on the same language to negotiate *their* position within – or against – Roman identity. Thus, decoding *portenta* from the early empire can give us important insights into unique narratives of identity (re)negotiation in this period, and, in this capacity, demand increased scholarly attention.

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