

Augustus' Conception and the Heroic Tradition

Suetonius wrote of Augustus' conception : *In Asclepiadis Mendetis Θεολογούμενων libris lego, Atiam, cum ad sollemne Apollinis sacrum media nocte uenisset, posita in templo lectica, dum ceterae matronae dormirent* (1), *obdormisse : draconem repente irrepsisse ad eam pauloque post egressum ; illam expergefactam quasi a concubitu mariti purificasse se ; et statim in corpore eius extitisse maculam uelut picti draconis, nec potuisse umquam exigi, adeo ut mox publicis balineis perpetuo abstinerit ; Augustum natum mense decimo et ob hoc Apollinis filium existimatum* (2). Dio recorded a more concise version of the same story, "ἡ Ἀττία δεινῶς ἰσχυρίζετο ἐκ τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος αὐτὸν κεκυηκέναι, ὅτι καταδαρθοῦσά ποτε ἐν ναῶ αὐτοῦ δράκοντί τινι μίγνυσθαι ἐνόμισε καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τῷ ἱκνουμένῳ χρόνῳ ἔτεκε" (2bis).

Modern scholars generally have viewed this story as a reworking of an earlier tale of Alexander the Great's conception (3). While their perceptions are correct, they consistently have paid little or no attention to two significant points. First, the story is part of a larger tradition/topos that encompassed the conceptions of other ancient heroes, namely Scipio Africanus, Aratus and Aristomenes. Second, Suetonius' version provides more details than appear in any earlier version of the topos. A Roman hearing the story for the first time would have recognized immediately the parallels it drew not only between Augustus and Alexander, but also between Augustus and other earlier heroes, in particular Scipio Africanus. At the same time, the added details suggest that the narrator had a close association with the imperial family and thus

(1) GRAEVIUS, *app. crit.*, proposed that *dormirent* should read *domum irent*. While this alters the action of the story, it does little, however, to change the main effect of the matrons' actions, whether sleeping or departing, they were available neither to confirm nor to deny the validity of Atia's subsequent experience.

(2) SUETONIUS, *Diuus Augustus* 94, 6.

(2bis) CASSIUS DIO 45, 1, 2.

(3) For earlier discussions see : O. WEIPPERT, *Alexander-Imitatio und römische Politik in republikanischer Zeit*, Augsburg, 1972, p. 214-259 ; D. KIENAST, *Augustus und Alexander in Gymnasium* 76, 1969, p. 430-456 ; E. NORDEN, *Das Geburt des Kindes*, Darmstadt, 1958 ; A. R. BELLINGER, *The Immortality of Alexander and Augustus* in *YCS* 15, 1957, p. 91-100 ; A. HEUSS, *Alexander der Große und die politische Ideologie des Altertums in Antike und Abendland* 4, 1954, p. 65-104 ; P. TREVES, *Il mito di Alessandro e la Roma d'Augusto*, Milano-Napoli, 1953, p. 154-163 ; E. BRAUN, *Eine Alexanderlegende in Jahreshfte des österr. archäolog. Institutes* 39, 1952, p. 139-145.

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Before we turn to a closer e it is worth reviewing the ear tradition as it concerns the G are :

1) Plutarch, *Alex.* 2, 6-7 : Ὀλυμπιάδος παρεκτεταμένους ἔρωτα καὶ τὰς φιλοφροσύνας παρ' αὐτὴν ἀναπαυσόμενον, ἐτῆς γυναικός, εἶτε τὴν ὀμίλιαν ἀλλὰ Φιλίππῳ μὲν, μετὰ τὸ Δελφούς, χρησιμὸν κομισθῆνα καὶ σέβεσθαι μάλιστα τοῦτον ἑτέραν, ἦν τῷ τῆς θύρας ἀρμ συνευναζόμενον τῇ γυναικὶ τὸν

2) Lucian, *Dial. Mort.* 13 : ὡσπερ καὶ ἡμεῖς ἅπαντες — ἄνθρωπος ὢν ἀπέθανον. — εἶσε εἶναι, σὺ δὲ Φιλίππου ἀρετέσθηκεν Ἀμμωνος ὢν. — ἐλέγετο, δράκοντα ὀμιλεῖν αὐτὸν δὲ Φίλιππον ἐξηπατῆσθαι.

3) Lucian, *Alex.* 7 : ... δράκοντα ὄθεν καὶ τὸν περὶ τῆς Ὀλυμπεύουτος τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον, δράκοντός τ

4) Pausanias, 4, 14, 4-7 : Μεσσηνίους τιμάς. καὶ οἱ καὶ Νικοτελεία γὰρ τῇ μητρὶ αὐτοῦ λέγουσι. τοιαῦτα δὲ καὶ Μ. Σικωνίου οἶδα εἰρηκότας, δι' Ἀριστομένην Ἡρακλεῖ παῖδα καὶ Ἀρατον Ἀσκληπιῶ Σικυά

5) Justin, 11, 11, 3-6 : *N Philippo fuerat, Alexandrum concepit. Denique Philippi non esse palam praedicauerat repudio dimiserat. Igitur Al simul et matrem infamia lili sibi responderi uellet. Ingreca filium salutant.*

and the Heroic Tradition

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added to the credibility of his story. More importantly, the details included in Suetonius' account give the story an individuality that keeps it from appearing as a simple repetition of the earlier topos.

Before we turn to a closer examination of this story of Augustus' conception, it is worth reviewing the earlier evidence for the topos. The sources for this tradition as it concerns the Greek heroes, Alexander, Aratus and Aristomenes, are :

1) Plutarch, *Alex.* 2, 6-3, 2 : *ᾠφθη δὲ ποτε καὶ δράκων κοιμωμένης τῆς Ὀλυμπιάδος παρεκτεταμένος τῷ σώματι· καὶ τοῦτο μάλιστα τοῦ Φιλίππου τὸν ἔρωτα καὶ τὰς φιλοφροσύνας ἀμαυρῶσαι λέγουσιν, ὡς μηδὲ φοιτᾶν ἐτι πολλάκις παρ' αὐτὴν ἀναπαυσόμενον, εἴτε δέισαντά τινας μαγείας ἐπ' αὐτῷ καὶ φάρμακα τῆς γυναικός, εἴτε τὴν ὀμιλίαν ὡς κρείττονι συνούσης ἀφοσιούμενον. ... Οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ Φιλίππῳ μὲν, μετὰ τὸ φάσμα πέμψαντι Χαίρωνα τὸν Μεγαλοπολίτην εἰς Δελφούς, χρησμὸν κοιμισθῆναι λέγουσι παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ κελεύοντος Ἄμμωνι θύειν καὶ σέβεσθαι μάλιστα τοῦτον τὸν θεόν· ἀποβαλεῖν δὲ τῶν ὄψεων αὐτὸν τὴν ἑτέραν, ἣν τῷ τῆς θύρας ἀρμῶ προσβαλὼν κατώπτευσεν ἐν μορφῇ δράκοντος συνευαζόμενον τῇ γυναικὶ τὸν θεόν.*

2) Lucian, *Dial. Mort.* 13 : ... *Διογ.· Τί τοῦτο, ᾧ Ἀλέξανδρε ; καὶ σὺ τέθνηκας ὡσπερ καὶ ἡμεῖς ἅπαντες — Ἀλεξ.· Ὀρῆς, ᾧ Διόγενες· οὐ παράδοξον δέ, εἰ ἄνθρωπος ὢν ἀπέθανον. — Διογ.· Οὐκοῦν ὁ Ἄμμων ἐψεύδεται λέγων ἑαυτοῦ σε εἶναι, σὺ δὲ Φιλίππου ἄρα ἦσθα — Ἀλεξ.· Φιλίππου δηλαδή· οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἐτεθνήκειν Ἄμμωνος ὢν. — Διογ.· Καὶ μὴν καὶ περὶ τῆς Ὀλυμπιάδος ὅμοια ἐλέγετο, δράκοντα ὀμιλεῖν αὐτῇ καὶ βλέπεσθαι ἐν τῇ εὐνῇ, εἶτα οὕτω σε τεχθῆναι, τὸν δὲ Φίλιππον ἐξηπατησθαι οἴομενον πατέρα σου εἶναι...*

3) Lucian, *Alex.* 7 : ... *δράκοντας ... πολλοὶ δὲ γίνονται παρ' αὐτοῖς τοιοῦτοι, ὅθεν καὶ τὸν περὶ τῆς Ὀλυμπιάδος μῦθον διαφορῆσαι πάλοι εἰκὸς ὅποτε ἐκείν τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον, δράκοντός τινος, οἶμαι, τοιοῦτου συγκαθεύδοντος αὐτῆ...*

4) Pausanias, 4, 14, 4-7 : ... *Ἀριστομένης, ὃς καὶ νῦν ἐτι ὡς ἥρωος ἔχει παρὰ Μεσσηνίους τιμάς. καὶ οἱ καὶ τὰ τῆς γενέσεως ἐπιφανέστερα ὑπάρχει νομίζουσι· Νικοτελεία γὰρ τῇ μητρὶ αὐτοῦ δαίμονα ἢ θεὸν δράκοντι εἰκασμένον συγγενέσθαι λέγουσι. τοιαῦτα δὲ καὶ Μακεδόνας ἐπὶ Ὀλυμπιάδι καὶ ἐπὶ Ἀριστοδάμα Σικυωνίου οἶδα εἰρηκότας, διάφορα δὲ τοσόνδε ἦν· Μεσσήνιοι γὰρ οὐκ ἐποιοῦσιν Ἀριστομένην Ἡρακλεῖ παῖδα ἢ Δίῃ, ὡσπερ Ἀλέξανδρον Ἄμμωνι οἱ Μακεδόνες καὶ Ἄρατον Ἀσκληπιῷ Σικυώνιοι.*

5) Justin, 11, 11, 3-6 : *Namque mater eius Olympias confessa uiro suo Philippo fuerat, Alexandrum non ex eo se, sed ex serpente ingentis magnitudinis concepisse. Denique Philippus ultimo prope uitae suae tempore filium suum non esse palam praedicauerat. Qua ex causa Olympiada uelut stupri conpertam repudio dimiserat. Igitur Alexander cupiens originem diuinitatis adquirere, simul et matrem infamia liberare, per praemissos subornat antistites, quid sibi responderi uellet. Ingredientem templum statim antistites ut hammonis filium salutant.*

For the Roman hero, Scipio Africanus, they are :

6) Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, 26, 19, 6 : *Hic mos per omnem uitam seruatus seu consulto seu temere uolgatae opinioni fidem apud quosdam fecit stirpis eum diuinae uirum esse, rettulitque famam in Alexandro Magno prius uolgatam, et uanitate et fabula parem, anguis immanis concubitu conceptum, et in cubiculo matris eius uisam persaepe prodigii eius speciem interuentuque hominum euolutam repente atque ex oculis elapsam. His miraculis numquam ab ipso elusa fides est ; quin potius aucta arte quadam nec abnuendi tale quicquam nec palam adfirmandi.*

7) Silius Italicus, *Punica*, 13, 634-644 :

*Verum age, nate, tuos ortus, ne bella pauescas
ulla nec in caelum dubites te attolere factis,
quando aperire datur nobis, nunc denique disce.
sola die caperem medio cum forte petitos
ad requiem somnos, subitus mihi membra ligauit
amplexus, non ille meo ueniente marito
adsuetus facilisque mihi. tum luce corusca,
implebat quamquam languentia lumina somnus,
uidi, crede, Iouem, nec me mutata fefellit
forma dei, quod squalentem conuersus in anguem
ingenti traxit curuata uolumina gyro.*

8) Valerius Maximus, *De uiris illustribus* 49, 1-4 : *Publius Scipio ex uirtute Africanus dictus, Iouis filius creditus : nam antequam conciperetur, serpens in lecto matris eius apparuit, et ipsi paruulo draco circumfusus nihil nocuit.*

9) Quintillian, *Inst. Orat.* 2, 4, 19 : *aut de serpente, quo Scipio traditur genitus...*

For the topos in both the Latin and the Greek tradition :

10) Aulus Gellius, *Noct. Att.* 6, 1-5 : *Quod de Olympiade, Philippi regis uxore, Alexandri matre, in historia Graeca scriptum est, id de P. quoque Scipionis matre qui prior Africanus appellatus est memoriae datum est. Nam et C. Oppius et Iulius Hyginus, aliique qui de uita et rebus Africani scripserunt, matrem eius diu sterilem existimatam tradunt, P. quoque Scipionem, cum quo nupta erat, liberos desperauisse. Postea in cubiculo atque in lecto mulieris, cum absente marito cubans sola condormisset, uisum repente esse iuxta eam cubare ingentem anguem eumque, his qui uiderant territis et clamantibus, elapsum inueniri non quisse. Id ipsum P. Scipionem ad haruspices retulisse ; eos, sacrificio facto, respondisse fore ut liberi gignerentur, neque multis diebus postquam ille anguis in lecto uisus est, mulierem coepisse concepti fetus signa atque sensum pati ; exinde mense decimo peperisse natumque esse hunc P. Africanum...*

In all of these accounts the is seen sleeping with a snake union the hero is conceived. and on occasion some rudim — both Greek and Latin — f

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(4) ARTEMIDORUS, *Oneirocri.* *ὁ δράκων· εἰσι δὲ οἶδε· Ζεὺς Σαφ. Ἡρώες...* For a modern discussi

(5) PLUTARCH, *Alexander II.* *αἱ τῆδε γυναῖκες ἐνοχοὶ τοῖς Ὀρῆ τοῦ πάνυ παλαιοῦ, Κλώδωνές τε κ καὶ ταῖς περὶ τὸν Αἴμον Θρῆσαι ταῖς κατακόροις γενέσθαι καὶ πη ζήλωσασα τὰς κατοχὰς καὶ τοὺς ἐ χειροῆθεις ἐφείλκετο τοῖς θιάσοις παραναυόμενοι καὶ περιελιπτόμ ἐξέπληττον τοὺς ἄνδρας.*

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et, uisum repente esse iuxta eam
uiderant territis et clamantibus,
cipionem ad haruspices retulisse ;
gignerentur, neque multis diebus
rem coepisse concepti fetus signa
peperisse natumque esse hunc P.*

In all of these accounts the basic plot is the same : the mother of the hero is seen sleeping with a snake who is in reality a god in disguise ; from this union the hero is conceived. The god in question varies from story to story, and on occasion some rudimentary details are added, but all of these stories — both Greek and Latin — follow the same pattern.

On the Greek side, where variations to the basic topos occur, they are relatively minor. The most noticeable difference lies in the name of the god ; in each story a different deity appears. In Alexander's story the god is Zeus Ammon, in Aristomenes' the father is left anonymous, while Aratus' father is said to be Asclepius. This variation seems to stem from local traditions concerning the respective heroes' fathers and to have little significance beyond this. At the same time it should be noted that in every instance where a specific god is named, that god's symbols include a snake (4). Thus the choice of god can also be traced back to the symbolism inherent in the snake's presence.

The other difference between these accounts is the detail Plutarch adds to his version. His additions for the most part consist of an explanatory aside on the reasons for the snake's presence in Olympias' bed (5). The only alterations he makes to the actual topos are Philip's consultation of the Delphic Oracle, the Oracle's warning that Philip would lose the eye he had used to spy on his wife and Philip's subsequent abstention from sex with Olympias. While these details do give a certain freshness to the story (particularly the image of Philip peeping through the keyhole at Olympias and the snake) they do not provide the same sense of intimate knowledge on the part of their author that the later additions to the story as told about Augustus do.

On the Latin side, the variations between the accounts are also relatively minor. Aulus Gellius asserts that Pomponia was barren and that Scipio's father consulted the haruspices about the snake's significance ; while of our sources, only Silius Italicus and Valerius Maximus explicitly name Jupiter as the god. As regards the god's identity, internal evidence in Livy and Aulus

(4) ARTEMIDORUS, *Oneirocritica* II, 13, 106, Z. 6 : θεοὺς πάντας, οἷς ἐστὶν ἱερὸς ὁ δράκων · εἰσὶ δὲ οἶδε · Ζεὺς Σαβάζιος, Ἥλιος, Ἀημίτηρ καὶ Κόρη, Ἐκάτη, Ἀσκληπιός, Ἥρωες... For a modern discussion see E. BRAUN, *Eine Alexanderlegende* [n. 3], p. 142.

(5) PLUTARCH, *Alexander* II, 5-6 : Ἐτερος δὲ περὶ τούτων ἐστὶ λόγος, ὡς πᾶσαι μὲν αἱ τῆδε γυναῖκες ἔνοχοι τοῖς Ὀρφικοῖς οὖσαι καὶ τοῖς περὶ τὸν Διόνυσον ὀργασμοῖς ἐκ τοῦ πάνυ παλαιοῦ, Κλώδωνές τε καὶ Μιμαλλόνες ἐπωνυμίαν ἔχουσαι, πολλὰ ταῖς Ἡδωνίσι καὶ ταῖς περὶ τὸν Αἴμον Ἐρῆσσαις ὁμοία δρῶσιν, ἀφ' ὧν δοκεῖ καὶ τὸ θρησκευεῖν ὄνομα ταῖς κατακόροις γενέσθαι καὶ περιέργοις ἱερουργίαις, ἣ δὲ Ὀλυμπιάς μᾶλλον ἐτέρων ζηλώσασα τὰς κατοχὰς καὶ τοῖς ἐνθουσιασμοῖς ἐξάγουσα βαρβαρικώτερον ὄφεις μεγάλους χειροῖθεις ἐφείλκετο τοῖς θιάσοις, οἱ πολλάκις ἐκ τοῦ κιττοῦ καὶ τῶν μυστικῶν λίκνων παραναδυόμενοι καὶ περιλιττόμενοι τοῖς θύρσοις τῶν γυναικῶν καὶ τοῖς στεφάνοις ἐξέπληττον τοὺς ἀνδρας.

Gellius' accounts suggest that both authors knew of the tradition concerning Jupiter's role in Scipio's conception. Indeed both authors tacitly acknowledged it. Although neither Livy or Aulus Gellius stated that the snake was Jupiter in disguise, both joined the story of Scipio's conception to others concerning the hero's efforts to suggest that he was particularly favored by Jupiter (6). This association suggests, at the least, an implicit connection between Jupiter, the god who especially favored Scipio, and the unnamed god involved in the hero's conception.

Aulus Gellius' statement that Pomponia was barren does add yet another miraculous element to Scipio's conception, but it does not substantially alter the topos. So too, Aulus Gellius' statement that Scipio's father consulted the haruspices adds little originality to the story. Such an act was very much in keeping with traditional Roman practices — any Roman husband faced with similar circumstances would, as a standard reaction, have consulted the haruspices for the meaning behind this event. A Roman audience might well have assumed that such a consultation took place in any case, whether or not the narrator explicitly mentioned it. Neither of Aulus' Gellius additions, any more than Plutarch's explanation of the snake's presence in his account, suggest the intimate knowledge or provide the sense of individuality that Suetonius' alterations to the topos as told about Augustus do.

Let us turn now to Suetonius' account of Augustus' conception. According to Suetonius, Asclepiades of Mendes recorded that nine months before Augustus' birth (i.e. in November or December of 62 BC) Atia attended a festival of Apollo at the god's temple. While there, she fell asleep and was visited by a snake. When she awoke she performed the purificatory ritual that she used after intercourse with her husband and immediately afterwards a snake-shaped spot magically appeared on her body. Because of this spot she never again bathed in public.

If one compares this version of the story to the earlier episodes in the topos, it immediately becomes apparent that it differs in some marked ways from its predecessors. First, in the earlier episodes the god in question always has a snake as one of his symbols, while in Suetonius' version the choice of god has as much to do with earlier propaganda as with traditional iconography. Second, the location of the encounter is changed from a shadowy and indistinct place (in Olympias' and Pomponia's cases the evidence suggests their bedrooms) to the public and concrete setting of Apollo's temple during one of his festivals. Third, none of the earlier women performs anything remotely resembling a purificatory ritual, a ritual which incidentally squares well with the temple setting. Fourth, in no other instance is a visible mark — the snake-shaped spot — left behind.

(6) LIVY, *Ab urbe condita* XXVI, 19, 5; AULUS GELLIUS, *Noctes Atticae* VI, 1, 6.

As has already been discussed, the god follows naturally from the topos. It is Asclepius, in Alexander's case, who also be the case in Augustus' account. It may also be the case in Augustus' account. It is considered a symbol of Apollo. It is propaganda spread during Augustus' reign. As a god, Apollo was most closely associated with Augustus at the moment in his early career, and he had close connections with Augustus. Apollo was credited with his victory over the emperor built his new house in its precincts and set up a statue of the temple. In addition, Augustus. Undoubtedly, Apollo's inclusion in Augustus' tradition. It is a short leap from the topos to favor to Augustus to the belief. Such a belief would have been widespread in the empire, where rulers would have done much to maintain it.

The second major difference is closely related to the first, that the snake appeared to Augustus in the precincts. This is a marked contrast with the earlier episodes which take place either in a private or a public location (10). The setting of

(7) A. PEASE, *M. Tulli Cicero*, p. 565-566. See also E. SIMON, *Zeitenwende*, Munich, 1986, p. 11.

(8) P. LAMBRECHTS, *La politique de Auguste*, *Nouvelle Clio* 5, 1953, p. 65-82; L. R. TAYLOR, *The Divinity of Augustus*, p. 156. — L. R. TAYLOR, *Divinity*, „When his house was struck by lightning he fled to the temple of Apollo and began his plans for the empire which he issued probably in the year 37, and the laurel wreath. The symbols on the coins, indicated that he was not only especially associated with Apollo, but also with the care of the Sibylli reforms”.

(9) H. MATTINGLY, *Coins of Augustus*, 1936, p. CXXIII, no. 638-642.

(10) P. GRANDET, *Les songes* writes: „Le récit de l'incubation

knew of the tradition concerning both authors tacitly acknowledged stated that the snake was Jupiter conception to others concerning particularly favored by Jupiter (6). implicit connection between Jupiter, the unnamed god involved in

was barren does add yet another but it does not substantially alter that Scipio's father consulted the deity. Such an act was very much unusual — any Roman husband faced a similar reaction, have consulted the deity. A Roman audience might well find place in any case, whether or not of Aulus' Gellius additions, the snake's presence in his account, the sense of individuality that distinguishes Augustus do.

Augustus' conception. According to Suetonius (orded that nine months before the birth of 62 BC) Atia attended a festival there, she fell asleep and was subsequently performed the purificatory ritual and immediately afterwards conceived in her body. Because of this spot

differs to the earlier episodes in the tradition it differs in some marked ways. In all episodes the god in question always appears. In Suetonius' version the choice of deity for propaganda as with traditional iconography. After Augustus' encounter with the snake, the setting is changed from a shadowy location to the setting of Apollo's temple during which earlier women performs anything but a ritual which incidentally squares with the other instance is a visible mark

See GELLIUS, *Noctes Atticae* VI, 1, 6.

As has already been discussed, in the earlier topoi, the name of the father/god follows naturally from the snake's symbolism. In Aratus' case, the god is Asclepius, in Alexander's Ammon, in Scipio Africanus' Jupiter. This may also be the case in Augustus' version; in antiquity a snake is sometimes considered a symbol of Apollo (7). But the choice of god is also due to the propaganda spread during Augustus' early rise to power. Of all the Roman gods, Apollo was most closely connected to Augustus. At more than one moment in his early career, Augustus went out of his way to emphasize his close connections with Apollo (8). After Actium, for example, Augustus credited Apollo with his victory over Antony and Cleopatra. When the emperor built his new house on the Palatine he included the temple of Apollo in its precincts and set up a statue of Apollo with his own face in the portico of the temple. In addition, numerous coins link Augustus and Apollo (9). Undoubtedly, Apollo's inclusion in this story stems from this well-documented tradition. It is a short leap from the tradition that the god showed special favor to Augustus to the belief that the emperor was in fact the god's son. Such a belief would have been particularly acceptable to the Eastern half of the empire, where rulers were traditionally descended from the gods, and would have done much to make Augustus' rule more palatable.

The second major difference between this and earlier versions of the topos is closely related to the first, discussed above. Suetonius stated in his account that the snake appeared to Atia at a festival of Apollo held within his temple precincts. This is a marked departure from the earlier episodes in the topos, which take place either in the woman's bedroom or in an undisclosed location (10). The setting of Atia's encounter in a specific god's temple has

(7) A. PEASE, *M. Tulli Ciceronis de Divinatione*. Edidit A.P., Urbana, 1920 [1979], p. 565-566. See also E. SIMON, *Augustus: Kunst und Leben in Rom um die Zeitenwende*, Munich, 1986, p. 106; p. 164-165.

(8) P. LAMBRECHTS, *La politique apollinienne d'Auguste et le culte imperial* in *La Nouvelle Clio* 5, 1953, p. 65-82; J. GAGÉ, *Apollon Romain*, Paris, 1955, p. 570-581; L. R. TAYLOR, *The Divinity of the Roman Emperor*, Middletown CT., 1931, p. 153-156. — L. R. TAYLOR, *Divinity*, p. 120, lists many of Augustus' actions in this regard: „When his house was struck by lightning, he consecrated it to Apollo as a sacred place and began his plans for a great temple of the god. On one series of coins, issued probably in the year 37, he had symbols of Apollo represented — the tripod and the laurel wreath. The symbols as we know from their appearance on other Roman coins, indicated that he was now a member of the great college of priests that was especially associated with Apollo — the quindecimviri sacris faciundis... The cult of Apollo and the care of the Sibylline books occupied a central place in his early religious reforms”.

(9) H. MATTINGLY, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*, I, London, 1936, p. CXXIII, no. 638-642.

(10) P. GRANDET, *Les songes d'Atia et d'Octavien* in *RHR* 203, 1986, p. 368, n. 6, writes: „Le récit de l'incubation d'Atia dans un mystérieux sanctuaire d'Apollon, à

a public and concrete quality about it that lends reality to the claim that it really happened. It also gives an added majesty to the story. Not only was a god involved, but the event took place publicly, under his auspices, at his temple — the god's home as it were. Such a location offers more distinction and luster than the private bedroom of a mortal. It seems to set the god's seal publicly on the occasion.

At the same time it is important to note that this detail is not based in any reality — as far as we know no such festival occurred at the appropriate time. For the timing of Augustus' conception to be correct, the episode must have taken place in November or December. Yet no public festival was held in Apollo's honor in either of these months (11). It is just possible that the celebration was a private one, but this is unlikely in the light of Suetonius' statement that Atia was accompanied by other Roman matrons.

This detail, then, can be based neither on the earlier topos nor on an actual event. Instead it must have come into being for reasons having entirely to do with Augustus. By establishing the setting of the story as the holy precinct of Apollo, the originator of the story was clearly emphasizing in an unobtrusive and natural fashion that the god played some role in the occurrence. If the event occurred under Apollo's auspices, what more likely probability than that the god disguised as a snake should be Apollo. Such a detail also would have made the story seem more believable to a Roman audience, providing as it did a specific venue for the encounter. Ancient women often took part in such rituals; a sign sent by the god under such circumstances would have seemed more likely to an audience accustomed to such practices than a meeting that simply occurred in some unknown locale.

Atia's purificatory ritual is also an addition to the basic topos found only in this story. Presumably this ritual has as its basis the purificatory rituals that were often performed before a sacrifice or religious rite. It should be noted however, that the timing of this particular act, coming as it does during or after the rite in question, is awkward and out of keeping with actual

practices. Most probably this atmosphere of the encounter, that the nature of Atia's sex: would also have rung true to a realistic and believable addi of this detail in the story sug on the part of the narrator. It also adds an individuality versions of the topos and so repetition of these earlier vers

The same is true of the fi spot which appears on Atia' knowledge of Atia's person: story is not merely a literary: its own right. It also follows the god leaves something behi serves to set the story off frc of the god's favor (13).

Although at first sight, the repetition of a story told at an intricate and complex rew deliberately designed to mee that suggest the author's inti and at the same time give 1 the earlier topos and makes of this particular topos comb two major themes in August der (14) and Apollo's role in emperor's resemblance to S to chance. Instead the story v part of the emperor's rise to

l'occasion d'une cérémonie non moins mystérieuse, doit probablement être considéré comme un traité purement formel, résultant de l'emprunt à la légende d'Alexandre, et à rapporter, sans doute, à l'explication figurant chez Plutarque (mais qui lui était évidemment antérieure), mettant au compte des rites orphiques et du culte orgiastique de Dionysos les rapports d'Olympias et du serpent". Nothing in Plutarch's account, however, suggests that Olympias' encounter took place within a temple precincts and it is a very long jump from the author's explanatory statements concerning the snake and Dionysus to the explicit setting of Atia's encounter in Apollo's temple at his festival. Nor do any of the other earlier versions of the topos show any signs of having transpired within a temple precinct.

(11) W. BURKERT, *Greek Religion*, Cambridge MA, 1985, p. 242-246; W. FOWLER, *Roman Festivals*, London, 1899, p. 67-68; p. 154-156; p. 178-179.

(12) For example, the emper then woke to discover a statu 4, 3). Aeneas woke from a pra as proof of his dream's veracity

(13) W. DÉONNA, *La légende* in *RHR* 83, 1921, p. 168-170, practices of tattooing, but thi

(14) H. U. INSTINSKY, *Die S* P. TREVES, *Il mito* [n. 3], p. *Successors* in *HSCP* 39, 1928, 1

(15) L. R. TAYLOR, *Divinity*

that lends reality to the claim that the emperor's majesty to the story. Not only would the event take place publicly, under his auspices, but the location would be there. Such a location offers more room for a mortal. It seems to set

Note that this detail is not based in the festival occurred at the appropriate time to be correct, the episode must be correct. Yet no public festival was held in Athens⁽¹¹⁾. It is just possible that the detail is unlikely in the light of Suetonius' account of other Roman matrons.

In the earlier topoi nor on an actual festival being for reasons having entirely to do with the telling of the story as the holy precinct of the temple, nearly emphasizing in an unobtrusive way the temple's role in the occurrence. If the detail is what more likely probability than the detail of Apollo. Such a detail also would be more likely to a Roman audience, providing a more realistic detail. Ancient women often took part in such circumstances would have been more likely to such practices than a meeting in a temple.

In addition to the basic topos found only in the earlier topoi as its basis the purificatory rituals of the temple or religious rite. It should be noted that this particular act, coming as it does during the emperor's rise and out of keeping with actual

because, doit probablement être considéré comme l'emprunt à la légende d'Alexandre, tirant chez Plutarque (mais qui lui était étranger) les rites orphiques et du culte orgiastique qui y sont associés". Nothing in Plutarch's account, however, takes place within a temple precincts and the emperor's statements concerning the snake and his encounter in Apollo's temple at his rise to power show any signs of having

Journal of American Studies, 1985, p. 242-246; W. FOWLER, *Journal of American Studies*, 1984, p. 154-156; p. 178-179.

practices. Most probably this discrepancy can be attributed either to the dream atmosphere of the encounter. At the same time the detail's inclusion ensures that the nature of Atia's sexual relationship with the snake is clear. This image would also have rung true to a contemporary audience and would have been a realistic and believable addition to the story. At the same time the inclusion of this detail in the story suggests an intimate knowledge of Atia's practices on the part of the narrator, which makes his veracity seem unquestioned. It also adds an individuality to the story that is not present in the earlier versions of the topos and so prevents the story from being solely an obvious repetition of these earlier versions.

The same is true of the final alteration in the topos — the snake shaped spot which appears on Atia's stomach. Its inclusion again suggests intimate knowledge of Atia's personal habits and at the same time signals that the story is not merely a literary repetition of an earlier topos, but an event in its own right. It also follows a common pattern among omens, one in which the god leaves something behind as his mark⁽¹²⁾. Thus this detail simultaneously serves to set the story off from earlier topoi and acts as further confirmation of the god's favor⁽¹³⁾.

Although at first sight, the story of Atia and the snake may seem a simple repetition of a story told about Alexander the Great's mother, the story is an intricate and complex reworking of the earlier legend, a revision that seems deliberately designed to meet a multitude of needs. Details have been added that suggest the author's intimate knowledge of the imperial family's practices and at the same time give the story an individuality that separates it from the earlier topos and makes it more realistic. On a broader level the choice of this particular topos combined with the reworking of the story ties together two major themes in Augustan propaganda — Augustus' likeness to Alexander⁽¹⁴⁾ and Apollo's role in his success⁽¹⁵⁾ — and establishes a third — the emperor's resemblance to Scipio. This intricacy is unlikely to have been due to chance. Instead the story was probably spread deliberately during the earlier part of the emperor's rise to power in order to enhance his reputation.

(12) For example, the emperor Galba supposedly had a dream about Fortuna and then woke to discover a statue of the goddess outside his door (Suetonius, *Galba* 4, 3). Aeneas woke from a prophetic dream to discover a white sow and her piglets as proof of his dream's veracity (Vergil, *Aeneid* VIII, 26-85).

(13) W. DEONNA, *La légende d'Octave-Auguste : Dieu, sauveur et maître du monde* in *RHR* 83, 1921, p. 168-170, suggests that this spot is a veiled reference to ritual practices of tattooing, but this idea is far-fetched, with no evidence to support it.

(14) H. U. INSTINSKY, *Die Siegel des Kaisers Augustus*, Baden-Baden, 1962, p. 34; P. TREVES, *Il mito* [n. 3], p. 13-25; p. 58-81; A. R. ANDERSON, *Heracles and his Successors* in *HSCP* 39, 1928, p. 55-58.

(15) L. R. TAYLOR, *Divinity* [n. 8], p. 120.

According to Suetonius, his source for the story of Augustus' conception was Asclepiades of Mendes. Asclepiades was an Egyptian scholar, whose work, the *Θεολογούμενα*, dealt with the similarities between various religions (16). Although we do not know Asclepiades' exact dates, evidence suggests that he wrote during Augustus' lifetime and was perhaps even one of Augustus' freedmen (17). If this is so, then the story was certainly current during Augustus' lifetime.

Augustus' use of literature to spread his propaganda is well known; ancient authors such as Horace, Livy and Vergil all contributed in some fashion at one time or another (18). I would argue that Asclepiades' inclusion of this story was yet another example of this practice. Even if the author himself was never present in Rome, he might well have been „inspired” to record the story while Augustus was touring Egypt after the death of Anthony. Such a scenario is particularly well-suited to the timing of the propaganda themes encapsulated in the story.

As L. R. Taylor has shown, the earliest trace of Augustus' deliberate association of himself with Apollo was a banquet, held shortly after the Peace of Brundisium in 40 BC, where he supposedly impersonated the god (19). During the next ten years the emperor went out of his way to strengthen this association. This deliberate campaign culminated in his declaration that Actian Apollo had given him his victory over Antony. During the same period, Augustus also tried to strengthen his resemblance to the earlier hero Alexander the Great in an attempt to reconcile the East to his rule. Thus the messages conveyed by the story of Atia's experience were particularly suited to the propaganda needs of the period between the Peace of Brundisium and the conquest of Alexandria (20).

(16) J. GAGÉ, *Apollon* [n. 8], p. 95; p. 571; L. R. TAYLOR, *Divinity* [n. 8], p. 234.

(17) J. GAGÉ, *Apollon* [n. 8], p. 571.

(18) For a full discussion of this topic see, among many others, T. WOODMAN and D. WEST, *Poetry and Politics in the Age of Augustus*. Edited T.W and D. W., Cambridge, 1984.

(19) L. R. TAYLOR, *Divinity* [n. 8], p. 120. See also: G. BOWERSOCK, *Augustus and the East: the Problem of Succession in Caesar Augustus*. Edited F. MILLER and E. SEGAL, Oxford, 1984, p. 169-188; K. SCOTT, *The Political Propaganda of 44-30 B.C.* in *MAAR* 11, 1933, p. 7-50.

(20) J. GAGÉ, *Apollon* [n. 8], p. 571, believes that the story became known at the beginning of Augustus' career, while P. GRANDET, *Les songes* [n. 10], p. 375-376, goes even further and suggests that this story was circulated in Egypt between 30 and 27 BC in an attempt to gain the Egyptians' support for the consolidation of power that Augustus carried out in 27 BC and then made known at Rome in 28 BC for similar reasons. Grandet's supposition that reports of this story was meant to influence the eastern half of the empire, in particular, is a feasible one, but there is no reason to limit the need for these messages to the years immediately after the conquest of Alexandria in 30 BC. Augustus would have wished to garner support for his cause

This dating joined with the and the snake suggests on dissemination. Together with earliest known sources for contemporary of Julius Caesar power, while Hyginus was t reign of Augustus (22). This Augustus' reign for the story some evidence to support th period (23). In any case, the revived at about the same ti current. This timing sugges deliberately disseminated to Scipio Africanus. Such a c Augustus. Scipio was a republ By establishing a connection birth legends, Augustus could to the Republican hero's po have given the emperor am legitimacy.

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(21) AULUS GELLIUS, *Noctes* he read it in the works of Oppiu

(22) H. H. SCULLARD, *Scipi* 19-20; R. M. HAYWOOD, *Stua* A. R. ANDERSON, *Heracles* [n. 1

(23) HAYWOOD, *Studies* [n. 2]

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This dating joined with the dates of our sources for the story of Pomponia and the snake suggests one final twist to the scenario of the story's dissemination. Together with Livy, Caius Oppius and Julius Hyginus are our earliest known sources for the story of Pomponia (21). Oppius was a contemporary of Julius Caesar, who probably lived during Augustus' rise to power, while Hyginus was the director of the Palatine Library during the reign of Augustus (22). This gives us a date of shortly before or during Augustus' reign for the story's first recorded appearance. However, there is some evidence to support the belief that the story was known at an earlier period (23). In any case, the story was either invented or, more probably, revived at about the same time as the story of Atia and the snake became current. This timing suggests the possibility that the two stories were deliberately disseminated to establish a comparison between Augustus and Scipio Africanus. Such a comparison would have been very helpful to Augustus. Scipio was a republican military hero, credited with saving Rome. By establishing a connection between himself and Scipio in the form of their birth legends, Augustus could suggest that he was the divinely chosen successor to the Republican hero's position as savior of Rome. Such a claim would have given the emperor ammunition in his quest to establish his regime's legitimacy.

If this scenario is accurate, the choice of this conception legend was cleverly coordinated to both halves of the empire. In the East, Alexander was viewed as a great hero, one who had increased Greek dominance and established a wide empire. In the West, the story drew a connection between Augustus and the great Republican general who was credited with permanently rescuing Rome from the danger posed by its greatest enemy, Carthage. For Augustus who wished to be seen simultaneously in the East as the bringer of peace to Alexander's war torn empire and in the West as the restorer of the Republic (albeit in revised form) the choice of story could not have been more inspired.

Robin S. LORSCH.

in the East well before his final victory over Antony. He would have needed it as much before Antony's defeat as after.

(21) AULUS GELLIUS, *Noctes Atticae* VI, 2, states in his account of the story that he read it in the works of Oppius and Hyginus.

(22) H. H. SCULLARD, *Scipio Africanus, Soldier and Politician*, London, 1970, p. 19-20; R. M. HAYWOOD, *Studies on Scipio Africanus*, Baltimore, 1933, p. 26-27; A. R. ANDERSON, *Heracles* [n. 14], p. 32.

(23) HAYWOOD, *Studies* [n. 22], p. 26-27.

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