

BELLARIA XCVI



MACROBIUS AMBROSIUS THEODOSIUS (iii) (c. AD 390- after 430)

Augustus' tolerance of smart responses on marriage laws, and a hooty owl



2.4.25 'As censor, too, Augustus showed a remarkable tolerance which won him high praise. A Roman knight was being reprimanded by him on the ground that he had squandered his property, but was able to show publicly that he had in fact increased it. The next charge brought against him was failure to comply with the

marriage laws. To this he replied that he had a wife and three children and then added: "I suggest, Caesar, that in future, when you have occasion to inquire into the affairs of respectable persons, the inquiry be entrusted to respectable persons."

2.4.26 There is, moreover, the story of the soldier from whom he tolerated language which was not only blunt but recklessly rude. While he was staying at a certain country house he spent restless nights, his sleep being broken by the frequent hooting of an owl. He therefore gave orders for the bird to be caught, and a soldier who happened to be an expert fowler brought it to him. The man expected to receive a handsome reward, but the emperor only complimented him and ordered him to be given a thousand sesterces. Whereupon the fellow had the audacity to say: "I'd sooner let it live," and let the bird go. It is surely remarkable that Augustus took no offence at this insolence but allowed the soldier to go away unpunished.'

2.4.25 *mira etiam censoris Augusti et laudata patientia. corripiebatur eques Romanus a principe, tamquam minuisset facultates suas. at ille se multiplicasse coram probavit. mox eidem obiecit quod ad contrahendum matrimonium legibus non paruisset. ille uxorem sibi et tres esse liberos dixit. tum adiecit: posthac, Caesar, cum de honestis hominibus inquiris, honestis mandato.*

2.4.26 *etiam militis non libertatem tantum sed et temeritatem tulit. In quadam uilla inquietas noctes agebat rumpente somnum eius crebro noctuae cantu. prendendam curauit noctuam. miles aucupii peritus et spe ingentis praemii pertulit. laudato imperator mille nummos dari iussit. ille ausus est dicere: malo uiuat, auemque dimisit. quis non miratus est non offenso Caesare abisse militem contumacem?*

Augustus shamed by his treatment of a soldier and of entertainers



Grain ration

2.4.27 'An old soldier who found himself in danger of losing an action at law in which he was the defendant accosted the Emperor in a public place with a request that he would appear for him in court. Augustus at once chose one of his suite to act as counsel and introduced the litigant to him. But the soldier, stripping his sleeve and showing his scars, shouted at the top of his voice: "When you were in danger at Actium, I didn't look for a substitute but I fought for you in person." The emperor blushed, and, fearing to be thought both haughty and ungrateful, appeared in court on the man's behalf.

2.4.28 He presented the musicians of the slave-dealer Toronius Flaccus with a grain ration as a reward for the pleasure which they had given him at dinner, although he had shown his appreciation of other such entertainments by generous gifts of money. And when, sometime later, he asked to Toronius to allow them to play again for him at dinner, the latter excused himself by saying: "They're busy milling the grain."

2.4.27 *ueteranus, cum die sibi dicto periclitaretur, accessit in publico ad Caesarem, rogauitque ut sibi adesset. ille aduocatum quem ex comitatu suo elegerat sine mora dedit, commendauitque ei litigatorem. exclamauit ingenti uoce ueteranus: at non ego, Caesar, periclitante te Actiaco bello uicarium quaesiui, sed pro te ipse pugnaui, detexitque inpressas cicatrices. erubuit Caesar, uenitque in aduocationem, ut qui uereretur non superbus tantum sed etiam ingratus uideri.*

2.4.28 *delectatus inter coenam erat symphoniacis Toronii Flacci mangonis, atque eos frumento donauerat, cum in alia acroamata fuisset nummis liberalis: eosdemque postea Toronius aequae inter coenam quaerenti Caesari sic excusauit: ad molas sunt.*

Augustus and the complimentary ravens



Not best mates

2.4.29 ‘Among those who welcomed him on his return in state from his victory at Actium, was a man with a raven which he had taught to say: “Hail, Caesar, Caesar, victorious commander.” Augustus was charmed by this compliment and gave the man twenty thousand sesterces for the bird. But the bird’s trainer had a partner, and, when none of this large sum of money had come his way, he told the emperor that the man had another raven and suggested that he should be made to produce that one as well. The bird was produced and repeated the words which it had been taught to say: they were: “Hail, Antony, victorious commander.” Augustus, however, instead of being at all angry, simply told the first man to share the money with his mate.

2.4.30 He was greeted in a similar way by a parrot, and he ordered that bird to be bought, and a magpie too, which he fancied for the same trick. These examples encouraged a poor cobbler to try to train a raven to repeat a similar form of greeting, but the bird remained dumb, and the man, ruined by the cost incurred, used often to say to it: “What a waste of time and money!” One day, however, the raven began to repeat the greeting it had been taught, and Augustus as he was passing heard it. “I’ve got enough of such greetings at home,” he replied. But the bird also recalled the words of his master’s customary lament and added: “What a waste of time and money!” At which the emperor fell about, and ordered the bird to be bought, giving more for it than he had paid for any of the others.’

2.4.29 *sublimis Actiaca uictoria reuertebatur. occurrit ei inter gratulantes coruum tenens, quem instituerat haec dicere: aue, Caesar uictor imperator. miratus Caesar officiosam auem uiginti milibus nummum emit. socius opificis, ad quem nihil ex illa liberalitate peruenerat, adfirmavit Caesari habere illum et alium coruum, quem ut adferre cogeret rogauit. adlatus uerba quae didicerat expressit: aue, uictor imperator Antoni. nihil exasperatus satis duxit iubere illum diuidere donatium cum contubernali.*

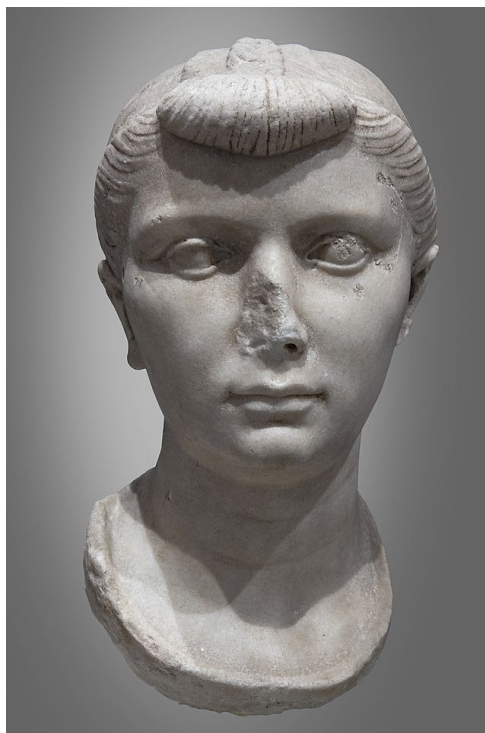
2.4.30 *salutatus similiter a psittaco emi eum iussit. idem miratus in pica hanc quoque redemit. exemplum sutorem pauperem sollicitauit ut coruum insitueret ad parem salutationem: qui impendio exhaustus saepe ad auem non respondentem dicere solebat: opera et impensa periit. aliquando tamen coruus coepit dicere dictatam salutationem. hac audita dum transit Augustus, respondit: satis domi saluatorum talium habeo. superfuit coruo memoria, ut et illa quibus dominum querentem solebat audire subtexeret: opera et impensa periit. ad quod Caesar risit, emique auem iussit quanti nullam adhuc emerat.*

Augustus rewarded for his Greek epigram

2.4.31 'As he went down from his residence on the Palatine, some little Greek used to offer him a complimentary epigram. This the man did on many occasions without success, and Augustus, seeing him about to do it again, wrote a short epigram in Greek with his own hand and sent it to the fellow as he came up to him. The Greek read it and praised it, expressing admiration both in words and by his looks. Then, coming up to the imperial chair, he put his hand in a shabby purse and drew out a few coins, to give them to the emperor, saying as he did so: "I swear by your Good Fortune, Augustus, if I had more, I would be giving you more." Everyone fell about at this, and Augustus, summoning his steward, ordered him to pay out a hundred thousand sesterces to the Greek.'

2.4.31 *solebat descendenti a Palatio Caesari honorificum aliquod epigramma porrigere Graeculus. id cum frustra saepe fecisset, rursumque cum idem facturum uidisset Augustus, breue sua manu in charta exaravit Graecum epigramma: pergenti deinde ad se obuiam misit. ille legendo laudare, mirari tam uoce quam uultu: cumque accessisset ad sellam, demissa in fundam pauperem manu paucos denarios protulit quos principi daret: adiectus hic sermo: Ἡὴν τὴν σὴν τύχην, Σεβαστέ· εἰ πλέον εἶχον, πλέον ἐδίδουν. secuto omnium risu dispensatorem Caesar uocauit et sestertia centum milia numerare Graeculo iussit.*

Augustus' (rather lively) daughter Julia's wit and high intelligence



Julia

2.5.1 ‘Shall I’, continued Avienus, ‘go on to tell you of some of the sayings of his daughter Julia? If you won’t think me too talkative, I should like to begin with a few remarks which throw light on her character, unless, of course, some one of you has something less trivial and more instructive to tell us.’ All encouraged him to go on, and this is how he began.

2.5.2 ‘Julia was thirty-seven and had reached a time of life which, had she been sensible enough, she would have regarded as bordering on old age, but she habitually misused the kindness of her own good fortune and her father’s indulgence. Nevertheless, she had a love of letters and a considerable store of learning—not hard to come by in her home—and to these qualities were added a gentle humanity and a kindly disposition, all of which won for her a high regard; although those who were aware of her vices were astonished at the contradiction which her qualities implied.’

2.5.1 *uultis aliqua et filiae eius Iuliae dicta referamus? sed si garrulus non putabor, uolo de moribus feminae pauca praemittere, ni quisquam uestrum habeat seria et discenda quae proferat. hortantibusque omnibus, ut coepto insisteret, ita de Iulia orsus est.*

2.5.2 *annum agebat tricesimum et octauum, tempus aetatis, si mens sana superesset, uergentis in senium: sed indulgentia tam fortunae quam patris abutebatur, cum alioquin litterarum amor multaue eruditio, quod in illa domo facile erat, praeterea mitis humanitas minimeque saeuus animus ingentem feminae gratiam conciliarent, mirantibus qui uitia noscebant tantam pariter diuersitatem.*

Augustus’ pride in his ‘two spoiled daughters’

2.5.3 ‘Again and again her father had referred to the extravagance of her dress and the notoriety of her companions and had urged her in language at once tender and grave to show more restraint. But at the same time the sight of his many grandchildren and their likeness to their father, Agrippa, forbade him for very shame’s sake to entertain any doubts about his daughter’s virtue.

2.5.4 And so he flattered himself that her high spirits, even if they gave the impression of promiscuity, were in fact blameless, and he ventured to regard her as a latter-day Claudia [Quintia, also of unfair reputation]. Thus it was that he once observed, when talking among some friends, that he had two spoiled daughters to put up with—Rome and Julia.’

2.5.3 non semel praeceperat pater, temperato tamen inter indulgentiam grauitatemque sermone, moderaretur profusos cultus perspicuosque comitatus. idem cum ad nepotum turbam similitudinemque respexerat qua repraesentabatur Agrippa, dubitare de pudicitia filiae erubescibat.

2.5.4 inde blandiebatur sibi Augustus laetum in filia animum usque ad speciem procacitatis, sed reatu liberum: et talem fuisse apud maiores Claudiam credere audebat. itaque inter amicos dixit duas habere se filias delicatas, quas necesse haberet ferre, rem publicam et Iuliam.

Julia's choice of dresses



Modesty

2.5.5 'She came one day into her father's presence wearing a somewhat immodest dress. Augustus was shocked but said nothing. On the next day, to his delight, she wore a different kind of dress and greeted him with studied demureness. Although the day before he had repressed his feelings, he was now unable to contain his pleasure and said: "This dress is much more becoming in the daughter of Augustus." But Julia had an excuse ready and replied: "Yes, for today I am dressed to meet my father's eyes; yesterday it was for my husband's."

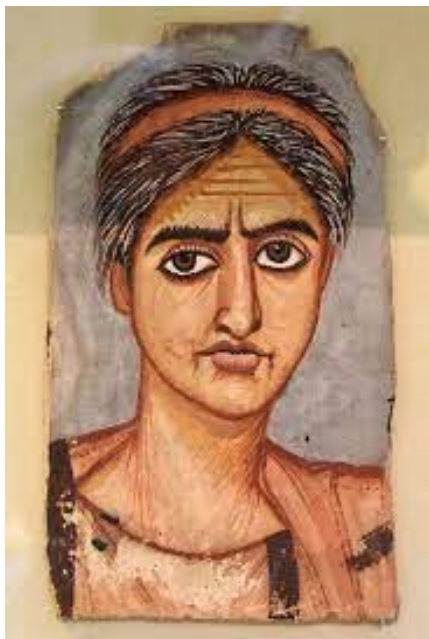
2.5.6 Here is another well-known saying of hers. At a display of gladiators the contrast between Livia's entourage and Julia's had caught the eye, for the former was attended by a number of grown-up men of distinction but the latter was seated surrounded by group of rather disreputable young men. Her father sent Julia a

letter of advice, suggesting she note the difference between the behaviour of the two chief ladies of Rome, to which she wrote this neat reply: “These friends of mine will be old men too, when I am old.”

2.5.5 uenerat ad eum licentiore uestitu, et oculos offenderat patris tacentis. mutauit cultus sui postera die morem, et laetum patrem adfectata seueritate complexa est. at ille, qui pridie dolorem suum continuerat, gaudium continere non potuit, et quantum hic, ait, in filia Augusti probabilior est cultus? non defuit patrocínio suo Iulia his uerbis: hodie enim me patris oculis ornaui, heri uiri.

2.5.6 notum et illud. aduerterant in se populum in spectaculo gladiatorum Liuia et Iulia comitatus dissimilitudine, quippe cingentibus Liuiam grauibus uiris, haec iuuentutis et quidem luxuriosae grege circumsidebatur. ammonuit pater scripto: uideret, quantum inter duas principes feminas interesset eleganter illa rescripsit: et hi mecum senes fient.

Julia’s greying hair, and her status



2.5.7 ‘Her hair began to go grey prematurely, and she used to pull the grey hairs out in private. One day her hairdressers were surprised by the unexpected arrival of her father, who pretended not to see the grey hairs on their dresses and talked for some time on other matters. Then, turning the conversation to the subject of age, he asked her whether she would prefer eventually to be grey or bald. She replied that for her part she would rather be grey. “Why, then,” said her father, thus reproving her fib, “are these women of yours in such a hurry to make you bald?”

2.5.8 Moreover, to a serious-minded friend who was seeking to persuade her that she would be better advised to order her life to conform to her father's simple tastes she replied: "He forgets that he is Caesar, but I remember that I am Caesar's daughter."

2.5.7 *eadem Iulia mature habere coeperat canos, quos legere secreta solebat. subitus interuentus patris aliquando oppressit ornatrices. dissimulauit Augustus deprehensis super uestem earum canis: et aliis sermonibus tempore extracto induxit aetatis mentionem, interrogauitque filiam, utrum post aliquot annos cana esse mallet an calua: et cum illa respondisset ego, pater, cana esse malo, sic illi mendacium obiecit: quid ergo istae te caluam tam cito faciunt?*

2.5.8 *item cum grauem amicum audisset Iulia suadentem melius facturam si se conposuisset ad exemplar paternae frugalitatis, ait: ille obliuiscitur Caesarem se esse: ego memini me Caesaris filiam.*

Julia on adultery

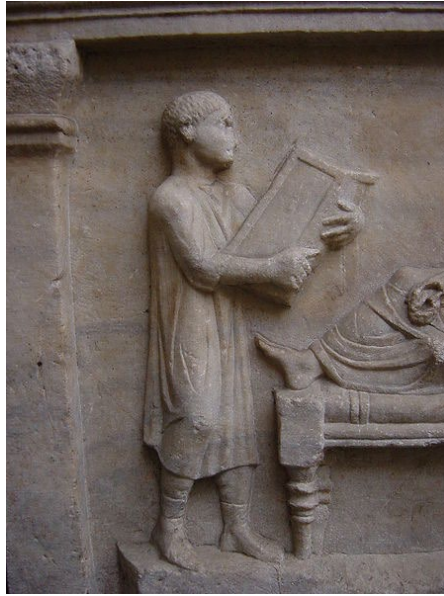
2.5.9 'To certain persons who knew of her infidelities and were expressing surprise at her children's likeness to her husband Agrippa, since she so freely offered the right to use her body, she said: "Passengers are never allowed on board until the hold is full".

2.5.10 A similar saying was ascribed to Popillia, who, to someone asking in surprise why it was that among the lower animals the female sought to mate with the male only when she wished to conceive, replied: "Because they are animals."

2.5.9 *cumque conscii flagitiorum mirarentur quomodo similes Agrippae filios pareret quae tam uulgo potestatem corporis sui faceret, ait: numquam enim nisi nauis plena tollo uectorem.*

2.5.10 *simile dictum Popilliae, quae miranti cuidam, quid esset quapropter aliae bestiae numquam marem desiderabant nisi cum praegnantem uellent fieri, respondit: bestiae enim sunt.*

The wit of the lawyer Cascellius



A Roman jurist

2.6.1 ‘Let me turn back now from stories of women to stories of men and from risqué jests to seemingly humour. The jurist Cascellius had a reputation for a remarkably outspoken wit, and here is one of his best known quips. Vatinius had been stoned by the populace at a gladiatorial show which he was giving, and so he prevailed on the aediles to make a proclamation forbidding the throwing of anything but fruit into the arena. Now it so happened that Cascellius at that time was asked by a client to advise whether a fir-cone was a fruit, and his reply was: “Yes, if you intend to throw it at Vatinius.”

2.6.2 Then there is the story that, when a merchant asked him how to split a ship with a partner, he replied: “If you split the ship, neither you nor your partner will have it.”

2.6.1 *sed, ut a feminis ad uiros et a lasciuis iocis ad honestos reuertar, Cascellius iuris consultus urbanitatis mirae libertatisque habebatur, praecipue tamen is iocus eius innotuit. lapidatus a populo Vatinius, cum gladiatorium munus ederet, optinuerat ut aediles edicerent, ne quis in arenam nisi pomum misisse uellet. forte his diebus Cascellius consultus a quodam, an nux pinea pomum esset, respondit: si in Vatinium missurus es, pomum est.*

2.6.2 *mercatori deinde, quemadmodum cum socio nauem diuideret, interroganti, respondisse traditur: nauem si diuidis, nec tu nec socius habebitis.*

Next week: Tacitus’ Agricola