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The memory of the Roman Republic exercised a powerful influence on several generations of Romans who lived under its political and cultural successor, the Principate or Empire. *Empire and Memory* explores how (and why) that memory manifested itself over the course of the early Principate. Making use of the close relationship between *memoria* and *historia* in Roman thought and drawing on modern studies of historical memory, this book offers case-studies of major imperial authors from the reign of Tiberius to that of Trajan (AD 14–117). The memory evident in literature is linked to that imprinted on Rome’s urban landscape, with special attention paid to the Forum of Augustus and the Forum of Trajan, both of which are particularly suggestive reminders of the transition from a time when the memory of the Republic was highly valued and celebrated to one when its grip had begun to loosen.
This series promotes approaches to Roman literature which are open to dialogue with current work in other areas of the classics, and in the humanities at large. The pursuit of contacts with cognate fields such as social history, anthropology, history of thought, linguistics and literary theory is in the best traditions of classical scholarship: the study of Roman literature, no less than Greek, has much to gain from engaging with these other contexts and intellectual traditions. The series offers a forum in which readers of Latin texts can sharpen their readings by placing them in broader and better-defined contexts, and in which other classicists and humanists can explore the general or particular implications of their work for readers of Latin texts. The books all constitute original and innovative research and are envisaged as suggestive essays whose aim is to stimulate debate.

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Empire and Memory

The Representation of the Roman Republic in Imperial Culture

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University of Washington

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Como me duele el olvido . . .

– Fher Olvera
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Illustrations

Fig. 1  Plan of the Imperial Fora. Revised drawing by J.E. Packer (2001), fig. 3, after an original by I. Gismondi in A.M. Colini (1933), ‘Notiziario di scavi, scoperte e studi in intorno alle antichità di Roma e del Lazio 1931–1932–1933’, BullCom 61: 256, pl. A. Used with J.E. Packer’s permission.

Fig. 2  Ground plan of the Forum of Augustus, with sculptural program. From Zanker (1990), fig. 149. Used with permission, University of Michigan Press.

Fig. 3  Reconstruction of a statue of a summus vir, with titulus and elogium, in the gallery of the Forum of Augustus. From Degrassi (1937), 4, reprinted in Zanker (1990), fig. 164. Used with permission, University of Michigan Press.
I remember quite clearly the moment I decided to write this book. On a damp evening in the early June of 1998 I had the pleasure of walking through Rome’s Campus Martius with Alessandro Barchiesi. For a classicist, perhaps no other quarter in Rome is so rich in history and memory, and as our discussion turned to precisely that topic and my own growing interest in it, Alessandro asked, “Have you read Halbwachs?” I had not, I replied . . . but I would. Appropriately, somewhere between the Mausoleum of Augustus and the Theater of Pompey, I became persuaded that a study of how the Roman Republic was memorialized in early imperial literature and culture would be useful, especially in light of recent interest in the intersections of history and memory. The topic, however, is a large one, and it has not been my aim to discuss in this book all of the many ways in which the Roman Republic is represented in or affects imperial culture. Much has by necessity been omitted. In keeping with the aim of books in this series, I have focused on a few representative texts and sites in order to describe what I see to be fundamental tendencies and changes as well as to propose a constructive way to think about early imperial culture. Profound thanks are due to the many individuals who contributed to the ideas in this book. I must first and foremost express my deep gratitude to the series editors, Stephen Hinds and Denis Feeney. Both have been indefatigable in their support for this project, and indefatigably patient. I have recorded specific debts to them here and there throughout the text, but their assistance has been more substantial than those notes will suggest. Sandra Joshel, my colleague in the University of Washington Department of History, gave generously
of her time and considerable expertise; readings and discussions with her over the course of more than one summer were indispensable toward helping me refine my thoughts on how and why memory mattered to the Romans. Alessandro Barchiesi and my colleague Catherine Connors kindly read and astutely commented on a draft of the manuscript. Parts of the book were presented, in various stages of completion, at several institutions (New York University, the University of Washington, the University of Calgary, Harvard, Princeton, and Stanford). I am grateful for those opportunities and for the helpful discussions they generated. I have benefited as well from numerous conversations with a variety of individuals, in particular Joy Connolly, Larry Bliquez, Ruby Blondell, Jim Clauss, Dan Harmon, John Webster, and John Chesley. I owe special thanks to the participants of my interdisciplinary graduate seminar on this subject, sponsored by the University of Washington’s Center for the Humanities in 1997; to the members of the Center’s 2003–4 Society of Scholars, especially my colleagues Sarah Stroup and Robert Stacey, who both read and provided wise advice on a draft of the first chapter; and to the students of several Classical Seminars in Rome, who invariably help me see Rome and its monuments with fresh eyes. And finally, heartfelt thanks go to my wife Anne and son Benjamin for teaching me, in ways books can never do, the value of memory.
CHAPTER

I

Historia/memoria

“optanda erat oblivio”

The emperor Tiberius was once approached by a man who addressed to him a question beginning with the word meministi – “do you remember . . . ?” (Sen. Ben. 5.25.2). Scarcely had he uttered that one word when the emperor brusquely interrupted, non memini . . . quid fuerim, “I do not remember what I was.” Tiberius was merely feigning a memory lapse; he doubtless remembered perfectly well what the man was inquiring about – evidently, a previous encounter between the two – but chose to consign it to oblivion. As Seneca puts it, optanda erat oblivio (ibid.). Loosely rendered, “it was the emperor’s wish to forget.”¹

If, to borrow Millar’s succinct definition, the emperor was what the emperor did, he was equally what he remembered.² As this small episode

¹ Ti. Caesar inter initia dicenti cuidam: “meministi” – antequam plures notas familiaritatis veteris proferret: “non memini,” inquit, “quid fuerim.” ad hoc quidni non esset repetendum beneficium? optanda erat oblivio; aversabatur omnium amicorum et aequaliun notitiam et illam solam praesentem fortunam suam adspici, illam solam cogitari ac narrari volebat. inquisitorem habebat veterem amicum! “When someone started to say, ‘Do you remember . . . ?’, Tiberius interrupted before he could present more evidence of old acquaintance: ‘I do not remember what I was.’ Why should this man not have sought a reciprocal benefit? It was the emperor’s wish to forget; he was renouncing his relationship with all his friends and companions, wishing only that his current good fortune be considered, that only this should be pondered and talked about. He looked upon an old acquaintance as an investigator!” On the passage, Roller (2001a), 208–9.

² Millar (1977), xi. For the latter notion (generally construed), Roth (1994).
illustrates, however, his memory could be entirely selective, with decisions large and small hinging on what the emperor chose to remember ... and forget. Indeed, memory lay at the very heart of power under the Principate; the phenomenon of *damnatio memoriae* – the (usually) posthumous ‘erasing’ of someone’s memory by having all references to their names removed from inscriptions, portraits defaced, and the like – provides one familiar illustration of how such control might be exerted and, as importantly, why it needed to be exerted. Memories, Romans knew, can be dangerous. For that reason the ability to control and even suppress memory became a crucial component of political authority. Jacques Le Goff’s observation applies especially to the Roman aristocracy: “[t]o make themselves the master of memory and forgetfulness is one of the great preoccupations of the classes, groups, and individuals who have dominated ... historical societies.” Such an attitude capitalizes on the fact that for members of most societies remembering the past is both a social and political imperative. Romans attached a heightened importance to memory, which manifests itself in almost every aspect of their existence, from celebrations of the dead to oratory to law, suffusing and animating their art, their buildings, and their literature. For Romans the past wholly defined the present, and to forget – to disconnect with – the past, at either the level of the individual or of the state, risked the loss of identity and even extinction. Hence the danger – and sometimes the appeal – of oblivion.

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3 Le Goff (1992), 68, 98–100 (citing Veyne). For the link between power and memory see further Terdiman (1993), 19–20.
6 In our era this has become a global concern, as evidenced by UNESCO’s “Memory of the World” project (http://www.unesco.org/webworld/mdm/en/index_mdm.html). Cf. the American Memory project (http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ammemhome.html).
7 As Carruthers (1990), 13 puts it: “A person without a memory ... would be a person without moral character and, in a basic sense, without humanity. *Memoria* refers not to how something is communicated, but to what happens once one has received it, to the interactive process of familiarizing – or textualizing – which occurs between oneself and others’ words in memory.” Cf. Roth (1995), 16; Gillis (1994), 3–5.
The threatened demise of the Republic was a constant concern for Cicero, who was acutely aware that the political system to which he had devoted his life was living on borrowed time. As he put it, his Republic was a faded picture of its former self (picturam . . . evanescentem vetustate) whose moral fiber had become buried in oblivion (oblivione obsoletos, Rep. 5.1.2). Cicero’s anxiety over the loss of memory, evident here and elsewhere and a precursor to the situation under the early Empire, underscores just how grave this threat had become in the second half of the first century BC, when the very political identity of the res publica was at stake.8

This identity was fundamentally aristocratic in nature; although the Roman political system featured some democratic elements (the tribunate being the most important) and the populus was not without influence, real power lay in the Senate, membership in which was determined by both wealth and lineage, and its accompanying magistracies.9 In design and function, the Republic was deliberately anti-monarchical. While it may be historically practical and neat to mark the end of the Republic and the beginning of the Principate with the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BC or the battle of Actium in 31 BC, it took well over a century for the idea and the ideals of the Republic to be purged from the Roman imagination and memory (though they would never be purged entirely). The degree to which the early Principate may have perpetuated certain aspects of the Republic’s political character has often come under discussion, and yet the Republic’s demise is to be measured not merely in terms of political change, but of gradual shifts in individual and collective psychology as

memory and identity; Isid. Orig. 11.1.13 (people without memory are amentes, “mindless”). On the importance of memory in Roman culture, Farrell (1997); and Small and Tatum (1995), essentially a survey of recent work on memory and how it may be applied to the study of antiquity, containing much that is useful about the importance of memory in the classical period.

8 For historical details and analysis of the crisis of the late Republic, Meier (19973), esp. 207–300. On Cicero’s growing concern for the threat to Roman memory, Gowing (2000); and with respect to the De re publica specifically, Zetzel (1994), 31–2. Cf., e.g., de Orat. 1.38.

The Republic and its memory came to be used and exploited by many different groups of people: not only by those who, like the early emperors, found it expedient to perpetuate the myth of a res publica restituta, a “restored Republic,” but also by those who used it to discredit such people or at least underscore their hypocrisy; by those with a nostalgia for the Republic; and by those who sought to sow dissent. However the Republic and its history might be deployed, a deep-seated reverence for the past (or “Republicanism,” the term often used to describe this trend) sat awkwardly with the need, at some level and in some quarters, to forget that past or at least certain aspects of it. The term res publica warrants some discussion. It is clear that in many contexts this phrase simply refers to “the state.” Yet it is equally clear that res publica denoted one thing to Cicero and something quite different to, say, Pliny the Younger. Thus when we find in the Fasti Praenestini for January 13, 27 BC, the assertion that the res publica had been “restored” (by Augustus) – res publica restituta – are we to understand the restoration of the traditional Republic or simply of the state, i.e. “government?” I believe it must be the former. Arguments for the latter – for understanding res publica here as meaning little more than “government” – rather reduce the stakes, and seem to be more the product of hindsight than a reflection of a contemporary, early Augustan perspective; such arguments also imply that Augustus was a little less disingenuous about what he had done than seems likely. At this juncture, the res publica could be nothing other than the Republic. Surely the truly significant word is restituta; the message Augustus sought to convey was that he had restored the Republic, not created a new and distinct state. And yet with the passage of time, over the course of the first century, the phrase res publica ceased to refer, as it typically must have in the Augustan and perhaps even the Tiberian periods, to what we

12 For full discussion of this and related terms (e.g., libertas, princeps), see Lind (1986); see also Flower (2004a), 2–3.