Vixen, Victor, Virgin

THE DEVELOPMENT OF VENUS IN LATIN POETRY

DURING THE AGE OF AUGUSTUS

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Abstract

Since her first appearances, Venus has captivated the minds of poets. Her depictions in poetry are tied to each generation's ideals of sexuality and beauty, and as morals and expectations of female behaviour change, so too do portrayals of the goddess. This thesis examines the shifting portrayals of Venus in poetry during a time of great social upheaval: the age of Augustus. The social and moral discourse of the period influenced the portrayals of Venus as the post-Civil War generation grappled with the newfound peace, a staunchly moralistic emperor who claimed descent from the goddess, and a series of legislations that reshaped the image of an ideal Roman woman.

While the age of Augustus is overflowing with Latin poets, this thesis will dedicate itself to three: Vergil, Horace, and Ovid. Within their works, we can see the importance of the goddess' portrayals and how their evolution can reflect Rome's social, political, and moral climate. Vergil presents a transformed goddess, a morally upstanding mother who engages in the political and domestic spheres. Horace stands on the precipice of change, his Venus straddling the edges of elegy and epic. He recognizes and responds to a political, Augustan goddess before returning to more traditional elegiac matters. Our final source, Ovid, is seemingly traditional in his portrayals of the goddess. Closer examination of his works, however, reveals how Ovid's Venus transformed from the traditional goddess of love and sexuality to become an empress in her own right. After the introduction of the *lex Julia* and Augustus' portrayals of the goddess, the poets of his age used Venus as an exemplum of moral (or immoral) behaviour, motherhood, and dynastic pursuit.

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Introduction

Muse, tell me the deeds of golden [Venus],
the one from Cyprus, who stirs up sweet desire among the gods
and conquers the races of mortal men.
Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite, 1-3.[1]

Venus has captured the imaginations of poets and artists since her earliest appearances. Her beauty, sexuality, and passion have served as a muse; the danger of her desires and her cruelty have shaped mythology and elegy. Venus encompasses the ideals of erotic femininity in every generation; and with this, her poetic portrayals shift to match. This thesis examines the shifting portrayals of Venus during a time of great social and moral upheaval: the fall of the Roman Republic and the subsequent rise of the Roman Empire. When Augustus rose to power after the battle of Actium in 31, he was left with undisputed authority in the Mediterranean.[2] Over the subsequent decades, the *princeps* leveraged established social, political, religious, and cultural systems to legitimize his position.[3] These systems influenced the portrayals of Venus in art and poetry as the post-Civil War generation grappled with the newfound peace, a staunchly moralistic emperor who claimed descent from the goddess, and a series of legislations that reshaped the image of an ideal Roman woman.

While there is no shortage of poets and works within which to study the image of Venus in the age of Augustus, this thesis will dedicate itself to three: Vergil, Horace, and Ovid. These authors feature the most prolific use of Venus during the period and, when compared, exhibit three very different interpretations of the goddess. Chronologically, a history of Venus will be

[1] All translations are my own unless stated otherwise. Ancient abbreviations are taken from Brill's New Pauly and modern abbreviations are taken from l'Année Philologique.
[2] All dates are in BCE unless otherwise specified. For the purposes of this thesis, the *princeps* will only be referred to as Augustus, not Octavian.
[3] Ferrary (2009) 90-136; Gruen (2005) 33-51; Galinsky (1996) 80-141.

given from the foundation of Rome to the death of Julius Caesar, before focusing on the reign of Augustus from 31 BCE to 14 CE. This thesis will also be geographically limited to Rome, as the seat of the *princeps* and his area of most direct influence, as well as the homes of Vergil, Horace, and Ovid. Through this study, the impact of Augustus' social influence and legislative measures on Venus will be established, as well as how the uses of the goddess in poetry interacted with contemporary discourse on women and morality. We will see how Venus transitions in poetry from the goddess of love and sex to a proper Roman matron, an image which complemented Augustus' renewal of Roman morality and was used as an example of how women should behave in his new Empire.

Literature Review

For all that Venus has captivated the world of poetry and art, along with most women in antiquity, she was until recently dismissed in scholarship. Much of the current field owes itself to Pomeroy's seminal 1975 work: *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*. This text laid the foundation for examining the portrayals of women as part of larger societal discourse. Unfortunately, while her work has greatly influenced the study of women and goddesses, her references to Venus are brief and oversimplified: Pomeroy states that Venus is the Roman Aphrodite.[4] Beyond this, Venus is left untreated.

The study of Venus has been undertaken most extensively by Schilling in his 1954 monograph: *La religion romaine de Vénus depuis les origines jusqu'au temps d'Auguste*. While speculative in places, his work provides the most comprehensive study of Venus' origin and Republican history. Schilling presents a timeline of Venus within Rome focussing on her

[4] Pomeroy (1975) 5-6.

religious associations, though he occasionally references her literary role. His study spans the etymological origins of Venus to her early temples and association with the Trojan legend to her late Republican political patronage, presenting Venus as a unique goddess in the Roman pantheon. This contribution is important because it discredited the widely held belief that Venus was a Roman version of Aphrodite, instead of a culmination of years of Roman worship and fusion with the Greek goddess. Instead, Schilling presented Venus as an individual deity worthy of independent study.

Bažant's 2022 monograph: *Statues of Venus: From Antiquity to Present* is the most recent study of Venus in art. This work is an in-depth examination of images of Venus throughout history, beginning with Aphrodite in the eighth century BCE and ending with contemporary portrayals of the goddess. Bažant traces Venus throughout history, devoting a chapter to Venus in Rome during the Republic and early Empire, highlighting the changes and uses of Venus under Augustus and their reception. These images complement the changes in Venus' appearance in poetry during the age of Augustus, exemplifying the physical impact of his moral legislation on portrayals of women. While art is not the main focus of this work, Bažant provides the context of images of Venus in Rome during the period in which Vergil, Horace, and Ovid were writing.

A much more significant amount of scholarly effort has been put into examining Augustus' influence on the poetry of his age; the most relevant to this study is White's 1993: *Promised Verse: Poets in the Society of Augustan Rome*.[5] This monograph offers one of the most well-balanced studies of Augustus' relationship with poetry. In past works, the portrayals of

[5] The impact of these studies on Augustan poets is examined in chapter one.

Venus in Augustan poetry have been linked to the poet's personal relationship with the *princeps*.[6] While this certainly had influence among some poetic circles, scholars emphasize Augustus as an individual over the socio-political context in which the works were written, ignoring the social and legislative changes brought in under his reign.[7] White sees each Augustan poet as an individual with opinions, motivations, and life experiences (dependent and independent of Augustus) that influence their poetry. White argues against the conventional interpretations of the Augustan poets, which tend to be shallow. Instead of seeing the poets in a vacuum and only interacting with the *princeps* on an interpersonal level, White presents them within their larger context. He establishes that they did not merely react to Augustus, but actively contributed to shaping discourse and the Augustan ideas around it.

In a similar theme, the relationships between Augustus and two contemporary poets, Vergil and Horace, have been explored extensively by Nadeau's: *Safe and Subsidized: Vergil and Horace Sing Augustus*, published in 2004, as well as his subsequent 2008 monograph: *Erotica for Caesar Augustus: A Study of the Love-Poetry of Horace, 'Carmina,' Books I-III*.[8] The former offers a self-described 'scientific approach' to the relationship between the poets and Augustus.[9] Nadeau presents the *Aeneid* and the works of Horace as a form of constant interaction between the poets and the *princeps,* seemingly studying every line of poetry for a hint of Augustan praise. The monograph mainly serves as a summary of arguments from previous scholars, but through the intertextual analysis between Vergil and Horace, it does offer new insights. Unfortunately,

[6] Examples of studies in the relationship between Augustus and individual poets, Ovid: Citroni (2009); Davis (2006), Vergil: Weeda et al. (2015); Nadeau (2004); Stahl (1998), and Horace: Nadeau (2008), (2004); Lowrie (2007).
[7] For an overview of Augustus' social and legislative changes, see Milnor (2007); Mellor (2006); Crook (1996a), (1996b).
[8] Horace's *Odes* are also known as the *Carmina.* For the purpose of this thesis, they will be referred to only as the *Odes.*
[9] Nadeau (2004) 5-6.

Nadeau makes little reference to Venus except for her healing of Aeneas' wound in the *Iliad.* The latter text, focussing on Horace's *Odes*, is once again hindered by the hunt for Augustan references. Nadeau examines each poem independently, seemingly ignoring the decades of scholarship which came before. This offers some valuable insight into the interpretation of Horace as a reader. However, the author often makes assumptions or presents ideas that have been dismissed in scholarship and builds his arguments from them. Once again, Venus is rather surprisingly not a concern for the Augustan-focused Nadeau, who only really references her as a stand-in for Horace's lover, Pyrrha, and her general behaviour in love poetry.

Venus in the Augustan elegists has been nowhere else as thoroughly examined as in Merriam's 2006 monograph: *Love and Propaganda: Augustan Venus and the Latin Love Elegists*. In it, Merriam argues that the Latin elegists identify Venus with Augustus and treat her as a stand-in for the *princeps* and his regime. In essence, Merriam attempts to apply the idea that every mention of Venus in Augustan literature must represent Augustus. She argues that the elegists treat Venus differently, depending on their response to Augustus. Merriam generally sees the poets as hostile towards, personally slighted by, and dismissive of, Augustus. The complete assimilation of Augustus with Venus, which comprises the core of Merriam's arguments, may prove useful for interpreting certain individual poems, yet it oversimplifies the complicated nature of elegy. One needs to consider that Venus is bound to appear in love elegy frequently; her use in Augustan elegy is by no means an evolution of the genre. Venus has also acquired certain Greek and Latin literary features, which Merriam attributes wholeheartedly to her Augustan associations. Merriam fails to account for the fact that love elegy's tone, character, and objectives differ from epic and prose, which may feature different aspects of Venus. While

invaluable to the study of Augustan elegy, Merriam's work takes the assumption of subversion too far, refusing to account for a poet's practices, motivations, and historical contexts.

This thesis agrees and disagrees with the scholarly discourse on Augustus, Venus, and the poets. The majority of previous scholarship is divided by the extremes of subversion and propaganda; this thesis takes a more moderate approach, similar to that of White. The period's discourse employed and interacted with Augustan themes; poets did not exist in a vacuum but actively engaged with the *princeps* and each other. Among the most influential themes was the *lex Julia* and the moral revolution Augustus attempted to inspire in Rome. Augustus also claimed Venus, a sexual and semi-exotic deity, as his ancestress. Between the moral reforms and the leader of a new Empire's claim to familial connection, the goddess of sex, love, and promiscuity had to be reconsidered. Poets independently interacted with and elaborated on Augustan themes, legislation, and discourse, placing their own beliefs and motivations within a larger framework. While the image of Venus within the works of Augustan poets cannot be separated from the historical context within which they were written, the portrayals do not necessarily have to be related to the poet's personal feelings regarding the *princeps.* Venus is the goddess of the poet's imagination; she wears infinite faces, only one of them Augustan.

Layout of Thesis

This thesis is divided into four parts: three chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter is a source chapter, where the influence of Augustus on Vergil, Horace, and Ovid, and their interpretations in scholarship are examined. The second chapter is dedicated to Venus' history in Rome before Augustus' rise to power. Her origin as a goddess is studied through etymology and her connection to the Greek goddess Aphrodite. This chapter also includes a chronological

analysis of the temples of Venus in Rome. The second chapter concludes with an analysis of Venus' relationship with prominent political figures and families in the late Republic, notably Sulla, Pompey, and the *Julii.* The connection between Julius Caesar and Venus sets the stage for this thesis' third and final chapter, which examines how Augustus' moral reforms and presence in Rome influenced the portrayal of Venus in Latin poetry.

The examination of Venus under Augustus is split into five parts. First, the moral legislation of Augustus is examined, emphasizing the *lex Julia de maritandis ordinibus* and the *lex Julia de adulteriis coercendis*. Then, with the groundwork laid on how morally upstanding men and women in the Augustan age ought to behave, the *princeps'* influence over Venus in material culture is briefly studied. The bulk of this chapter is then focussed on the analysis of Venus in the works of Vergil, Horace, and Ovid.

Chapter One: Venus' Augustan Sources

Introduction

The end of the Republic and the early Empire is one of the best-documented periods of Roman history, due to the numerous surviving biographies, histories, and poems written during and after Augustus' rise to power. While these authors offer valuable insight into the history of the early principate, it is the poets who offer the most information on Venus. The poets of the Augustan age are often considered the greatest of the Roman authors — Horace, Vergil, and Ovid wrote their famous works during this period. It is these three authors who featured the goddess Venus frequently in their poetry, displaying her transformation and use under Augustus.

Augustus' influence on poetry, whether he controlled authors and their topics or allowed poets free reign, has long been debated in scholarship.[10] The amount of power he held in Rome was unprecedented and at the end of decades of Civil War, one-man control was something to both celebrate and fear.[11] Augustus reflected hope for a new golden age, a time of peace and prosperity, which many poets admired in their works.[12] Through his reign, he had a clear ideological plan in his policies and material culture which echoes in the works of poets who were close to the emperor.[13] This does not mean that poetry was part of the *princeps'* ideological campaign, it was more likely a reflection of shared opinions and common discourse of the period.[14] While Augustus may not have used poetry to express his power, his influence may not have simply inspired those poets who sang his praises, but also silenced those who might have

[10] For arguments see Rutledge (2009) 23-24; Galinsky (1996) 225-230; Feeney (1992) 7.
[11] Ferrary (2009) 99-103; Rutledge (2009) 48; Gruen (2005) 33-35; Crook (1996a) 113-123.
[12] Townend (1996) 905-929; Crook (1996a) 133-140.
[13] Galinsky (1996) 90-106, 225-244; Zanker (1988).
[14] Tac. *Ann.* 3.55.4; Williams (2009) 203-204; Lowrie (2007) 80; Otis (1964) 2-4.

otherwise criticized him. He could have inspired fear in those who might have acted or spoken out against him; the threat of censorship, exile, and death may have stopped poets from expressing their true opinions.[15]

Augustus' influence in poetry came from the power he had over the people of Rome, the ideology he promoted, and the fear he inspired. There were no poets forced to write in support of Augustus, nor were any poets punished directly for writing negatively about him.[16] His influence over them did impact what they wrote about and how they portrayed him, as a result of his power in Rome and his role at the head of the Empire. Two of the poets examined here, Horace and Vergil, had a close connection to the emperor and his inner circle. Unlike those who openly praised the emperor, our third poet, Ovid, has long been studied for his supposed undermining of the principate's power through his poetry. Augustus' power played an important role in how poets discussed the era, showed their support or disdain for the *princeps*, and characterized the mother of the Empire: Venus.

Horace

The Roman poet Quintus Horatius Flaccus, better known as Horace, flourished in the age of Augustus. Born in 65 to a freedman, Horace grew up in Venusia before being sent to Rome to better his education.[17] He then studied at the Academy in Athens where he befriended several elite Roman youths.[18] It was in Athens that Horace was inspired to join Brutus' cause after the

[15] Pollio in Macrob. *Sat.* 2.4.21.
[16] Tac. *Ann.* 1.72; Rutledge (2009) 31-32, 43, (2001) 89, 209-212; White (1993) 149-155.
[17] Hor. *Sat.* 1.6.8, 2.1.34-35. Horace's claim that his father was a freedman could be an artistic device to exaggerate his humble origins (Armstrong (2010) 10-12). His father may have also been enslaved briefly in the Social War (Williams (1995) 296-313). His father's ability to send him to Rome and then Athens for education certainly speaks to a wealthier upbringing than Horace admits.
[18] Hor. *Ep*. 2.2.45; Miller (2019) 3-4; Freudenberg (1993) 205.

assassination of Julius Caesar, gaining the rank of *tribunus militum*. He fought in the battle of Philippi in 42 against Augustus and Antony, but in its aftermath, he abandoned the cause and returned to Rome where he was granted a pardon by Augustus.[19] Horace then rejected a military or political career in favour of writing poetry, which brought him into the circle of Maecenas through their mutual friend, Vergil.[20] Maecenas and Horace became close, travelling together for several years on various political missions before Horace settled down to write poetry full-time.[21] Through this connection, Horace seemingly became a spokesman for the new principate as his poetry strongly supported the moral and social reforms of Augustus.

The relationship between Horace and Augustus has been the subject of debate for decades. In his writings, Horace often spoke of Augustus as a close friend, directly addressing him in many of his *Epistulae.*[22] Suetonius' *Vita Horati* claims that not only were they members of the same circles but were friends as well.[23] Horace had multiple works commissioned by Augustus, including the *Carmen Saeculare,* which was performed at the *Ludi Saeculare* in 17. Horace's second book of *Epistulae* and his second book of *Odes* were both commissioned by Augustus as well.[24] Suetonius relates that Horace had turned down the position of Augustus' secretary and Horace himself even says he refused the opportunity to write the *Res Gestae* of Augustus.[25] These honours certainly speak to Horace being a well-respected author during the reign of Augustus, but they do not necessarily speak to a high degree of familiarity between the poet and the *princeps.* Horace was also the client and very close friend of Augustus' right-hand

[19] Hor. *Ep.* 2.2.46, *Odes.* 2.7; Nisbet (2007) 7-8.
[20] Hor. *Sat.* 1.6.54-62.
[21] Hor. *Sat.* 1.5.1-33 recounts his voyage to Brundisium with Maecenas to sign the Treaty of Tarentum; 1.5.104-131 describes his life in Rome once he settled there.
[22] Hor. *Sat.* 2.1, Ep. 1.19; Lowrie (2007) 77-89.
[23] Suet. *Hor.* 12.
[24] Suet. *Hor.* 17-18.
[25] Suet. *Hor.* 10; Hor. *Epist,* 2.1.251.

man, Maecenas, so his praise of the emperor's character and their relationship may have been influenced equally by the opinion of his patron.[26]

Judgement of Horace's position regarding Augustus depends greatly on the era of scholarship and the respective authors' views on the principate. Pre-World War II scholarship generally views Horace as an Augustan lackey, a loyal spokesman who supported the reforms of Augustus because they aligned with the poet's own opinions.[27] World War II and the Cold War introduced a more critical reading of Horace's work.[28] His poems were then viewed by some scholars as subversive or the work of a man desperate to survive in a new age. Scholars scoured Horace's poems for critiques of Augustus and his new regime. Other scholars from this era continued to support the reading of Horace as a loyal lackey and became overly critical of Horace for his 'foolish' support of Augustus, implying Horace was nothing more than Augustus' mouthpiece.[29] The views expressed during World War II and the Cold War have little evidence within Horace to support them, relying instead on parallels of their own time or biased readings of Horace's situation to imply he was forced or coerced into writing in support of Augustus. Modern scholarship has generally returned to the Pre-World War II understanding of Horace as loyal to Augustus, as the poet himself claims in his *Epistulae.*[30] His work tends to show support for the principate without critical commentary or subversion, leading to the conclusion that, at

[26] Lowrie (2007) 78-79 suggests this exaggeration.
[27] Lowrie (2007) 77-78; Kennedy (1992) 26-58; Horace's denunciation of adultery seemingly aligns with Augustus' first attempt at moral reform (*Odes.* 3.6). He later laments their failure in *Odes.* 3.24.33-36.
[28] For varying interpretations of Horace's motives, see Zanker (1988) 158, 169, 176; Fraenkel (1957) 240; Syme (1939) 443-444.
[29] Fraenkel (1957) 95-97, 124-126.
[30] Hor. *Ep.* 1.13, 1.16, 2.1.

least in his works, Horace was an avid supporter of Augustus.[31] This is not to say that Horace was the lackey he was once considered, but rather a commentator whose personal views lined up with those of Augustus.

Venus appears most often in the *Odes* of Horace, written in several volumes over twenty years.[32] This large time span shows how his attitudes towards the goddess adapted as Augustus gained power. The first three books, while written over several years, were published together in 23. The fourth was published a decade later, in 13, at the request of Augustus. In his first *Ode*, Horace is critical of the goddess, calling her 'cruel mother of the cupids'.[33] She is cruel for forcing him to focus solely on love and no other topics of poetry. She is all-consuming in this *Ode*, returning his affections to a woman from his past. He refers to her as the 'cruel mother of sweet cupids' once again in his final book, but this time in reference to his wish to be left alone by the goddess in his old age.[34] He asks the goddess to go to younger men and bless them with her favour, allowing them to successfully court young women. In his final poem, Horace calls her 'kindly Venus' and claims that they will sing in victory to 'the people of Venus'.[35] Venus goes from being cruel to him by making him act on unwanted attraction to being cruel only by staying with him rather than moving on to younger men who need her help more. Her portrayal in his final poem also reflects her role as a bringer of victory to the Roman people.[36] This transformation is accompanied by a lack of the goddess' presence in the stories of the *Odes*. She

[31] Hor. *Ep.*1. 13; Suet. *Hor.* 1. 2. Before Kennedy (1992), the debate about Horace being Augustan or anti-Augustan occupied much of the scholarship regarding the poet. Lyne (1995) provides a comprehensive overview of the changes in scholarly opinion on Horace. Most of the scholarship written after Kennedy follows his understanding of Horace as firmly in the Augustan camp: Feeney (1998); Oliensis (1998); Lowrie (1997); White (1993); Seager (1993) all portray Horace as sharing Augustus' views.
[32] Venus' appearances in his other works are so sparse that they shall not be discussed.
[33] Hor. *Odes.* 1.19.1.
[34] Hor. *Odes.* 4.1.1-8.
[35] Hor. *Odes.* 4.15.
[36] The martial aspects of Venus in Rome are discussed in chapter two.

is usually invoked as an abstract force, seen reuniting separated lovers or asked to make a man more attractive to his suitor.[37] Occasionally, Venus is shown favouring beautiful (often married) women with whom the poet is infatuated, making him attracted to these women despite his own resistance. These poems could be implying an adulterous relationship, but they also could be speaking to a simple case of attraction without successful pursuit or any pursuit at all.

Horace's *Odes* focus on issues of private and public sexual morality, usually using negative examples to explain the dire outcome of behaving immorally.[38] These examples are mostly mythological in nature, which is why it seems strange that myths surrounding the goddess, especially those of her multiple affairs and children, are largely ignored.[39] In the first book, Venus is mentioned in direct connection with her husband, Vulcan, naming her only as a springtime goddess without mention of sexual affairs.[40] She is declared an unfair goddess, matching unsuitable people together — though this is in reference to bodies and minds, not situation.[41] Venus appears as a character twice in the third book, laughing at those who would oppose the advances of Jupiter. In one, she laughs at the guardian of Danae on the night Jupiter visits her.[42] Venus is not the cause nor perpetrator of the sexual acts in this poem, she is merely laughing at the guardian's fruitless attempts to protect the young woman. In another, she laughs at and then reprimands Europa for being ashamed of her affair with Zeus.[43] In the fourth book, Venus as the mother of Aeneas is emphasized over her role as the goddess of love. This particular book was published ten years after the first three, when Augustus' own portrayals of

[37] Hor. *Odes.* 1.30, 3.9.17, 3.26.
[38] Lyne (1995) 22-26.
[39] Hardie (2014) 43-54; Lyne (1995) 57.
[40] Hor. *Odes.* 1.4.5.
[41] Hor. *Odes.* 1.33.10. Horace rarely mentions relationships between those of different social classes, keeping in line with Augustus' outlawing of marriage between classes.
[42] Hor. *Odes.* 3.16.4-6.
[43] Hor. *Odes.* 3.27.65-76.

the goddess as his ancestress were commonly advertised, and the myths of Troy feature heavily within this final book.[44] Venus is seen pleading to Jupiter to give her son a sign of good omen, and later the Trojans — and therefore the Romans — are called the 'people of Venus'.[45] The passing over of Venus' non-sexual aspects prior to the fourth *Ode* reflects the transformation of Venus' role within Horace's work, showing the change in her role in Augustan Rome. She is emphasized as a mother and ancestress of Rome, no longer the cruel force seen in the first books. Horace's depictions of Venus, and more generally women, in his poems are coloured by the poet's own misogynistic tendencies.[46] In his early works, Venus is only associated with love and sex, usually unwanted by the poet.[47] In the fourth book, however, Horace confronts Venus not as a woman but as a mother, simultaneously changing her representation while erasing many of her sexual aspects to make her an acceptable originator of Augustus and the Roman people.

While Venus is not a major character in Horace's poetry, her transformation gives valuable insight into the changing role she held under Augustus. The fourth book of *Odes* was commissioned by Augustus, and the poetry within it is as close to panegyric as Horace gets. The change in Venus' role from cruel and abstract to mother and ancestress implies that the perception of Venus had changed in the ten years since his first three *Odes*. The passing over of her affairs and role in adulterous situations is also a choice by the author, either due to the changing moral norms at the time or his own opinion on the matter. Horace likely made this change because poetic representations of Venus were changed, specifically by Vergil, between the publication of the third and fourth *Odes,* and the way Venus was portrayed in material culture

[44] For Venus as the ancestress of Rome and Augustus as a descendent of Venus, see chapter two.
[45] Hor. *Odes.* 4.6.22, 4.15.32.
[46] For examples of Horace's misogyny, see *Ep.* 1.1, 1.14, *Odes*. 1.5, *Epod.* 8, 12; *Sat.* 1.8. Courtney (2013) 72; Henderson (1999) 184–91; Oliensis (1998) 24. Nisbet (2007) 21 goes so far as to call him the 'most brutally sexist of Augustan poets.'
[47] Oliensis (1998) 221-234.

changed under Augustus.[48] She was perceived as a mother first and foremost in Augustan works, either downplaying sexual aspects or ignoring them outright. Horace may have witnessed this change, as well as its role in Augustus' advertisement, and worked it into his own poetry to please his commissioner. By doing so, he also became part of the change, shifting public perception with his own portrayals.[49] In the end, Horace's Venus supports the Augustan model of the goddess, portraying her the way Rome's first emperor wanted her to be, and in turn supporting the moral and social reforms of Augustus.[50]

Vergil

Publius Vergilius Maro, better known as Vergil, is regarded as one of the greatest Latin poets of the age of Augustus. Vergil was born in 70 in Cisalpine Gaul to a humble family, eventually moving to Rome in his youth to continue his education.[51] Unlike most of his peers, Vergil was not directly involved in the struggles of Civil War due to his poor health.[52] His early poetry focused on the idealization of the traditional lifestyle of Roman farmers, generally portraying a pessimistic outlook towards the Civil War and Augustus' early political decisions.[53] Despite this, his poetry, collected in the *Georgics,* was performed for Augustus in 31 when he returned from the Battle of Actium, perhaps introducing the *princeps* to the poet. This likely began Vergil's official involvement in the principate, establishing his relationship with Augustus' patron of the arts, Maecenas.[54] This relationship would develop into a close friendship, with Augustus becoming an avid fan of Vergil's work. Augustus would often request

[48] To be discussed in chapter three.
[49] Kennedy (1992) 30-33 suggests that Horace did this not only for Venus but for Augustus as well.
[50] Bond (2009) 150.
[51] Suet. *Verg.* 1.1-2.
[52] Suet. *Verg.* 1.8.
[53] Weeda et al. (2015) 85-103; Boyle (1977); Wilkinson (1969) 49-56.
[54] Suet. *Verg.* 1.20.

updates on the poet's latest works, especially his Roman epic, the *Aeneid*.[55] The epic, along with his other works, was popular among the Romans from their composition.[56] However, the tone of the *Aeneid* has been the subject of debate in scholarship. Vergil does not make a clear political stance in the epic, choosing instead to show the tension between two sides, optimistic and pessimistic about the new regime.[57] The poem can therefore be read as a panegyric of Augustus, a criticism of his actions, or a mix of the two.

The reception of Vergil, in particular the *Aeneid,* has changed depending on the historical context in which it is read, and whether the reader focuses on the tone or content. In early interpretations, the *Aeneid* reflected a hopeful audience, encouraging the reading of the poem in a pro-Augustan tone. Vergil created a literary myth to support the political myth of the principate, making use of the symbolism of the Augustan regime and including several prophecies about the success of Augustus.[58] The image of a pro-Augustan Vergil is based on several assumptions, as well as its ancient reception. Vergil's biographers include several accounts of his friendship with the *princeps,* which may have been exaggerated just as his relationship with Maecenas was. These accounts of friendship have often been taken as a sign of his positive outlook on Augustus. This is an overly simplistic model of patronage relationships, and poets in this circle, while usually supportive of Augustus, were allowed to be subtly critical or include multiple meanings without fear of retribution.[59] Vergil could also be read as pro-Augustan due to the actions of the *princeps;* Augustus loved his poetry, constantly demanding updates, and according to tradition, publishing the poem after Vergil's death despite the poet's final wish for the epic to be

[55] Suet. *Verg.* 1.31-32.
[56] Suet. *Verg.* 1.30 quoting Prop. 2.34.65.
[57] Tarrant (1997) 243-263.
[58] Tarrant (1997) 252.
[59] Propertius is the best example of this allowance: Tarrant (1997) 258; Griffin (1984) 87-105.

destroyed.[60] The poem includes several references in praise of Augustus; Aeneas is often considered a parallel of Augustus in some aspects of his character, particularly his *pietas* and his role as a founder of Rome.[61] The pro-Augustan outlook is enhanced by the perceived anti-*Aeneid* theme of Ovid and Lucan, who took the celebratory aspects of Vergil's work and presented the opposite views in their own poetry.[62]

Throughout the 20th century, scholarly approaches to Vergil's *Aeneid* shifted towards pessimistic interpretations, becoming especially popular during the 1940s-1960s.[63] Still reeling from the negative impacts of fascist and communist propaganda, the cynical view reflects a period of distrust during World War II and the Cold War. Opinions regarding nationalistic and imperialist ideals changed, influencing scholarship to take a more critical approach to the *Aeneid* and Vergil's sincerity.[64] In this pessimistic interpretation, the *Aeneid* is examined for subversion and criticism of the *princeps*.[65] There are two central arguments in this approach, though the evidence is slim for both. The first contention stems from Vergil's lack of praise for Augustus. The narrator of the *Aeneid* does not comment on Augustus, suggesting that Vergil privately lacked faith in him – only characters within the epic celebrate the *princeps*.[66] It argues that Vergil's absence of commentary is subversive, but it could be contended that placing praise in the mouths of gods and heroes increased its worth.[67] The second argument relies on Aeneas being a stand-in for Augustus, which is a typically disfavoured in scholarship.[68] Vergil's epic

[60] Suet. *Verg.* 31-33, 39-41; Ziolkowski and Putnam (2008) 420-425.
[61] Grebe (2004) 35-62.
[62] Casali (2011) 81-109; Tarrant (1997) 258; Hardie (1990) 224-235.
[63] For a summary of different interpretations in scholarship, see Schmidt (2001) 145-171; Putnam (1995) 2; Johnson (1976) 1-12.
[64] Harrison (1990) 1-20.
[65] Scullard (2010) 244; Syme (1939) 464-465.
[66] Parry (1963) 66-80.
[67] Verg. *Aen.* 1.286-296, 6.791-805.
[68] Weeda et al. (2015) 137-140; Tarrant (2012) 24.

was combed for potential criticism of Aeneas; this focused on his undesirable acts, such as his slaughter of Turnus and his affair with Dido. These actions parallel those of Augustus during the Civil War and his affair with Terentia, immortalizing the emperor's failures.[69] This pessimistic interpretation remains influential in contemporary scholarship, merging with the earlier optimistic view to create a complex, multi-faceted approach to the *Aeneid.*

Modern scholarship continues to debate the influence of Augustus on Vergil's works, whether he was writing the *princep*s' planned publicity or the poet's personal views. Generally, it is agreed that Vergil was not Augustus' mouthpiece but rather gave his opinions on contemporary issues freely and independently.[70] Vergil is critical of some of Augustus' actions while praising others, and his political views seem to have been continued from his earlier works.[71] Vergil was against the brutality of war and the destruction of his peaceful pastoral life in the early years of Civil War, supporting and criticizing both Antony and Augustus.[72] However, Vergil was supportive of a one-man rule, so long as it would bring about peace and stability in Rome.[73] He equally supported Augustus when he agreed with the emperor and criticized when he did not.[74] Overall, Vergil wrote the *Aeneid* as an epic for Augustus, creating a narrative which glorified Augustus' ancestors and the history of Rome, but his opinions of Augustus are his own, not forced onto him by his patron or emperor. His commentary reflects the socio-political views he held at the time of writing and had held consistently throughout his previous works.

[69] Powell (1992) 144-145; On the affair: Cass. Dio. 54.19.3; Suet. *Aug.* 69; Carter (1982) 191.
[70] Weeda et al. (2015) 142; Dominik (2009) 111; Feeney (1992) 1-3; Woodman and West (1984) 13.
[71] Weeda et al. (2015) 150; Putnam (1995) 14-16.
[72] Verg. *G.* 1.489-497, 4.554-558, *Aen*. 6.847-853, 11.100-105, 11.372-373, 12.35-36.
[73] Verg. *G.* 4.1-227, *Aen.* 1. 86-296, 6.788-800; Weeda et al. (2015) 145; Cairns (1989) 1-84.
[74] Vergil is critical of Augustus' actions in the *Eclogues*, most evidently in 1, 6, 7, 8, 9; Weeda et al. (2015) 142-151.

While Vergil is difficult to interpret as completely pro- or anti-Augustan, the *Aeneid* formed a political and ideological statement, and much of his ideology was in line with Augustus' moral programme.[75] The use of Augustan political myth within the epic is often read as one of the celebratory aspects of Vergil's poetry, a reflection of Augustus' moral and social beliefs as the poet's own. This political myth features most heavily in the prophecies in the *Aeneid,* where descendants of Aeneas (i.e., Augustus) are predicted to be the founders and saviours of the Roman state.[76] References to Augustus' family, both ancestors and descendants, are frequent throughout the *Aeneid* and reflect the hopeful aspects of Augustus' reign.[77] His descendants would carry on the *Pax Augusta*, while his ancestors' deeds predict the greatness of his age. Vergil's commentary on Augustus and his family is generally positive, celebrating the success of some while mourning the loss of others. The *Aeneid* clearly draws a familial connection between Aeneas and Augustus, and therefore, the actions of Aeneas' mother, Venus, should reflect the upstanding moral behaviour of a woman in the age of Augustus.[78] This results in a very different characterization of Venus from the works of earlier poets, in which her sexuality is emphasized above all. In the *Aeneid,* her sexuality, while present, is subdued compared to her role as a mother. This characterization also allows the moral and social reforms of the time to be reflected in the epic, as the goddess changes from hyper-sexual adulteress to caring mother, just as Augustus expects the women of his regime to do.[79]

Venus' erotic and adulterous behaviour is ignored and suppressed within the poem while her role as a mother is emphasized. The epic contains three of her children, all of whom have

[75] Dominik (2009) 111.
[76] Verg. *Aen.* 1.257-296.
[77] McNelis (2018) 7-9; Goldschmidt (2013) 51–53.
[78] Most of Vergil's references to Venus occur within the *Aeneid*, so it will be the focus of this study.
[79] Treggiari (2005) 130-148; Wallace-Hadrill (1981a) 58-80.

different fathers: Aeneas, who is acknowledged as the son of Anchises, as well as Cupid and Eryx, whose fathers are not mentioned.[80] None of the children are the offspring of Venus and her husband Vulcan, yet they are not portrayed as the sons of an adulterous woman. Instead, they are encouraged by their mother to act as brothers to one another, to assist Aeneas in his travels to ensure his legacy will last. Eryx provides a haven to Aeneas on his shores, while Cupid is implored to help Aeneas in his pursuit of Dido.[81] Vulcan even acts as a stepfather to Aeneas and is called *pater* as he works in the forge to craft weapons for the Trojans.[82] The new arms were requested by Venus under the guise of a loving wife asking her husband to help her son. While sexual favours are implied as part of the request, Venus and Vulcan's coupling is described as a mutually desired relationship, not as payment for his assistance. This is the only sexual relationship Venus is shown in throughout the epic, and references to other affairs are slim and obscure. Venus and Anchises are acknowledged as parents of Aeneas but the affair which brought them together is not.[83] Vergil also distances Venus from her ongoing affair with Mars, only mentioning them in the same place when delivering the prophecy of Romulus and Remus. Their conception, as Vergil describes it, distances the affair of Venus and Mars further; Mars' coupling with another woman, Ilia (Rhea Silvia), is instead emphasized.[84] Ilia, the granddaughter of Aeneas, then links Mars to Venus, and the Romans.

Instead of Venus' usual role as a sexual partner or cruel mother of Cupid, Vergil portrays Venus as a Roman mother whose focus lies in the political and social success of her children. The goddess' main role in the epic is the instigator of Aeneas' fate. In the first book, she begins

[80] Hallett (2020) 117.
[81] Verg. *Aen.* 1.664-669, 5.24-25, 5.413.
[82] Verg. *Aen.* 8.394.
[83] Hallett (2020) 116-118.
[84] Verg. *Aen.* 1.272-728; Hallett (2020) 119.

by reminding Jupiter of the intended legacy of her son and his promise that Aeneas will be the forebear of the Roman people. She then sends Cupid to assist Aeneas in receiving a safe welcome from the Carthaginians. Throughout the rest of the epic, Venus ensures her son's safety and success by acting on his behalf, most notably in seducing Vulcan for new armour and convincing Aeneas to continue his journey when he begins to settle with Dido. She actively guides his journey, and later in the epic, his military success.[85] This ties Venus to the military prowess of the Roman people as well, especially that of her descendant, Augustus. In the *Aeneid,* Venus stresses the Roman titles and roles bestowed upon her by her descendants, *genetrix* and *victrix*.[86]

Vergil may not have been Augustus' mouthpiece as previous scholarship suggests, but his interpretation of Venus and her role in mythology is clearly linked to her role both as ancestress of the emperor and as a morally upright woman. To reflect the shifting values of the Empire, Venus' image had to change in physical representations and in her more popular domain, poetry. Vergil was the first poet to reflect the changes to Venus' appearance in material culture in poetry, setting the groundwork for authors like Horace to follow. She was perceived as a mother first and foremost in his works, downplaying deviant sexual aspects while emphasizing maternal ones. By doing so, Vergil greatly impacted the shifting public perception with his own portrayals of Venus, complementing Augustus' changes. Vergil essentially created the Augustan poetic model of the goddess, portraying her the way Rome's first emperor viewed her, as an ancestress of his own family line and of Rome itself.

[85] Verg. *Aen.* 12.411-420, 786-787; Leach (1997).
[86] These epithets are discussed in chapter two.

Ovid

Publius Ovidius Naso, Ovid, was born on March 20th in 43 in Sulmo, Italy.[87] He was born into an equestrian family and was classically educated in Rome, Athens, and Asia Minor.[88] While he was raised to become a rhetorician and politician, he only served on the Board of Three in his youth before deciding to dedicate his life to poetry.[89] He would later serve in a couple of minor administrative roles and as a judge in several court cases, but he did not pursue a life on the *cursus honorum*.[90] The poet Marcus Valerius Messalla Corvinus was Ovid's patron and mentor for the early years of his career before he began to work with Paullus Fabius Maximus.[91] Ovid connected himself to Maximus through his third wife, who was close friends with Maximus' wife, who was in turn friends with Livia, Augustus' wife.[92] Ovid's poetry met with instant success, and he became famous in several literary circles in Rome.[93] Overall, he was a successful poet who had a perfectly good footing within the Roman elite under Augustus until his sudden exile in 8 CE.[94] Ovid's biography is elusive beyond the information above, as no ancient biography survives to us — if one was written — and contemporary sources do not mention him, except for Seneca the Elder. Seneca only provides a short commentary on Ovid, offering very little biographical information.[95] For all other information, we rely on the poet.[96]

[87] Ov. *Tr.* 4.10.3-14.
[88] Ov. *Tr.* 1.2.77-78, *Pont.* 2.10.21-42; Volk (2010) 23.
[89] Ov. *Tr.* 4.10.33-34. It is unclear if Ovid served with the *tresviri capitales* or the *tresviri monetales.*
[90] Ov. *Fast*. 4.383-384, *Tr.* 2.93-96, *Pont.* 3.5.23-24.
[91] Ov. *Pont.* 1.2.1-150; Juv. 7.95 names Maximus as a patron of poetry who supported Ovid.
[92] *ILS* 8811 (Paphos); Lewis (2012) 151-189 proposes that Ovid's third wife may have been Maximus' daughter, but with no primary evidence from Ovid, her identity remains unknown; Volk (2010) 23; White (2002) 2-3.
[93] Volk (2010) 23; Walsh (1961) 26-37.
[94] Ov. *Tr*. 2.471-492, 519.
[95] Sen. *Cont.* 2.2.8, 9.5.17 mention his education; Sen. *Q. Nat.* 3.27 offers a short critique of Ovid; Volk (2010) 20.
[96] White (2002) 1-2.

However, this is unreliable as Ovid himself contradicts whether the narrator of his poems is the historical Ovid or a literary character.[97]

Ovid's relationship with Augustus is difficult to understand and his exile in 8 CE only complicates it further. Prior to his banishment, Ovid was popular in Rome despite (or because of) his themes of sex and adultery, of which Augustus generally disapproved.[98] His patron was popular in Rome but not close to the emperor the way Maecenas was.[99] It is generally thought that while Ovid knew some of his fellow poets, he did not move in the same circles as them.[100] This may partially be the reason why Ovid did not toe the imperial line as Horace and Vergil did, turning away from themes of the golden age to focus on love elegy. His less than praiseworthy attitude is generally attributed to the circumstances of Ovid's youth; unlike his fellow poets who lived through the Civil Wars and saw Augustus as the solution, Ovid came of age in a Rome that Augustus already had power over.[101] Instead of being grateful for the peace and revival of their city, Ovid was a young man commenting on the only authority he had known. For him, there was no restoration to thank Augustus for, just changes to Ovid's perceived status quo. Ovid's poetry promoted the sexual proclivity and adultery that the men of Rome enjoyed until Augustus' moral reforms were published, and this is where the poet takes issue with the emperor.[102] He provides what was likely a common complaint among elites regarding Augustus' marriage reforms but was not punished for this (until at least a decade later, if we believe this was the cause of his

[97] In the *Tristia*, Ovid pleads with Augustus that his poems do not reflect his character, while other poems clearly reflect Ovid's reality, Ov. *Tr.* 2.354-360 compared to *Am.* 2.1.2, 3.12.44; Volk (2010) 24-34; cf. Hardie (2002); Gildenhard and Zissos (1999).
[98] This is discussed in chapter three.
[99] Augustus may have been responsible for Paullus Fabius Maximus' death in 14 CE: Tac. *Ann.* 1.5; Ov. *Pont*. 4.6.
[100] Ov. *Tr*. 4.10.41–52.
[101] Williams (2009) 206; see Citroni (2009) for a full overview of this attitude towards Ovid.
[102] Williams (2009) 203-210; Gibson (2003) 135; Feeney (1992) 3.

exile). Despite this difference in moral ideology, Ovid was not anti-Augustan.[103] He did not speak out against any other policies or support other candidates (that we are aware of), he seemed simply annoyed that Augustus was publishing laws on private affairs. The relationship between Ovid and Augustus deteriorated when Ovid was suddenly exiled in 8 CE. We have no contemporary evidence for the banishment beyond Ovid's own works, and no clear explanation of why the poet was exiled. In scholarship there are two generally accepted theories as to Ovid's exile: sexual or political exile.[104] Ovid tells us that he was exiled for a *carmen et error*, leaving scholars to suppose the *Ars Amatoria* or the poet's involvement in an adulterous scandal are to blame. If his exile was for political reasons, it is thought that he may have endorsed a successor to Augustus' role who the *princeps* did not support. [105] His exile, along with his earlier poetry promoting immoral sexual behaviour, is why many modern scholars read Ovid as subversive, questioning whether the poet was simply following the model set out by other elegists or if he was writing to criticize Augustus.

Ovid's supposed subversiveness is a complex topic of debate in recent scholarship. Prior to the 1950s, Ovid was largely ignored. His domain remained in the literary world, consistently being used as a teacher of elegy or a paradigm of exile in works of fiction.[106] Ovid was introduced into the world of scholarship in the 1950s, but the study of his works did not become

[103] Williams (1978) 63; Duquesnay (1973) 41; Otis (1938) 188-229.
[104] Sexual: White (2002) 16–17; Watson (2002) 154–155. Political: Syme (1978) 199–229; Norwood (1963). A third theory exists that suggests Ovid's exile never happened and that his exile poetry was meant to be a literary device, not to be taken literally: for a full bibliography, see Verdière (1992) 163. This theory has been dismissed by most scholars, as Ovid's unfinished works reflect his lack of access in Tomis, and letters sent during his exile implore his friends to help him return to Rome: Volk (2010) 30-31; Claassen (2008) 2-10; Brown (1985) 18-22.
[105] Ov. *Tr.* 2.207; Volk (2010) 31.
[106] See Ziolkowski (2005) for a full bibliography.

political until the 1970s.[107] This is when scholars began to question the implicit political nature of Ovid to determine his opinion on Augustus and the regime. He is generally received in one of two ways by modern scholars. The first interpretation of his work is that he is purposely anti-Augustan, that his treatment of sexuality, morality, and the Julian myths are intentionally incompatible with Augustus' policies.[108] After all, the association of the Augustan regime with Venus was not without problems. Reminders of Venus' traditional immorality were hardly welcomed by Augustus; the *lex Iulia* of 19 sought to punish that which Venus controlled in mythology: extramarital sexuality.[109] The second interpretation places this incompatibility not as a political position, but as annoyance and indifference towards Augustus' preferred moral stance.[110] The topics Ovid wrote about were part of a literary style which focussed on erotica and adultery.[111] He was following tradition in his writing, using his poetry to comment on Augustan policies regarding sex and morals to express his own opinion without being politically anti-Augustan. Whether Ovid supported Augustus as *princeps* matters little in the interpretation of Venus in his early works. Here, Venus is her typical elegiac self, the goddess of love and sex. It is only in his later works where the Augustan model of Venus, supported in poetry by Horace and Vergil, becomes relevant.[112] Even in the *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti,* Venus is primarily a sexual goddess, but Ovid plays with the model set by Vergil to comment on the moral reforms of Augustus. Still, his interpretations of Venus do not comment on his support or dislike of Augustus overall, just his opinion on the moral reforms. It does not matter how Ovid felt about

[107] Davis (1999) offers a summary of these works and the transformation of reading Ovid into political scholarship. Frankel (1956); Wilkinson (1955) discuss Ovid's work without mentioning politics. Also see Kennedy (1993) 34-38; Little (1982) 254-370; Moulton (1973); Curran (1972); Holleman (1971) 458-466.
[108] For a full bibliography, see Davis (2006); Nugent (1990). Contra: Kennedy (1992); Feeney (1992).
[109] Johnson (1996) 131; Zanker (1988) 209.
[110] See Harrison (2002) for a full bibliography.
[111] Luck (2002) 307-312.
[112] Johnson (1996).

the *princeps* himself, but rather how previous poets had used Venus in a traditional sense as opposed to her new role in Augustan Rome.

Ovid's Venus plays into the traditional, sexual imagery. She is first and foremost an erotic goddess in Ovid's poetry. Venus is the poet's inspiration to write; she is his patron, and her domain of love and sex is the topic of most of Ovid's work. For Ovid, Venus represents the opposite of work, politics, and war. She is not a mother or wife, but a natural force that draws people together despite their own wishes and against their better judgement. Women and men alike invoke her in Ovid's early poetry, such as the *Heroides,* where the goddess' role as the personification of love is emphasized. Venus is the cause of the heroines' love for their partners but also the source of despair as they beg for her to either bring their heroes home to them or free them from their love. Ovid's common theme when writing about Venus is that if you acknowledge the power of Venus and honour her, she will favour you, but when she is neglected or scorned, she punishes swiftly and harshly. Ovid frequently mentions in his *Amores* that since he serves Venus so well, she rewards him with any woman he desires.[113] Even as her favoured poet, the goddess is still to blame when Ovid's love life is going poorly.[114] Venus is the quintessential goddess of love in Ovid. She is seductive, erotic, romantic, and uncaring of reasonable thought. In the *Ars Amatoria,* Venus appoints him as the guide for lovers and he begs her to help his venture reach those who need it.[115] Her temples are where he instructs men to go to pick up women and as meeting places for affairs, as she will protect them from the eyes of gods and men.[116] He also makes frequent reference to the various statues of Venus around Rome

[113] Ex. Ov. *Am.* 2.8.16-20.
[114] Ex. Ov. *Am.* 2.10.
[115] Ov. *Ars.* 1.1.7, 30; 3.1.44.
[116] Ov. *Ars.* 1.3.

and their seductive poses, calling on his lovers and female students to take note of her stance and nudity.[117]

In Ovid's narrative works, Venus' stories tend to focus on her affairs or her role in influencing others' affairs, such as Aeneas and Dido or Paris and Helen.[118] The goddess is also heavily tied to Mars in Ovid's work due to their popularity in Greek myth, a distinct difference from Horace and Vergil. Their partnership is mentioned frequently in the *Amores, Ars Amatoria,* and the *Metamorphoses.*[119] The contrast between their two aspects, love and war, is a common topic in elegy and Ovid uses this trope to persuade others to drop their arms and give themselves to Venus.[120] He also uses it to subvert the common myth of Venus running in shame when her affair is discovered by Vulcan. In Ovid's tale, Venus forces Sol, who had told Vulcan of the affair, to fall in love with a mortal woman. Sol falls head over heels before he is forced to watch her die at her father's hands, leaving the god thoroughly punished for his crime against the goddess.[121] This is a common theme throughout Ovid's work, but especially in the *Metamorphoses,* where Venus is vengeful toward anyone who denies love.[122]

Venus' character only becomes more complex, and mildly more Augustan, in the *Metamorphoses*.[123] Written around 8 CE and left unfinished by Ovid's exile, this poem steps away from the erotic side of Venus to showcase her role as a generous yet vengeful goddess. In the first few books, stories of the goddess are continuations of how Venus was portrayed in Ovid's elegies, with a focus on her role in forbidden love and affairs. Beginning in book five, but

[117] Ov. *Ars.* 3.2.31-32, 3.9.20-22.
[118] Ov. *Her.* 7, 17.
[119] Their affair is fully outlined in Ov. *Met.* 4.167; *Am.* 2.5.27-30; *Ars.* 2.15.
[120] Ov. *Am.* 1.8.28-33.
[121] Ov. *Met.* 4.190-213.
[122] Stephens (1958) 298.
[123] For Augustan politics in the *Metamorphoses*, see Williams (2009) for a full bibliography.

more frequently seen after book ten, Venus becomes a more political version of herself, as Ovid turns to the Trojan myths.[124] These later books are often considered Ovid's retelling of the *Aeneid*, and it seems that Vergil's Venus influenced Ovid's version of her.[125] Since these books are a commentary on Vergil, and perhaps Augustus, Venus becomes the influential mother who pushes her son towards greatness and divinity as she was depicted in the *Aeneid*. Ovid's Venus, however, while concerned with her son's success, is focused on expanding her own domain of love and sex.[126]

Venus transformed once again in Ovid's *Fasti*, also published in 8 CE. After the goddess expresses her annoyance at Ovid's abandonment of elegy and her realm, she eventually allows him to continue writing after he promises to continue his dedication to her domain.[127] He dedicates the month of April to Venus, combining several unrelated festivals of fertility and maternity under her name.[128] The *Fasti* present Venus with a more practical usage of love, assigning a social function for female sexuality with attention given to rites for mothers, brides, daughters, virgins, and sex workers. The goddess gains a stately role that she did not hold in Ovid's elegiac work, giving love and sex a place in imperial Rome under Augustus.[129] With this poem, Ovid combines the epithets, myths, and rites of Venus in his description of April. This combination could be seen as a commentary of Venus becoming more Augustan in the poet's own work, or it could simply be a function of the calendar to describe all aspects of the goddess and the rituals of her month. The *Fasti* were published prior to Ovid's exile, but based on his

[124] Tissol (2002) 305; Johnson (1996).
[125] Tissol (2002) 310, (1997) 177-91, (1993); Hinds (1998) 107-19; see Galinsky (1975) for anti-*Aeneid* elements in the *Metamorphoses.*
[126] Ov. *Met.* 5.365-379; Johnson (1996).
[127] Ov. *Fast.* 4.1-18.
[128] Prior to Ovid, it does not seem like Venus had any strong connection to these festivals: Barchiesi (1997) 56.
[129] For the imperial narrative within the *Fasti,* see Herbert-Brown (2009) 120-138; Newlands (1992).

change of genre and depiction of Venus, he may have known he was in trouble and was trying to win back favour.[130] Despite a change in the function of Venus in the *Fasti,* the descriptions of her and her domain remain the same.[131] The goddess is erotic in her actions and physical descriptions, while the women who worship her celebrate their sexuality and their sexual role in the Empire. Venus in Ovid's *Fasti* fulfills all the roles placed on her by poets and politicians; she is the originator of the Julian family, the mother of Rome, the cause of sexual attraction, the granter of sexual favour, the protector of sex workers, and the motivator of both chastity and adultery.

Ovid's Venus is one of the most complex portrayals of the goddess in Augustan literature, combining and contrasting the elegiac and epic traditions which surrounded him. Though it remains unclear if Ovid's treatment of the goddess was motivated by his political opinion of Augustus or by his desire to continue the elegiac tradition, in his early poetry, Venus was erotic first, mother and protector second (if at all). His opinion of Augustus only becomes a concern in his later works, where Venus' character changes to combine the imperial versions seen in Horace and Vergil with the erotic version Ovid preferred. Even here, it is unclear if Ovid is directly engaging in Augustan discourse or simply reacting to the works of his fellow poets.

Conclusion

The influence of Augustus on the poets of the early imperial period varies greatly depending on the author and their role in the Empire and its foundation. For Horace and Vergil, Augustus was the first sign of peace and prosperity in decades. Their support of him, and his

[130] Newlands (1995) 1-27; Wormell (1979) 39-50.
[131] Ov. *Fast.* 4.133-144 represents the common language used to discuss the goddess through the poem.

family's connection to Venus, appears in many of their later works. The goddess' transformation reflects the changing view of her in Augustan discourse, as she becomes the mother and protector of Rome, as well as the divine ancestress of the *princeps.* Horace and Vergil allow their political relationship with Augustus to shape Venus, as she becomes the ideal Roman mother whose character falls in line with the moral and social reforms of Augustus.

Such a political relationship is not seen in Ovid until much later in his life at the very least. Ovid did not have the same loyalty to Augustus for bringing peace to Rome, as he grew up after the Civil Wars. The poet instead follows the example of his elegiac predecessors, portraying Venus as the erotic goddess who forces men to commit adultery and to love those they cannot have. Even if Ovid is making a commentary on Augustus, it does not change the way Venus is portrayed in his works as a sexual goddess. In his later works, as he interacts with Vergil's *Aeneid* and Venus, the goddess' role changes to accommodate the Augustan Venus.

Literary portrayals of Venus change drastically for some in the age of Augustus, for others she did not change to the same extreme. Horace, Vergil, and Ovid provide the most extensive examples of Venus in poetry under Augustus. Horace and Vergil, on one hand, exemplify the changes to the goddess made to suit Augustan ideology in the works of poets who aligned with him. They promoted the image of Venus as a mother and imperial patron through their representations of Aeneas or by suppressing the sexual aspects of the goddess. Ovid, on the other hand, represents the group of poets who were not as influenced by the imperial version of Venus, but rather continued an older model of poetry. By examining the versions of Venus written by the poets, we have clear picture of how the portrayal of the goddess changed under the moral and social reforms of Augustus.

Chapter Two: Pre-Augustan Venus

Introduction

During the Roman Republic, Venus grew in political and militaristic significance, becoming one of the chief goddesses of the Roman pantheon. Her Roman identity was firmly entrenched in military success, as were the identities of most Roman gods, and the foreign deities she merged with contributed to her martial attributes.[132] Before the third century, her cults in Rome and the surrounding regions were disjointed and combined with aspects of Aphrodite and other Eastern goddesses. By the third century, however, Aphrodite's mythology had been quickly adopted by Venus, and her role as the goddess of sex and love was combined with the Roman militaristic elements to create a uniquely Roman deity.

At the centre of this evolution was the association that Venus held with the foundation of Rome as the mother of Aeneas, introduced through her fusion with Aphrodite. While Venus' role as the goddess of fertility, lust, and love continued to be acknowledged through statues, shrines, and literature, her temples were where her military aspects were venerated above all else. Venus developed a strong tie to personal military success in the late Republic, when her divine patronage was sought by the greatest political players of ancient Rome: Sulla, Pompey, and Caesar. This chapter will review the evolution of Venus from the beginning of her worship in Rome to the death of Caesar, setting the stage for Augustus' treatment of the goddess.

The evolution of Venus will be reviewed chronologically. First, the origin of Venus in Italy and Rome will be examined by studying the etymological origin of *venus*, as well as the culmination of native and Eastern goddesses creating a Roman Venus. Then, the first

[132] Schilling (1954) 3-26.

appearances of Venus in Italy and Rome will be discussed, as well as the conflation of Venus and Aphrodite. This includes the study of temples of Venus in Rome and their historical backgrounds. The next section is dedicated to Venus' close connection to powerful politicians in the late Republic, focussing on Sulla and Pompey as patrons of Venus, and the final section examines Caesar as her descendent. These last two sections illustrate how Venus became a major point of contention among Roman statesmen as well as a means to legitimize power that would eventually be sought by Augustus himself.

An Italian Deity?

Venus has long been considered a Roman Aphrodite, but the goddess' origin in Italy and Rome deserves further inspection.[133] For evidence of Venus' beginning, we turn first to etymology. The word *venus* stems from the Proto-Indo-European root meaning desire in both a wishful and favour-seeking sense, but the Latin term's definition is much more nuanced.[134] It has been proposed that the word *venus* originally referred to an abstract force connected to the benevolence of divinity. Schilling defined it as a 'charme religieux' with which it was possible to win the favour of a deity.[135] By appealing to a god, their *venus* was increased. This increase meant a god was more likely to act on behalf of a worshipper. This may be why Jupiter has *venus* attached to him in first century inscriptions, as he has been imbued with this force and is more benevolent because of it, becoming Venus Jovia.[136] The application of this word to multiple early goddesses and abstractions, prior to the creation of Venus, meant that as she gained favour in the

[133] Diod. Sic. 4.83; Liv. 22.9, 22.10, 23.30; Hughes (2020) 77-80; Cyrino (2010) 120, 128; Beard, Price, and North (1998) 16; Koch (1955) 2-4; Schilling (1954) 87.
[134] Vaan (2008) 663.
[135] Schilling (1954) 36.
[136] *CIL* 10.3776, 10.1207.

pantheon, the goddesses described as *venus* were absorbed as attributes of Venus.[137] This includes Venus Murcia, Libitentia, Mefitis, and Cloacina.[138]

While the etymological study of *venus* may inform us of Venus' origin as a symbol of desire, as well as her absorbed traits, it does not mean there was a native goddess worshipped as Venus. For her origin as a goddess, we are left with pieces of material evidence, as well as the explanations of ancient authors and modern scholars. Venus was associated early in Italian history with the Greek goddess Aphrodite, and it may be that Venus was a native goddess who shared similar traits to Aphrodite. Varro gives a *terminus ante quem* for their association, as he writes in the first century that Venus is Aphrodite and that he could not find mention of Venus in older Roman calendars.[139] Physical evidence, however, shows that at least in some areas of Italy, Venus and Aphrodite were associated as early as the fifth century. This date comes from an imported mirror from a Praenestine findspot depicting the legend of Aphrodite and Adonis, with the name *Venos* written about the Aphrodite figure.[140] Most physical goods found in Italy with images of Aphrodite on them are not labelled, so it is unclear if this association to Venus existed throughout Italy, or even in the city of Rome, at this time. This is the first time the name Venus is written and may indicate some connection between the two goddesses existing prior to the mirror's importation. The mirror may also indicate Aphrodite's absorption into the abstract catch-all *venus,* referring to the goddess as the intangible force and signalling their connection through etymology. This mirror is the earliest evidence for the assimilation of Venus and

[137] Wagenvoort (1980) 166-196; Schilling (1954) 2-26. For abstractions becoming deities, see Beard, Price, and North (1998) 62.
[138] Murcia: Liv. 1.33; Plin. *NH.* 15.36; Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 20. Libitentia: Fest. 265; Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 23; Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.23; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 4.15.5. Mefitis; Fest. 348; Varro, *Ling.* 5.49. Cloacina: Plin. *HN.* 15.119-121; Liv. 3.48; Plaut. *Curc.* 471; Serv. *Aen.* 1.720.
[139] Varro, *Ling.* 6.33.
[140] *ES.* 325: Dated by van der Meer (2016) 68-86: The scope of provenance spans from 400-350, with the border design offering a *terminus post quem* of 400.

Aphrodite, but authors writing in the following centuries indicate that their connection was well known by the third and second centuries.

Ancient authors attest that Venus was closely associated with gardens and vegetation, perhaps beginning as a vegetal deity.[141] In recent scholarship, her potential origin as a garden goddess has fallen out of favour due to the conflation of Venus with Aphrodite and the Greek goddess' origin as a vegetation goddess. It has been suggested that ancient authors adopted Aphrodite's origin as Venus', rather than Venus having any basis as a native vegetal deity.[142] The oldest source which survives connecting Venus and vegetation is a fragment of Naevius from the third century, which was likely influenced by knowledge of Aphrodite's origin.[143] There is no evidence for Venus being associated with gardens prior to Aphrodite's influence.

However, the belief that Venus was a native Italian vegetation deity did pervade ancient writing and worship, despite the lack of historical basis. Many of Aphrodite's plants and garden associations appear in representations of Venus and her worship.[144] In the third century, it seems as though the association between Venus and vegetation was known in popular culture; the use of much-loved wordplay in Naevius' work could only be understood by audiences who knew Venus as a garden goddess.[145] Naevius makes the joke that 'the cook ate Neptune, Ceres, and Venus (the expert in Vulcan), and he swallowed Liber, all together.'[146] Paulus explains: 'by

[141] Naev. *Inc. Comp.* F 30a-c *ROL;* later, Varro, *Ling.* 6.20, *Rust.* 1.1.6.
[142] Rosenzweig (2004) 29-44; Ridgeway (1981) 24; Wagenvoort (1980) 182; Eden (1968) 448-459; Schilling (1954) 15, 60-61.
[143] Naev. *Inc. Comp.* F 30a-c *ROL.*
[144] Koch (1955) 1-51 and Schilling (1954) 2-26 both support this theory. Eden (1968) 448-459 is more skeptical of Aphrodite's origins as well.
[145] Eden (1968) 459.
[146] '*Cocus edit Neptunum Cererem et Venerem expertam Vulcanom Liberumque absorbuit partier.'* Naev. *Inc. Comp.* F 30a-c *ROL.*

Ceres he means bread, by Neptune he means fish, and by Venus he means vegetables'.[147] While these lines can be argued as spontaneous humour, they would not have been understandable to an audience without prior context.[148] Eden argues that the vegetable joke comes from a shortening of Venus Erycina, a well-known epithet of the time, to Venus Eruc on coinage, which can then be read as Venus *Eruca* or Venus of the Cabbage.[149] Cabbage was a known aphrodisiac, therefore making the line a comedic play on words that the audience would have recognized.[150] Though the understanding of Venus as a garden goddess may have been a later invention, it impacts how ancient authors refer to Venus and her worship. Even if they do not accurately describe a native goddess, they colour the understanding of Venus and her origin in Italy.

Venus had little presence in Rome prior to the third century, except in small literary references and, potentially, imported Greek art. At the very beginning of the third century, however, Venus appears in Rome as a fully-fledged Roman goddess with no evidence of how this transformation occurred. In 295, the Roman statesman Q. Fabius Maximus Gurges vowed a temple to the goddess Venus under the title Obsequens, the indulgent. In this context, it may indicate the quality of being accessible to requests and appeals; the abstract force of *venus* taking divine form.[151] The circumstances surrounding the vow are unknown, except that it occurred during the Samnite War while Gurges was campaigning against the Samnite-Etruscan coalition. According to Livy, the temple was built using funds raised from fines imposed by Gurges on adulterous women.[152] It was his belief that the Roman army was losing the Samnite War due to

[147] *'Significat per Cererem panem, per Neptunum pisces, per Venerem holera.'* Paul. *Ex F.* 40.19.
[148] Koch (1955) 49 and Schilling (1954) 17-18 argue for spontaneous humour. Eden (1968) 450 argues for prior context.
[149] Crawford (2011) n. 424.1a.
[150] Eden (1968) 448-459.
[151] Schilling (1954) 29.
[152] Liv. 10.31.9.

the immoral behaviour of Roman women, so the request Gurges made was both a call for victory and for the return of moral behaviour. There is no known explanation for how Venus went from an unknown goddess to a temple-worthy deity.

The only theory for how Venus came to Rome as a fully-fledged goddess conflated with Aphrodite was presented by Koch, who stated that Venus was not a native Roman goddess but a native Italian deity worshipped in Campania, Samnium, and Latium.[153] This native goddess may have been Frutis, who became Venus Frutis in later cult worship.[154] Though this theory has not gained traction in scholarship and cannot be supported by primary sources, it is the only theory offered to explain Venus' arrival in Rome. The native deity, as Koch suggested, was influenced by Aphrodite's presence on Greek vases and mirrors which appear more frequently in Campania, Samnium, and Latium in the fifth and fourth centuries than they do in the city of Rome. Koch proposed, based on the theory of Venus having a cult in these Italian cities, that Gurges was calling the protector of the region, Venus Frutis, to his side in pseudo-*evocatio.* The epithet Obsequens would then reflect the situation of Gurges' triumph, supposing that the goddess had been presented with a specific request that she had fulfilled, perhaps by changing the outcome of the war in favour of the Romans. While this theory explains the sudden appearance of a temple to Venus Obsequens in 295, there is no evidence to support it and the explanation of Venus' first appearance as a goddess in Rome remains a mystery.

This temple presents a turning point in the development of Roman Venus. It would seem as though Venus simply appeared as a fully developed goddess who already had associations

[153] Koch (1955) 1-51.
[154] Very little is known about this goddess; for an overview of evidence see Krogmann (1932) 175-178. Schilling (1954) argues that she is an Etruscan Aphrodite, but Boyd (1956) 266-269 criticizes Schilling for citing a fragment of Cassius Hemina, who has been dated to the second century.

with both military success and moral behaviour. The third century was also a time of rapid change in urban Roman society in several areas that may account for the appearance of Venus — social, political, and religious. The large-scale political and economic expansion, as well as the growing influence of Greek culture, had a major impact on how Venus was worshipped in Rome.[155] One contributing change in religion and cult worship was the rapid rise in temple building in accordance with military vows and Sibylline sanctions.[156] It may be that we do not have evidence of Venus in Rome prior to her first temple, but her appearance as a fully formed deity means that she did exist in some capacity as a goddess of indulgence and sexuality.

As we have seen, little evidence exists for a native Roman Venus prior to her conflation with Aphrodite. We do not know how Venus came to Rome or if she existed prior to the third century, which is when most of our evidence begins. The name *venus* may refer to her origin as an abstract force associated with the divine that eventually became a deity. Ancient authors suggest Venus was a native garden goddess, but this is likely the influence of Aphrodite after their conflation. The Praenestine mirror suggests that Aphrodite and Venus were merged as in the late fifth century, or that the quality *venus* was ascribed to Aphrodite early on. This evidence does not explain how Venus arrived as a fully formed goddess in 295, but her temple in Rome shows how quickly she became an important deity in the Roman pantheon. Now that we have established all that we can say on the native goddess, we shall turn to Aphrodite's arrival in Italy and how Venus was connected to the Greek goddess. As discussed previously, we have a start date for the assimilation of Venus and Aphrodite from the late fifth-early fourth century

[155] For the impact of Greece on Roman worship, see Peralta (2020) 1-31; Rüpke (2012) 73-79; Orlin (2007) 66-69.
[156] Orlin (1997) 11-116 gives an in-depth overview of temple vowing in the mid-Republic, as well as developments over time. See also Ziolkowski (1992).

Praenestine mirror, and an end date with Varro in the first century. The next question to answer is what happened between these two dates to allow Venus to subsume Aphrodite so completely.

Venus, Aphrodite, and Aeneas

The connection of Venus to Aphrodite on a larger cultic scale can be first identified through the Temple of Venus Erycina on the Capitoline, dedicated in 216. The island of Sicily, in particular Mt. Eryx, provides us with the earliest evidence of a Venus-like goddess near Italy through the cults of Aphrodite and Astarte, who were worshipped there prior to the fifth century. Aphrodite, along with her predecessor Astarte, had martial and fertility aspects tied into her worship and mythology.[157] The Near Eastern influences upon the cult of Aphrodite led to the creation of Aphrodite Areia in Sparta, Corinth, and parts of Ionia: an armed Aphrodite who was depicted with martial aspects, as well as her ethos as the goddess of love.[158] Astarte and her Near Eastern counterparts, Ishtar and Inanna, were often represented as goddesses of both love and war.[159] The Armed Aphrodite was a complex goddess; in her mythology and iconography, Aphrodite is often depicted with weapons or involved in battle. She can be found in scenes of the Gigantomachy, and fighting, though unsuccessfully, in the Trojan War.[160] Her role as the lover of Ares also meant that some depictions of Aphrodite show her wearing the sword of Ares or with martial paraphernalia beside her.[161] She was worshipped alongside Ares in Greek sanctuaries as well, emphasizing both warlike and sexual aspects.[162] It can therefore be no

[157] For the militaristic attributes of Aphrodite, see Cyrino (2010) 49-52; Flemberg (1991) 109-122.
[158] *Anth. Gr*. 9.321, 9.322, 16.171, 16.173, 16.174, 16.176, 16.177; Paus. 2.5.1, 3.15.10, 3.17.5, 4.14.2; Flemberg (1991) 109-110.
[159] For the conflation of these goddesses and their influence on each other, i.e., syncretism, see Budin (2004) 95-145; Bonnet and Pirenne-Delforge (1999) 249-257; Marcovich (1996) 43-59.
[160] Giuliani and Schefold (1992) 57-58.
[161] Versions can be seen in the Aphrodite of Capua, the ring stone of Gelon, and Aphrodite from Epidaurus. Flemberg (1991) gives an overview of the transformation of the Armed Aphrodite.
[162] Paus. 1.8.4, 2.25.1.

surprise that the cult of Aphrodite in Sicily — from which some of Venus' aspects in Rome were adapted when the cult was introduced — was able to encompass both love and warfare, just as her temples in Greece had.

The Sicilian temple on Mt. Eryx was a sanctuary for the protective deity of the region, the goddess of Eryx, identified as Astarte, Aphrodite, and/or Venus.[163] The Phoenicians worshipped a fertility goddess at this site in the 12th century, and in the fourth century, when the goddess was associated with Aphrodite, a stone temple was erected.[164] The cult was a combination of Greek and Near Eastern practices, influenced by the change in control over the island from Phoenician to Greek. As an Eastern goddess, dedications were made in vegetables and incense rather than blood.[165] The cult in Eryx was the home of an oracle that focused on issues of love and fertility. There was also the common attribution of sacred prostitution practiced in the temple, as there often were in temples of Aphrodite, connecting fertility and lust to the goddess' character.[166] Though myths of sacred prostitution have since been dismantled, the Sicilian sanctuary was nonetheless known for its connection to prostitution in Roman literature.[167] The temple has several foundation myths, but there was one that connected the goddess to the Trojan cycle and Rome. After Aeneas fled Troy, he came to Sicily and either dedicated the temple to Aphrodite himself or came upon the temple and adorned it with great offerings.[168] These myths

[163] Astarte: *CIS* 1.3776; *ICO Sic.* 1, *Sard*. 19. Aphrodite: Thuc. 6.2.3; Apoll. Rhod. 4.912-19; Pol. 1.55. Venus: Pol. 1.55; Hor. *Odes.* 1.2.33; Ov. *Epist*. 15, 57. For a comprehensive study of sources for the goddess of Eryx, see Lietz (2012) 219-333; Schilling (1954) 233-239.
[164] Cass. Dio. 4.83.4; Galinsky (1969) 71-75.
[165] *CIL* 6.2274; Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.61; Ov. *Rem. Am.* 549-54; Lietz (2012) 171-3; Schilling (1958) 18-25.
[166] Str. 6.2.6; Lietz (2012) 46. See Budin (2008) for issues of sacred prostitution (in Eryx, sacred slavery is likely the root of the prostitution rumours, 184-90), but the association of Aphrodite with sex workers is secure.
[167] Str. 6.2.6. cf. Lietz (2009) 247-53.
[168] Diod. Sic. 4.83.4-7; Verg. *Aen.* 5.759-760; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom*. 1.53.

were among the many stories of Trojan city and temple foundations in this region of Sicily, tying the region to the Greco-Roman world.[169]

The temple site, as well as the cities of Eryx and nearby Segesta, became points of contention during the First Punic War. These towns, as well as their surrounding regions, sided with Rome against the Carthaginians and thus, in order to align themselves to their new allies, emphasized their shared Trojan ancestry.[170] This placed Aeneas as a founder of Rome, a legendary genealogy that was already popular among families in this period.[171] The goddess of Erycina was considered a Carthaginian goddess but when the Romans won the island of Sicily, they came to worship her as well.[172] In 217, after the disaster at Lake Trasimene, the Romans dedicated a temple to the goddess in hopes of reversing their fate.[173] The temple was dedicated to her on the Capitoline Hill to bring the goddess' support firmly onto their side. Rather than perform an *evocatio* to bring this goddess to Rome, as was the practice with foreign deities, Venus Erycina was moved to Rome as an ancestral deity that did not need to be summoned by the Roman people. The adoption of this goddess indicates a belief in Aeneas as an ancestor, at least among the elite in Rome.[174]

For Venus to be an ancestral deity, and to be accepted as such, the Trojan legend in Rome must have been popular enough at the time for this goddess' adoption to have cultural and political significance.[175] The role of Aeneas in the history of Rome and Italy is unclear, as ancient authors disagree with one another and place different levels of emphasis on Aeneas' role

[169] Cic. *Verr.* 4.72; Diod. Sic. 23.5; Smith and Serrati (2000) 9-14; Galinsky (1969) 171-173.
[170] Thuc. 6.2.3; Paus. 5.25.6; Gruen (1992) 10-14; Cornell (1975) 23; Galinsky (1969) 91-100, 172-178.
[171] Rodriguez-Mayorgas (2010) 105; Wiseman (1998); Gruen (1992) 28, 45-47; Cornell (1975) 23, (1977) 82-83.
[172] Liv. 22.9. 9-10, 10.10; Galinsky (1969) 173-174; Schilling (1954) 244.
[173] Cic. *Inv.* 2.52; Liv. 22.9.9, 23.30.13, 40.34.3.
[174] Wiseman (2004) 18-20; Gruen (1992) 6-51; Galinsky (1969) 169.
[175] Cornell (1995) 65, (1975) 23; Gruen (1992) 45-51.

in the foundation of Rome.[176] It is clear from material evidence that the myth of Aeneas was known in Etruria in the late sixth century, as pottery from the period features the story of Aeneas' flight from Troy and his assistance in the theft of Helen.[177] This pottery would have been accompanied by oral traditions spread by Greek merchants and nearby colonies; these traditions were likely known in Italy, and perhaps Rome, as early as the eighth century.[178] It may be that, in Italy, Aeneas was accepted early in the fifth century as the ancestor of all Latins, but not of any city in particular.[179] Greek authors writing in the fifth and fourth centuries credit Aeneas with the foundation of Rome, but it was common practice for Greeks to connect cities in Italy with fleeing Trojan heroes as a way of bringing their ancestry back to Greece, rather than through any actual belief those living there may have had.[180]

When the Romans came into contact with Greece on a larger scale in the third century, the myth of Aeneas was combined with the legend of Romulus and Remus, allowing Rome to have a stronger cultural connection to Greece.[181] During the Punic Wars, Eryx and Segesta capitalized on the cultural affiliation found through their Trojan ancestry, emphasizing the role of Aeneas in Rome's history for their own political gain.[182] Eryx and Segesta may have drawn their origins back to Aeneas before the Romans came to Sicily, but the relationship was certainly empathized after Romans arrived. Alkimos, a Sicilian Greek in the 350s, was the first historian to link Aeneas to Romulus.[183] This combination of mythic origins is significant, as Alkimos was

[176] For a review of these various legends, see Casali (2010) 41-46; Rodriguez-Mayorgas (2010) 94-107.
[177] Gruen (1992) 21-22; Cornell (1975) 4-6, (1995) 66; Galinsky (1969) 113-140.
[178] Wiseman (2004) 15-21; Gruen (1972) 23.
[179] Gruen (1992) 22; Cornell (1975) 15; Galinsky (1969) 131.
[180] Plut. *Cam.* 22.2; Hellanicus, *FGrH.* 4 F 84; Damastes, *FGrH.* 5 F 3; Galinsky (1969) 76-78; Cornell (1995) 38-39, 63-64; Rodrigues-Mayorgas (2010) 100-101.
[181] Gruen (1992) 223-271.
[182] Zonaras 8.9.12; Erskine (2001) 178-184, 198-205; Serrati (2000) 120-126; Gruen (1992) 45; Galinsky (1969) 172-176.
[183] Alkimos, *FGrH.* 560 F 4.

both Greek and from Sicily, and may have sought to combine his heritage with local genealogy to form a connection between the two regions. Thucydides wrote that the Trojan refugees landed in Sicily after fleeing their homeland and founded the cities of Eryx and Segesta.[184] Though Aeneas does not feature in Thucydides' version, the connection between Troy and Sicily emerged early in historiography. After the First Punic War, the Trojan origin of these cities was advertised on coins.[185] Romans were left to react and engage with this rhetoric, and those familiar with Greek historiography would popularize the Trojan myth in Rome.[186] This emphasis would lead to Venus Erycina being accepted as the mother of Aeneas, creating an ancestral connection to the goddess. The adoption of Venus Erycina was beneficial for the Romans on two fronts: by taking the protective deity of the region as their own, Rome was able to ensure the region's loyalty and eventually secure victory, while also unintentionally gaining a new ancestral deity for the city.[187]

The temple of Venus Erycina was dedicated in 216 by Q. Fabius Maximus Verrucosus. Upon being appointed dictator for the second time, he called for a vote in the Senate to make an extraordinary consultation of the Sibylline books.[188] The temple was built to atone for the misdemeanours of Gaius Flaminius, whose disregard of sanctioned auspices and several other misdeeds, were blamed for the devastating battle of Lake Trasimene.[189] The goddess was adopted by the Romans from her sanctuary in Sicily and moved to a new temple dedicated on the Capitoline Hill, along with several other temples and sacrifices, to appease the gods. Other than the connection that Venus Erycina had to Aeneas, there are a couple of reasons the goddess may

[184] Thuc. 6.2.3; cf. Paus. 5.25.6.
[185] Soraci (2016) 114-116, 124-128; Puglisi (2009) 259; Hill (1903) 213.
[186] This led to a fusion between the Trojan myth and the local myth of Romulus and Remus in Rome.
[187] Wiseman (2004) 165; Gruen (1992) 46-51; Galinsky (1969) 174-190; Schilling (1954) 243-248.
[188] Liv. 22.10, 23.30-31; Ov. *Fast.* 4.871-876.
[189] Cic. *Inv.* 2.52; Liv. 21.63.

have been chosen by the Senate. The first reason is the established connection that the Fabii had with Venus. The temple of Venus Obsequens had been dedicated nearly a century earlier by Verrucosus' grandfather, Q. Fabius Maximus Gurges.[190] It could be argued that Verrucosus, as the initiator of the vote, had specifically requested a temple to Venus to recall the glory earned by his grandfather. This would have the added benefit of advertising his own achievements to the Roman people.[191] The increase in personal prestige does not necessarily detract from the sense of duty in Fabius' position.

Additionally, by dedicating a temple to Venus Erycina, the Romans were directly referencing their previous success against Carthage.[192] When threatened by the same enemy, the same goddess was turned to for protection. The temple, built on the Capitoline, was an attempt to renew favour from Venus on the occasion of new conflict and to strengthen Roman ties with Sicily.[193] The temple's placement on the Capitoline Hill emphasized her importance to the Romans. Its exact location is debated, but the close proximity of the temple to Rome's religious centre, near the Temple of Jupiter Maximus Capitolinus, points to Venus representing their heritage.[194] The move offered reassurance and boosted public morale in the grim circumstances after Trasimene. Honouring the goddess who both protected and emphasized a link to their origin gave confidence in the endurance of Rome's legacy.[195] Rome had a claim over the Sicilian sanctuary due to her connection to Aeneas and the origin of the Roman people; rather than performing the ritual adoption of foreign gods, an *evocatio*, this was the return of an ancestral

[190] Plut. *Fab.* 1.2-3.
[191] Lietz (2012) 152-3; Ziokolwski (1992) 199-200 argued that Fabius was merely performing his duty, as he vowed this temple while dictator.
[192] Schilling (1958) 241
[193] Lietz (2012) 154.
[194] Schilling (1954) 248-254; cf. Bitto (1977) 121-133; Galinsky (1969) 173-175.
[195] Gruen (1992) 48; cf. Schilling (1954) 243-244.

goddess to her home.[196] In this way, Venus Erycina was given a prominent place within traditional religion, making Verrucosus' invocation in his defence of Rome and against Carthage dutiful; at the same time, the reference to Venus Obsequens enhanced his personal involvement.

Venus Erycina may not have been considered a foreign cult, but the worship practiced in her temples had aspects that the Romans considered undesirable. These aspects were likely purged when her temple was dedicated in Rome.[197] Venus Erycina had aspects in the Sicilian cult focused on fertility and protection. When the cult was adopted by Rome, Venus Erycina was emphasized as a victory goddess and the coinage of Venus featured the Temple in Eryx as well as palm leaves and Venus in chariots.[198] Her most undesirable trait to the Romans was her connection to and the protection of sex workers. These lost aspects were returned in some capacity when the second temple to Venus Erycina was dedicated outside the Colline gate.

The first temple of Venus Erycina had been stripped of all its foreign elements, making it a cult of a Roman goddess rather than an adopted one.[199] It is unclear why these elements were stripped, though it can be assumed that Venus Erycina was originally accepted as a native Roman deity and was given the same treatment as her fellow Roman gods. Strabo tells us that the second temple, built 30 years later, was an exact reproduction of the temple in Sicily.[200] This temple of Venus Erycina was dedicated in 181 by L. Porcius Licinius, fulfilling a vow made by

[196] Diod. Sic. 3.83.4, 4.83. For the practice of *evocatio* and its importance in battle, see Liv. 5.21.5-6; Serrati (2020) 38; Dillon (2020).
[197] Lietz (2012) 152-156; Schilling (1948) 242-254.
[198] Crawford (2011) n. 313/1a-c; 424/1; for Venus Erycina as deity of victory, Schilling (1954) 243.
[199] Lietz (2012) 152-156; Schilling (1954) 242-254. Str. 6.2.6 and Ov. *Fast.* 4. 863-878 only mention foreign elements such as vegetal offerings, incense burning, and prostitution regarding this second temple, indicating these practices did not occur at the Capitoline temple. *CIL* 6. 2274 also mentions a soothsayer at the second temple, with no evidence of this existing at the first.
[200] Str. 6.2.6.

his father during the Ligurian War in 184.[201] The circumstances surrounding the vow and dedication are unclear; it seems the senate decided which aspect of Venus to dedicate the temple to, not L. Porcius.[202] The second temple was built near the Colline gate, outside of the *pomerium*.[203] It was dedicated on 23 April, the same day as the Temple of Venus Erycina on the Capitoline.[204] No source explains why a temple was dedicated to the same goddess when the older temple was not in any sign of disrepair. The decision to dedicate a second temple to Venus Erycina, however, could be explained through the senate's attempt to introduce, sanction, and maintain control over a foreign cult after the Bacchanalia affair of 186.[205] The cult of Bacchus had moved beyond the control of the senate; members were participating in various criminal pursuits and sexual activities. Thousands of people were arrested and executed, and the prosecution of the cult's members continued into the late 180s.[206] The senate's response was then to place severe restrictions on the cult, stripping it of many foreign elements. Perhaps the introduction of a familiar goddess with additional foreign aspects allowed the senate to show their acceptance of non-Roman cultic practices without losing control over the populace.[207] Venus Erycina was also a suitable choice for this role as the cult overlapped with multiple aspects of Roman society and combined them, meaning the senate was both controlling and allowing different groups — political, social, or sexual — to interact with this cult.[208]

[201] Liv. 40.34.4. This temple was eventually surrounded by the Gardens of Sallust, and according to inscriptions, came to be called the temple of Venus *Hortorum Sallustianorum: CIL* 6.122, 32451, 32468.
[202] Orlin (2000) 71, 87.
[203] Ov. *Fast.* 4.871, *Rem. Am*. 549; Liv. 30.38.10; Ap. *B. Civ*. 1.93.
[204] *ILLRP* 9, 23 Apr.
[205] Orlin (2000) 70-90; for an overview of the affair, see Gruen (1990) 34-78.
[206] Liv. 39.41.6-7, 40.19.9-10.
[207] Orlin (2000) 83, 86-88.
[208] Orlin (2000) 88; Staples (1998) 101-121.

These foreign elements were those honoured in the Sicilian temple and represented a combination of Phoenician, Greek, and Roman practices. These included the offerings of vegetables and incense in the place of sacrifice, a connection to Amor/Cupid, and an oracular dimension that focused on love affairs.[209] Vegetable sacrifices are not unheard of in Roman worship, but this seemed to have reflected Aphrodite's worship in Sicily rather than Roman practice. The connection to Amor is unclear, but Ovid placed Amor at the Colline gate and claimed that he helped the youth who came to the temple with their forgotten and unrequited love.[210] Prior to this, Venus had little connection with Amor, who was an ancient Roman deity, except in Hellenistic-style portraits of Aphrodite and Eros.[211] By combining Venus and Amor, Ovid emphasised their separate yet connected roles in sexual affairs. The temple in Rome seemed to be a gathering place for questionable characters, as Ovid tells of the *vulgares puellae* who celebrated Venus near this temple.[212] It may be that the protection which Venus Erycina offered for sex workers in Sicily was carried over into this temple, unlike her Capitoline one. This second temple reflected more of Venus' fertility aspects, combining military success and sexual behaviour.

The temples of Venus in the third and second centuries that were dedicated by generals focused on the celebration of military success and the upstanding moral behaviour that ensured said success. Throughout this period, Venus was also worshipped in other aspects unrelated to martial matters. Statues and shrines had been dedicated to Venus from the early third century relating more to her shared aspects with native Italian deities. These included a statue of Venus

[209] *CIL* 6.2274; Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.61; Lietz (2012) 170-173.
[210] Ov. *Rem. Am.* 549-556.
[211] Plaut. *Mostell.* 163; Lietz (2012) 171-172; Schilling (1954) 18-25. It is unclear whether at this time the *Amor-Roma* connection had been made and acknowledged in Rome; it does not appear on a cultic scale until Hadrian's twin temple in 135 CE.
[212] Ov. *Fast.* 4.865-866.

Verticordia, the turner of hearts (usually from lust to chastity), who later had a temple dedicated to her after a moral crisis in Rome, and shrines to Venus Murcia, Venus Cloacina, Venus Libitina, and possibly one of Venus in Palatio.[213] An unidentified shrine to Venus was said to have been built near the forum and burnt in 178, but it may have shared a name with one of the former.[214] These shrines were most likely dedicated in the early Republic to goddesses with whom Venus later came to be associated, as discussed earlier, when *venus* was personified.[215] The temple of Venus Verticordia, built in 114, was the only temple built for Venus without a military dedication. The temple had been ordered by the Sibylline books after a case of incest involving a Vestal Virgin. Venus was called upon to ensure such an occurrence would not happen again.[216] These shrines and the temple showed that Venus was not exclusively involved in martial matters, allowing her role as a fertility and love goddess to be reflected in Rome as well.

Venus' Roman temples built up her political and social significance in the city and created a goddess who was tied to the foundation of Rome and Roman military prowess. Her development over the third and second centuries encouraged widespread belief of Venus as an ancestress to the Roman people. While Roman temples in the Republic were connected to the individuals who dedicated them, they did not carry significant political importance. The Roman political ladder had once been the means to generalship and military triumph, but as the political sphere grew increasingly enticing to elites, the political significance of divine connections became increasingly important.[217] As restrictions on competition for power and status were less

[213] Verticordia: Val. Max. 8.15.12; Plin. *HN.* 7.120; Murcia: Liv. 1.33; Cloacina: Liv. 3.48: Plaut. *Curc*. 471; Plin. *HN*. 15.119; Libitina: Fest. 265; Plut. *Quaest. Rom*. 23; *In palatio*: Cass. Dio. 74.3.1.
[214] Obseq. 8.62.
[215] See Pp. 33, 47.
[216] Obseq. 37.97; Ov. *Fast.* 4.157-160; Val. Max. 8.15.12.
[217] Pollini (2012) 69.

and less enforced, religion quickly became another sphere in which the political elite competed.[218]

A Divine Patron of Sulla and Pompey

The tumultuous political period of the later Republic saw further developments in Venus' reception. It was common practice in the late Republic to relate successes to a divine patron, either directly or indirectly.[219] By advertising oneself as the favourite of a particular god, power could be sought not only through personal merit but also divine legitimization.[220] The practice of advertising relationships with the divine had begun in the third century but became increasingly popular in the late Republic as the political sphere grew more important to the Roman elite. The *Lex Gabinia Tabellaria* of 138, the introduction of secret balloting, has been blamed for this change.[221] Modern scholars have long regarded the change as a democratic opne, lessening the control of the upper classes over the electorate and effectively enhancing the voters' freedom of choice.[222] This meant that politicians needed to promote themselves to attract voters and one of the ways to do this was through a campaign of divine support.

Venus was particularly connected to families which drew legendary descent from Aeneas. These families had advertised this relationship in the late second century through coinage and literature but as a display of familial connections to the divine rather than a show of political power.[223] While familial legendary descent was more common, Venus had been

[218] Beard, Price,and North (1998) 86; Rosenstein (1990) 1-9; in general, see Farney (2007).
[219] Pollini (2012) 69-70.
[220] Lipka (2009) 167-177 gives an overview of Roman elites and the gods they connected themselves to, either individually or through their *gentes.*
[221] Pollini (2012) 72.
[222] Yakobson (1995) 426-42; Wallace-Hadrill (1989) 70; Linderski (1988) 91; Millar (1984) 18; Brunt (1971) 65-66; Wiseman (1971) 4; Larsen (1954) 10-11; Wirszubski (1950) 20.
[223] Erskine (2001) 21; Wiseman (1974) 153-164.

connected to specific politicians in the past, such as the dedicators of her temples, but these had been singular incidents. This changed in the early first century, when three politicians attached themselves to Venus as one of their patron goddesses, producing coinage, statues, and temples in her honour.

Before he was the dictator of Rome, Sulla was a successful military general who connected himself to Venus as one of his divine benefactors. Venus' early temples in Rome connected the goddess to military success and the foundation of Rome, both associations to which Sulla sought to link himself through coinage, trophies, and self-promotion.[224] Sulla had a number of military gods from whom he drew support: Mars, Bellona, Hercules, and Victoria were all honoured with games, temples, and dedications during his career.[225] Venus was important in Sulla's pantheon of support, not only due to her early connections to military success but because of her role as ancestress and protector of the Roman people. Sulla used her in his public image to advertise himself as a favourite of the goddess and a founder of Rome.

Coinage is one of the many ways a politician could advertise divine connections and their associated qualities to the public. Sulla minted coinage throughout his dictatorship which promoted his connections to divine qualities, such as *felix* and *felicitas,* as well as his favoured goddess Venus. As Sulla's power grew, so did the number of coins that depicted her. Up to this point in Rome, there were only a few coin types displaying Venus in circulation. These were mostly minted by the *gens* Julii and Memmii, who had claimed Venus as a divine ancestress.[226] There were six reverses under Sulla that depicted Venus, all minted with relative frequency.

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[224] Ramage (1991) 93-121.
[225] Ov. *Fast.* 6.212; Mackay (2000) 161-210; Keavaney (1982) 44-79 provides an overview of Sulla's relationship with multiple divine figures.
[226] Crawford (2011) n. 205 and 320; Balsdon (1951) 7-8.

These coins featured Venus with a variety of symbols that recalled various functions of the goddess; on some, she commemorates victory with trophies and palm branches, others depicted symbols of wealth and fertility such as ears of wheat and cornucopias.[227] Venus appeared on the obverse of these coins, while the reverses referenced Sulla's victories and achievements. Sulla was not representing the goddess in one specific aspect but rather calling attention to her full support of him in every iteration.

In Rome, Sulla's chosen cognomen, Felix, enforced the connection between himself, Venus, and good fortune.[228] This was an epithet that was first given to Sulla, and he passed it on to the goddess. He may have dedicated a temple or shrine to Venus Felix, as an inscription points to such a temple near the *Horti Sallustiani,* but little else is known and it is not mentioned in any written sources.[229] Sulla's connection to Venus went beyond his Roman politics, as he was known in Greece as *Epaphroditus,* the favoured of Aphrodite, on official letters and trophies.[230] He was styled *Epaphroditus* by an official decree of the senate, serving as an indicator of his official relationship with Venus, advertising a public link between the goddess and himself.[231] The association of Sulla with Aphrodite in Greece came from an oracle delivered to him, as well as through a dedication which he made at the shrine of Aphrodite at Aphrodisias in Caria.[232] Sulla is the only case where *Epaphroditus* was given as an *agnomen,* celebrating his unique connection to Aphrodite/Venus.[233]

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[227] Crawford (2011) n. 357, 258, 359, 357, 375, and 376.
[228] For Sulla's use of *felix* in Rome, see Plut. *Sull*. 34; Liv. 30.45.6.
[229] *CIL* 6.781.
[230] Plut. *Sull*. 34.2 explains that Sulla ordered that he receive the surname of *felix* in 82 but used the name *Epaphroditos* when writing to Greeks.
[231] Ap. *B. Civ.* 1.97; Santangelo (2007) 210-215; Castagnetti (1996) 47–52.
[232] Ap. *B. Civ.* 1.97.452-455.
[233] While *Epaphroditus* appears as a first name of many freedmen in Roman history, it is not used as an honorific except in the case of Sulla.

In the Roman provinces, Sulla's advertisement could be seen inscribed on dedicatory objects in Venus' temples.[234] Sulla gifted one dedicatory object in Greece, a double-headed axe, after Venus appeared to him in a dream, dressed in armour and ready for battle.[235] This dream is undated, and it may be the beginning of Sulla's relationship with the goddess.[236] If this is the case, Sulla may have been introduced to the militaristic Aphrodite of Asia Minor, reinforcing the idea of Venus as a martial goddess. The Roman public would have certainly been aware of Venus as a military goddess through monuments such as her Erycina temple and popular literature. These images, while projecting the political message of military excellence and personal patronage, could also reflect Sulla's *pietas* and religious devotion. Plutarch says that Sulla set up a victory trophy after the battle of Chaeronea and 'inscribed on his victory trophies the names of Ares, Nike, and Aphrodite since he believed his success was due as much to good fortune as to skill and military superiority'.[237] The appearance of Ares and Aphrodite in this dedication indicates that the goddess' military power was reinforced by her position as a consort of Ares. The association of Mars and Venus in military contexts had not been utilized prior to Sulla.[238]

During his dictatorship, Sulla drew upon Venus' support as the mother and protector of the Roman people to advertise himself as a secondary founder of Rome. Sulla has been portrayed as knowingly promoting himself as a sole ruler in Rome and using the patronage of Venus to

[234] Plut. *Sull.* 19.9, 34.4-5; Ap. *B. Civ*. l.97; Beard, Price, and North (1998) 144-5; Champeaux (1987) 11.216-36; Schilling (1954) 272-95.
[235] Ap. *B. Civ.* l.97.
[236] Keavaney (1982) 60.
[237] Plut. *Sull.* 19.9. Trans. Waterfield (2008).
[238] Keavaney (1982) 61-62; the sexual connection between Mars and Venus, in general, had been popular prior to Sulla, as their relationship connected the two foundation myths of Rome: Weinstock (1971) 128-129. Cyrino (2010) 51 briefly discusses the militaristic Aphrodite that may have influenced Sulla's trophy.

display the divine support of this role.[239] His public spectacles, especially his triumph, were a way of advertising his wealth and prosperity to the people of Rome, and how he could enrich the city with his newfound power.[240] In the city of Rome, after his triumph over the Marians, Plutarch said that '...Romans of the utmost eminence and power followed Sulla as their saviour and father, since without him they would never have been able to return to their homeland with their children and wives'.[241] He was seen by his allies as a restorer of Rome, a second founder. Sulla's building projects in Rome reinforced his role as a founder; his repavement of the forum and the restoration of several temples meant that much of the western forum bore his name by the time of his death.[242] His projects have been considered practical and modest, but they were extensive and varied, much like his successors Caesar and Augustus.[243] Sulla was presenting himself as another Aeneas or Romulus, both descendants of Venus who founded Rome.

As Pompey rose to prominence under Sulla, he too claimed divine patronage from Venus. Rather than a competitive dialogue, which later occurred between Pompey and Caesar, Pompey sought to acquire the memory and political power of Sulla through his divine patron. Pompey was able to display himself as the immediate heir of Sulla, as the inheritor of the military and political favour that Venus had extended to him.[244] His connection to Venus may have been further strengthened by his marriage into the Julian family, who famously drew their lineage back to Venus. This is merely speculation, as Pompey had already connected himself with Venus

[239] Gisborne (2005) 105-123; Keavaney (1982) 60-65.
[240] Sumi (2002) 418-430; Ramage (1991) 93-121, also discusses the coherent program of public portrayal regarding his role as founder.
[241] Plut. *Sull.* 34.1. Trans. Waterfield (2008).
[242] Val. Max. 9. 3. 8; Tac. *Hist*. 3. 72; Plin. *HN.* 7. 138; 36, 45; See van Deman (1922) 1-31.
[243] Gisborne (2005) 119. Ramage (1991) and Keaveney (1982) 93-121 paint Sulla as knowingly portraying himself as a king of Rome.
[244] Pompey also adopted several other gods that Sulla had favoured, most notably Hercules. See Rawson (1970) 30-38 for an overview of Pompey and Hercules. He maintained his connection to Hercules even through his relationship with Venus, as he dedicated the temple of Venus Victrix on April 12th, the festival of Hercules Invictus.

through Sulla and his own advertisement prior to his union, but it is not impossible to think that his marriage may have been another place from which Pompey was able to draw a line to Venus. As he was a plebeian, he had no legendary genealogy of his own to recall, so perhaps he would be able to call upon their divine ancestress as his own – especially if the child he had with Julia had survived. Furthermore, he was able to portray himself as a founder of Rome through his monumental building projects, presenting his patronage of Venus as a reason for his power. One of the major developments of the late Republic was the creation of monuments that were closely linked to a general's name to provide means of lasting glory.[245] This can be best seen in Pompey's temple complex of Venus Victrix.

Dedicated in 55, this complex included multiple temples, a theatre, and several other public spaces.[246] Positioned within the Campus Martius, this was a monument to Pompey and his military achievements. The location of the temple complex furthered the martial connection of Venus and Pompey, as it has been suggested that the route through the complex — from the *curia* at the entrance to the temple of Venus Victrix — would resemble the triumphal procession of Pompey.[247] Here, the epithet Victrix was applied to Venus for the first time in a military context, which directly tied her to the military conquests of Pompey. Prior to Pompey, Venus Victrix only appears in sexual or comedic situations as Venus, conqueror of men.[248] The complex itself contained fourteen statues that represented the fourteen groups subdued by Pompey, resembling the Hellenistic style of a ruler cult temple rather than a Roman one.[249]

[245] Orlin (1997) 192 lists a number of temples that came to be known by their dedicator's name, including Pompey's temple to Hercules, called the *aedes* Pompeii.
[246] Tac. *Ann.* 14.20.
[247] See Gleason (1990) 4-13.
[248] Varro, *Ling.* 5.62.
[249] For the statues: Plin. *HN.* 36.41; Suet. *Nero*, 46; Serv. *Aen*. VII.721. For the Hellenistic style: Plut. *Pomp*. 42 suggests he took the building plan from Mitylene; Gleason (1990) 4-13; Hanson (1959) 52-55.

Pompey included shrines and altars to at least three other deities — Honos, Virtus, and Felicitas. A fourth temple was likely dedicated to Victoria, evidenced by inscriptions that have a 'V' following the list of other deities, but this is speculation.[250] He also incorporated four Republican temples from an earlier period into a sacred area, taking over monuments for his own glory.[251] The complex was meant to be a personal gift to the people of Rome; the first permanent stone theatre in the city hosted elaborate games, contests with wild animals, and exhibitions from around the Mediterranean.[252] The public would have been constantly reminded of his personal achievements and how Venus had favoured Pompey.

The Ancestress of Caesar

When Caesar rose to power, he too would claim Venus as his divine patron. Rather than inherit the goddess as Pompey did, Caesar was able to claim legendary genealogy as the reason for her support. The claim to Venus would not result in competition until 54, when Pompey and Caesar's relationship deteriorated. Pompey had an established relationship with the goddess, while Caesar had a familial claim which went back at least three generations, though in all likelihood substantially longer.[253] As Venus was one of the divine patrons of his predecessors, Caesar claiming the goddess as his own put him in competition for her support. Caesar's ancestral lineage made him uniquely connected to the goddess; rather than calling upon Venus as a protector and guarantor of victory, Caesar claimed direct descent to his advantage. Direct

[250] Cf. Suet. *Claud*. 21: *cum prius apud superiores aedes supplicasset*. For the suggestion of Victoria: Fasti Allifani (*CIL*, 1. 217 [Aug. 12]): V[eneri] V[ictrici], H'onort', V[...], Felicita[ti] in theatro Pompei; Richardson (1992) 123; Hanson (1959) 52-53.
[251] Richardson (1992) 33.
[252] Cic. *Pis*. 65; Plin. *HN*. 7.158, 8.20; Plut. *Pomp*. 52.
[253] This is when physical evidence, such as coinage, advertises the relationship. It may have been established earlier or have been a late creation of legendary genealogy: see Erskine (2001) 20-23; Weinstock (1971) 15; Galinsky (1969) 5, 53.

descent from Venus was heavily emphasized and utilized by the *gens* Julia. Several members of the family minted coins that celebrated their relationship to Venus beginning in the 130s.[254] L. Julius Caesar, an antiquarian in the first century, wrote a text that traced the origins of the Julii back to Aeneas, Mars, and Venus.[255] Julius Caesar wrote a funerary speech for his aunt, which famously hailed Venus as their ancestress.[256] He was also celebrated as having received the 'bloom of youth' from Venus as a gift.[257] In the late Republic, when Venus gained political significance, Caesar entered the political stage with an advantage over Pompey.

Despite his connections to Venus, Caesar had to first draw the support of the goddess from her patron at the time: Pompey. Their contention for Venus was a contest between familial connection to a goddess and proven military support. Venus' role as an ancestress was important to Caesar's claim of her support, but his chosen aspect of Venus in military contexts was Venus Victrix. Caesar advertised his relationship to Venus through speeches to his soldiers in 47.[258] He began to be known as *venere prognatus*, born from Venus, among his detractors.[259] He continued to use her name as a watchword in camps and he initially promised a temple to Venus Victrix in Rome, purposefully rivalling the temple which Pompey had dedicated in 55.[260] It is also said that on the battlefield, Caesar performed a pseudo-*evocatio* for Venus Victrix, calling her to support his army rather than Pompey's. He vowed a temple to her in exchange for his victory, much like the Romans had in their vow to Venus Erycina years prior.[261]

[254] Sydenham (1952) 56, 82.
[255] Aur. Vict. 15.4, 18.5; Serv. *Aen.* 1.267.
[256] Suet. *Iul.* 6.1.
[257] Cass. Dio. 43.43.3.
[258] Cass. Dio 41.34.1-2.
[259] Cic. *Fam.* 8.15.2.
[260] Ap. *B. Civ.* 2.76, 102, 104.
[261] Ap. *B.Civ*. 2.68.281; Orlin (2007) 68-9.

On the eve of the Battle of Pharsalus, stories tell of Pompey having prophetic dreams. Plutarch said that Pompey dreamt of spoils decorating the Temple of Venus Victrix but was afraid that the dream showed Caesar's victory and not his own, because of the ancestral claim Caesar had to Venus.[262] According to Appian, Pompey dreamt of his dedication of a temple to Venus Victrix. This dream occurred the same night that Caesar vowed a temple to Venus Victrix; therefore, the dream would predict Caesar's success and not Pompey's. Though Appian's timeline was incorrect, as Pompey had dedicated the temple a year prior, his version still emphasized the dominance of divine support that Caesar had. Caesar's defeat of Pompey was considered a concession of the patronage of Venus; Caesar's divine ancestress had favoured him above all, just as he predicted.

The temple that Caesar had vowed to Venus Victrix was never built. Instead, he dedicated a temple in 46 to Venus Genetrix. At some point in time, Caesar had a dream in which a new epithet for Venus came to him — Genetrix.[263] The decision to dedicate the temple to his ancestress would prove significant for the worship of Venus in Rome. The new epithet for the goddess clearly marked her as the ancestress of the Julian clan and of the Roman people, not merely as the bringer of victory. He dedicated the temple on the final day of his triumph over the Pompeian allies.[264] Caesar raised a private family connection to the forefront of public cult in order to enhance his personal status. The cult of Venus Genetrix was still tied to the political and martial power Venus held, but the emphasis was on her role in the foundation of the Julian family.

[262] Plut. *Pomp.* 68.
[263] Serv. Aen. 1.720.
[264] Cass. Dio. 46.22.1-3

Venus Genetrix, the ancestress, was an epithet that had never before been applied to Venus in public cult, though it had begun to show up in writings at the time in reference to others.[265] This was an explicit reference to Venus and her role as a mother, beginning the separation of her cult from military might and immoral sexuality. The temple was placed in the Forum of Julius Caesar, which further connected him directly to the goddess.[266] By building a forum, Caesar was portraying himself as another founder. Caesar also began to mint coinage featuring Venus with Victoria, Cupid, victory trophies, captives, as well as the palladium and Aeneas.[267] He advertised his military victories in connection to Venus as well as his descent from Aeneas. Eventually, he minted coinage with his face, the first to do so, and placed himself on the obverse with Venus on the reverse, directly referencing his connection to the goddess.[268]

Under Caesar, the perception of Venus shifted. She was used to promote Caesar's personal merit and she continued to play an important role in his career right up until his assassination in 44. When Caesar dedicated the Temple of Venus Genetrix in 46, he also initiated the *Ludi Veneris Genetricis*. These games were held in Venus' honour in 46, 45, 44, and continued under the reign of Augustus.[269] The funeral games for Caesar's daughter, Julia, coincided with the timing of the *Ludi Veneris Genetricis* in 46*,* as did Caesar's own funeral games, held by Augustus, in 44.[270] These games emphasized the relationship between

[265] Lucr. 1.1 is the first time in our record that the epithet had been given to the goddess in literature.
[266] Ap*. B. Civ.* 102.
[267] Crawford (2011) n. 419, 458, 465.3, 4, 6a-d, 7 a-b, 468.
[268] Crawford (2011) n. 480.7-16.
[269] These games were also referred to as the *Ludi Victoriae Caesaris* under the principate: Cic. *Fam.* 11.28.6; Suet. *Aug.* 10.1.
[270] On Julia's funeral games, see Suet. *Iul.* 26; Plut*. Caes.* 55*;* Cass. Dio. 43.22.3. For the games of Caesar and his comet, see Suet. *Iul*. 88; Plin. *HN*. 2.93. Ap. *B. Civ*. 3.28; Cass. Dio. 45.6.4. Ramsey and Licht (1997) 41, appendix III for coinciding of funeral games with the festival. The calendar changes with Caesar and Augustus, so the initial games in 46 and 45 were held in September while the games in 44 were held in July.

the *gens* Julia and Venus. After Caesar's death, Augustus placed his image in the temple, next to Venus.[271]

Conclusion

The Roman Venus celebrated at the end of the Republic had been transformed by the political climate of the time. This 'charme religieux' had grown from a charisma that allowed worshippers to win the favour of a deity into a deity whose favour was to be won. She was fought over, sought after, and eventually used as a political tool for the elite's claim to legitimate power. Venus' origins and temples in Rome tell us of this transformation and how she became important to the Romans. The role of Venus in the foundation myth of Rome was vital for the progression of her worship in the city, emphasized through her connection to Aeneas and Sicily. This foundational Venus was publicized in the city through the temples to Venus Erycina, a role that became increasingly important as politicians began to associate themselves with Venus to advertise their own roles as secondary founders of Rome.

Later temples of Venus were even more explicit in their associations with the city's foundation. The epithets that each politician connected to Venus on coinage, temples, and in writings reflected the aspects of her character to which they wished to attach themselves. Venus became intrinsically tied to her role as political patron, and later, ancestress. Consequently, the epithets of *felix, victrix,* and *genetrix* competed alongside the politicians who used them. Sulla and Pompey emphasized the support they had received from Venus in battle, using their actions in the city to recall Aeneas. Sulla's coinage advertised his connection with Venus to the public

[271] Cass. Dio. 45.7.1, 47.18.4.

on an individual level, while Pompey's building projects advertised his divine patron in one of the largest public monuments built in Rome.

Under Caesar, Venus made the greatest transformation of all. Rather than her ability to grant victories, her role as mother to the Julian clan and Rome itself emerged as her principal aspect. It was here that the separation between private and public cult disintegrated, resulting in the familial cult of the Julian Venus being venerated throughout Rome and Italy. The cult of Venus Genetrix was developed throughout Caesar's career and, by the time of his death, the goddess of sex, love, and military success had become the ancestress of the Roman people and mother to the Julian clan. Venus' military significance and her role in the foundation of Rome uniquely situated her to become a principal goddess of the Augustan age. From her origins as a native goddess, conflated with the Greek goddess of love and sex, to a political device wielded by the most powerful men of the Republic, Venus became a symbol of divine right to rule.

Chapter Three: Augustan Venus

Introduction

From her early origins as an abstract deity of charm and seduction to the martial and maternal patron of Sulla, Pompey, and Caesar, Venus went through a slow but considerable transformation over the last three centuries of the Roman Republic. After the death of Caesar, Augustus continued to shape Venus into a goddess worthy of the Julian family. Under the *princeps*, Venus' maternal aspects were emphasized above all others, suppressing her sexual attributes to become the mother of the Roman Empire. Her material and literary depictions shifted throughout the final decades of the first century, with most losing their explicit eroticism to celebrate Venus as a morally upstanding Roman matron. These changes came as a result of Augustus' influence over public art and popular Latin authors, encouraged by the familial relationship the *princeps* had with Venus and from the impact of his moral reforms.

Augustus' social, moral, and cultural reforms were a major part of his program of renewal, promoting his ideology through visual culture, literature, and legislation. While the social impact of his reforms is debated among scholars, the ideological impact is visible in the art and literature of the age. These principles appear in both *princeps*-commissioned works and those of private individuals as they became a part of the cultural discourse of Augustus' reign. The reforms of Augustus, most especially the criminalization of adultery, meant that the relationships of a sexually charged Venus with various lovers had to change to fit this new moral framework. Thus, by the end of his reign, a new goddess emerged who was able to represent strong, maternal figures rather than the erotic nature of the pre-Augustan Venus.

Prior to Augustus, Venus' depictions in art and literature were not censored by the political figures who claimed her as patron, nor did these figures greatly influence the nature of the goddess in literature. She maintained her nude Hellenistic portrayals and erotic mythology throughout the Roman Republic in both public and private art. Latin literary depictions of Venus were entrenched in her eroticism, generally following the Greek models of illustrating Aphrodite. During the reign of Augustus, in most public depictions, Venus was separated from her sexually charged Greek form and standardized as the maternal goddess of the Roman Empire. Poetry served as the centre for Venus' transformation, especially in the works of Vergil and Horace. Such poetic depictions, in turn, both reflected and influenced Augustan laws regarding women and the general portrayal of femininity in the early imperial period.

Augustan Developments

During the reign of Augustus, the visual and literary depictions of Venus changed to fit her more recent roles of imperial mother and founder of the Julian line. This change was partially due to the social and moral reforms enacted by Augustus in his early reign, as he pushed for a return to traditional values, which Venus did not always represent. Augustus' reign focused on moral and social reformation, as the Romans believed moral decay had, at least partially, caused the Civil Wars.[272] Thus, he was not only bringing hope of peace and prosperity to Rome but bringing back the ancient golden age.[273] While the existence of a widespread Augustan program is often debated, there was certainly a planned program guiding his laws on marriage and adultery.[274] Augustus' legislation invoked the *mos maiorum*: an effective body of ethical rules

[272] Liv. *Praef.* 5-9; Tac. *Ann*. 3.28; Hoyos (2019) 210-238; Levick (1982) 53-62.
[273] Lively and Shaw (2020) 250 examine how the laws are both radically new and respectfully traditional, signaling a notional return to ancient precedent.
[274] Lively and Shaw (2020) 246; Galinsky (1996) 128, (1981) 126.

and regulations establishing the norms and morals for Roman society and law.[275] Augustus celebrated his legislation and moral program in the *Res Gestae,* stating that 'by new laws passed on my authority, I brought back many exemplary practices of our ancestors, which were now fading in our times...'. [276] The new laws he passed included the *lex Julia,* written to control the social, moral, and sexual behaviour of Rome's elite individuals. This legislation was published in 19/18 as the *lex Julia de maritandis ordinibus* and the *lex Julia de adulteriis coercendis.*[277]

The *lex Julia de maritandis ordinibus* (a reworking of a failed statute from 28) refers to legislation regarding Roman marriage and childbirth.[278] The restrictions were meant to encourage marriage, remarriage, and childbearing among the elite classes by offering political, religious, and financial incentives; the statute also carried consequences when expectations were not met.[279] It established a time limit on marriage/remarriage for men ages 25-60, and women ages 20-50; restrictions on giving and receiving an inheritance based on marital status and number of children; tax benefits for those with more than three children; restrictions on political and religious roles for those unmarried or without children; that all free-born citizens were forbidden from marrying people deemed *infamia*; that the senatorial class could no longer marry freedmen; and that unmarried individuals could not attend some specific public festivals.[280] Since membership of the senatorial and equestrian classes was dependent on the amount of money and property owned, unmarried and childless members of the upper classes could lose

[275] While the *mos maiorum* were never formally constituted, they played an influential role in Roman society: Lively and Shaw (2020) 252; Lowrie (2016).
[276] *R. Gest. div. Aug.* 8.5.
[277] McGinn (1998) 71, 141; Galinsky (1996) 130.
[278] Prop. 2.7.1-4; Liv. *Praef.* 9.
[279] McGinn (1998) 71-85; Wallace-Hadrill (1981a) 58-80.
[280] Ancient sources discuss the details of these laws, with extra focus on the requirements of marriage and children for the *cursus honorum:* Tac. *Ann*. 2.51; Suet. *Aug.* 34; Cass. Dio. 54.1.

their social status through these restrictions on inheritance.[281] There are records of an open revolt against the *lex Julia*, as well as a protest by the *equites* at a public event where Augustus demonstrated the joys of large families by showing off some of his great-grandchildren.[282] In later years, Augustus relaxed the measures through the *lex Papia Poppaea* of 9 CE.[283] This law diminished certain penalties and restrictions levied upon women in the *lex Julia de maritandis ordinibus,* while adding provisions on marriage and inheritance which complemented the earlier laws.[284] The *lex Papia Poppaea* eased time constraints on marriage and remarriage, reduced punishments on childless women, and offered more rights and benefits to women with three or more children.[285]

While disadvantages due to marital status and childlessness had been legislated prior to Augustus, this was the first attempt to both punish and reward individuals based on these merits.[286] The *lex Julia de maritandis ordinibus* served several functions in Augustus' larger plan of moral and social reform.[287] As an attempt to stabilize the Roman family, the laws presented a model for how men and women should behave when living together and encouraged legitimate childbearing among elite classes. This model of behaviour was also controlled by rules regarding who could marry into the senatorial and equestrian classes, keeping these classes separated from those deemed morally unfit and sexually uncontrollable.[288] During this time, increasing the birth rate in the upper classes was also a concern due to the significant loss of life from the Civil

[281] Swain and Davies (2010) 269-290.
[282]Cass. Dio 56.1; Suet. *Aug.* 34. This revolt occurred in the later years of Augustus' reign, after 6 CE when his eldest great-grandchild was born.
[283] Tac. *Ann*. 3.25, 28; Cass. Dio. 56.1-10.
[284] Cass. Dio. 56.1-10; Milnor (2007) 9, 13.
[285] Cass. Dio. 56.10.3; Kemezis (2007) 247; Treggiari (1991) 60.
[286] Sall. *Catil*. 10–15; Cic. *Marcell*. 23, *Fin*. 2.73; Hor. *Sat.* 1.2.37–46. See McGinn (1998) 78-79 for a summary of earlier attempts.
[287] Edwards (1993) 34.
[288] Ulp.13.2, 14.1; *Dig.* 23.2.43; Severy (2003) 52; McGinn (1998) 91-104.

Wars.[289] By financially and politically rewarding those who had legitimate offspring, the population of the upper classes was expected to increase during the Augustan peace.[290] The greater function of this law, along with the *lex Julia de adulteriis coercendis,* was derived from a larger program of legal interference in the Roman *familia.*[291] By controlling marriage, divorce, childbirth, and inheritance, Augustus set himself as the *paterfamilias* of every Roman household, taking power away from the men who typically served this role.[292] By doing so, Augustus was not only the father of a new Rome and the restorer of the golden age but the father of every Roman home. He became the ruling authority for previously personal matters, bringing the private business of Roman men into the public sphere.

The *lex Julia de adulteriis coercendis* was published alongside the *lex Julia de maritandis ordinibus* in 19/18. It mainly concerned the repression of unacceptable sexual behaviour — primarily adultery and *stuprum* — among Roman elites, particularly women.[293] Adultery charges could be brought by any Roman citizen and it became a crime if a husband knowingly ignored his wife's adultery.[294] Charges could result in divorce, financial consequences, *relegatio*, or exile, and those charged would be *infamia*.[295] Convicted women may also have been obliged to wear the toga — usually only worn by sex workers – as a symbol of shame.[296] Clothing became increasingly important under the reign of Augustus, as a return to

[289] Cic. *Marcell.* 23, *Leg.* 3.7.
[290] Milnor (2007) 9-11.
[291] Swain and Davies (2010) 269-290.
[292] A role Horace predicted for him nearly a decade earlier: *Odes.* 3.24.27-36; Bauman (1994) 116-117; White (1993) 124–127; des Bouvrie (1984) 93-113; Fraenkel (1957) 374.
[293] McGinn (1998) 141-148.
[294] Tryph. (*3 Disp.*) *D.* 4.4.37.1.
[295] *PS* 2.26.1-8, 10-12, 14-17; Cass. Dio. 54.16.1; Pap. *D*. 22.5.14; Ulp. 28.1.20.6, 3.2.2.3; Arr. Men. *D*. 49.16.4.7; Plin. *Ep*. 6.31.5.
[296] Cass. Dio. 54.16.3-5; Mart. 2.39, 10.52; Juv. 2.68-70; Porph. schol. Hor. sat. 1.2.63; Acro schol. Hor. 1.2.63; Cic. Phil. 2.44; [Tib.] 3.16.3–5; For an overview and complete bibliography of those who support the idea of the toga being legally enforced, see McGinn (1998) 157-172; Milnor (2007) 20; Sebesta (1998); Zanker (1988) 122. Contra: Olson (2008) 47-51.

modesty meant a return to styles which publicly symbolized and advertised the status and rank of the wearer.[297]

Augustus' laws created a 'meritocracy of virtue' to fit his ideology of moral and cultural renewal, building a new generation of moral elites.[298] Although it is unclear whether or not these laws were successfully enacted and reinforced in everyday life, they formed the basis of Augustus' moral program.[299] This program was reinforced not just through legislation but through visual culture, mainly Augustus' building program and consistent iconography, and through much of the age's literature.[300] Since these laws were significantly more restrictive towards women by controlling their marriages, inheritances, children, and sexual activity, much of the iconography and literature of the time focuses on their morality.[301] The changes made to portrayals of women can be seen across Augustan age art and literature, influencing and influenced by the way Venus was depicted under Augustus.

Augustan Venus

The change Venus experienced from 44 BCE to 14 CE was influenced by Augustus' familial connection to the goddess and his commitment to the moral restoration of Rome. The familial connection was a continuation of Julius Caesar's use of the goddess, while the moral restoration appears in Augustus' legal reforms and his use of popular culture as an attempt to enforce acceptable behaviour on women. Augustus was able to strengthen his familial tie to

[297] While togas may have been regulated by law, the *stolla* and *vittae* were encouraged through visual depictions, not law; cf. Tert. *Apol.* 6.2, and they are only seen from the mid-first century BCE to the second century CE, see Olson (2008) 32-34, (2002) 387-420; Sebesta (1998) 531; Zanker (1988) 165; Gardner (1986) 127-132.
[298] McGinn (1998) 80-82.
[299] McGinn (1998) 84-84; Tac. *Ann.* 3.25. On the effectiveness of these laws, as well as a summary and full bibliography, see Badian (1985).
[300] Bauman (1994) 106; Zanker (1988); Wallace-Hadrill (1981b) 299.
[301] McGinn (1998) offers a complete study of the laws and their focus on women in Rome.

Julius Caesar and Venus by completing his adopted father's temple of Venus Genetrix, and later he dedicated paintings and statues of the goddess to honour them.[302] Her image featured on Augustan coinage and statues of the goddess were placed in the newly built forum and in Augustus' public works. Her role as an Augustan goddess was emphasized in her placement within the trio of protective deities of Rome alongside Mars and Fortuna on the front relief of the temple of Mars Ultor.[303] The seated goddess on the Ara Pacis can be interpreted as Venus, as well as Tellus, Italia, and Ceres.[304] The goddess appears alongside several symbols that carry significance with Venus and other deities, such as a swan and stalks of grain.[305] Her reclined position is similar to several classicized portrayals of Venus and represents the *kourotrophos* (a child-nurturing goddess); here, Venus is a fertility goddess and the mother of the Roman people.[306] As the Ara Pacis contains several unidentifiable characters that represent a multitude of figures, it is not hard to imagine the image of the goddess encapsulating aspects of numerous deities, Venus among them.[307] Venus' presence in material culture increased during the reign of Augustus, owing to his own public works and the connection his family held to the goddess.

There was one major change, however, that differed from the known representations of Venus at the time: clothing. While no law controlled the everyday attire of Roman women under Augustus, imperial material culture and Augustan rhetoric of the period encouraged a return to

[302] Cass. Dio 45.6.4; Plin. *HN.* 35.91.
[303] Ov. *Tris.* 2.295-296; Pollini (2012) 147; Galinsky (1996) 208; Zanker (1988) 196-197. Thomas (2017) 146-212 argues that the relief commonly associated with the temple of Mars Ultor, the Algiers relief, is actually a recreation of cult statues in the Pantheon of Agrippa, as described by Cass. Dio 53.27.2-4. Either way, Venus was placed in a prominent position on a public monument sponsored by the imperial family, alongside other important Augustan deities.
[304] Galinsky (1996) 223-243, (1992) 457-475, (1969) 191-241; Booth (1966) 873-879.
[305] Booth (1966) 876; Galinsky (1992) 460-468, (1966) 229-232.
[306] Booth (1966) 873-874; Galinsky (1966) 233.
[307] Galinsky (1992) provides an overview of interpretations and scholarship on the seated goddess of the Ara Pacis.

simple, traditional clothing that was modest and unembellished.[308] Venus in her half-draped, often nude, state did not fit the Augustan model of a Roman matron in traditional representations. Under the influence of his moral reforms, Venus was covered by the type of dress encouraged by the women of the Julio-Claudian family, advertising to her viewers that even the goddess of erotic love could be reformed through clothing and behaviour. While the cult statues of Venus Genetrix are lost to us, depictions of the goddess on Augustus' public works projects, as well as later imperial coins, suggest that the Augustan Venus was unveiled, draped, and holding objects that were sacred to Rome or Mars.[309] Cupid often appeared beside her or on her shoulder, recalling older images seen on coins, while also reminding audiences of Venus' role as a mother.[310] In some depictions, Cupid is handing Mars' sword to his mother, perhaps indicating the end of violent Civil War through the intervention of Venus' children.[311] The children of the Augustan family were often depicted under the guise of Cupid as well, further linking the family to Venus and promoting the importance of having children in Rome.[312] Ideological depictions of mothers and their children were crafted in the same manner as Augustus' family, linking the divine in art to his divine lineage.

While imperial children were connected with Cupid, women in the imperial household were depicted as good Roman matrons in the same style and dress as Augustus' Venus.[313] Livia and Octavia were portrayed as draped, with their children or grandchildren surrounding them,

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[308] Hughes (2015) 377-378; Olson (2002) 387-420; Sebesta (1997) 529-541. While depictions of men and women in imperial art display the simple and traditional clothing that Augustus valued, in reality, embellishment, colour, and volume continued to be popular in everyday clothing.
[309] *RIC* 250/1, 251, 367; Weinstock (1971) 86; Harcum (1927) 141-148.
[310] Such as her relief on the Temple of Mars Ultor and earlier coinage: *RRC* 463, 468, 494/6, 494/34. Cupid is often celebrated in Augustan poetry as the son of Venus, establishing his relationship with the Julian family: Verg. *Aen.* 1.663-669; Tib. 2.5.39; Ov. *Met.* 5.365.
[311] As seen on the Algiers relief: Thomas (2017) 170; Pollini (2012) 147.
[312] Suet. *Calig*. 7; Huskinson (1996) 41-54, 105-109.
[313] See Olson (2008) 30-34 for the popularity of the traditional *stola* during the Julio-Claudian period.

similar to Venus and her children.[314] The procession on the Ara Pacis is crowded by draped women and young children, all dressed in traditional and simple attire that Augustus encouraged.[315] The style of dress was not only modest from a moral standpoint but traditional in the classicizing sense. Augustus sought a return to the morals of the old Republic (which he defined), restoring the city and its people to their former glory.[316] A large part of the official artistic programme under Augustus was a return to the classic Attic style of the fifth and fourth centuries.[317] Clothing, poses, and themes were taken from earlier models and placed within the context of Augustus' cultural reformation. By rebranding Venus, and imperial women, in the style of a good classical Roman matron, Augustus was able to advertise his moral and social reforms through their example. These visual representations worked alongside legislative and literary developments to shape a more family-friendly Venus, transforming the goddess into a maternal figure who dressed and acted as a good Roman woman.

The greatest influence on the perception of Venus, however, came through the works of Augustan poets. As Julius Caesar and Augustus rose to power, their influence over the art and literature of the period was not limited to their public works. The role of Venus was expanded upon by poets of the age, supporting the *princeps'* familial connection to the deity and her involvement in the very foundation of Rome itself. While Augustus did not control what the poets wrote, his presence in Rome was enough to inspire writers, and his love of certain poets may have swayed their support further.[318] From Augustus' rise to power to his death, literary depictions of Venus took on a new meaning as the goddess was honoured as the mother of Rome

[314] *DCIP* 25, 51, 52, 103; Severy (2003) 213-233; Wood (2000) 27-108.
[315] Cass. Dio. 55.2.5; Pollini (2012) 204-242; see Lamp (2009) 1-24 on the visual rhetoric of the monument.
[316] Richardson (2012) 80-196; Sebesta (1997) 529-541; Galinsky (1996) 363-370.
[317] Torelli (1996) 930-934; Zanker (1988).
[318] Augustus' influence on poets is discussed in chapter one.

and ancestress of the *princeps.* The Augustan Venus was a good, respectable matron who acted as a mother and protector of Rome. While the Hellenistic portrayal of Venus by no means vanished from poetry, traditional depictions were challenged by a reformed version of the goddess — sexuality and maternalism precariously balanced by the poets. There are three golden age authors who exemplify the Augustan, the transforming, and the traditional Venus: Vergil, Horace, and Ovid, respectively. In reaction to Augustus' moral reforms and claimed descent from Venus, as well as their personal connection to and feelings towards the *princeps,* these authors used the goddess as a poetic and political tool, forever changing the perception of Venus.

Vergil

> But Venus, maternal heart not at all terrified in vain,
> moved by the threats and cruel uprisings of the Laurentes,
> calls out to Vulcan, and begins in her golden wedding chamber,
> breathing divine affection into her words...
>
> Verg. *Aen.* 8. 370-373.

With these words, Vergil shapes Venus into the ideal Augustan Roman matron; at ease with her role as the matriarch of a blended family.[319] She calls upon her husband, Vulcan, to protect her son (the child of another man) as if Aeneas were his own. Through Vergil, Venus' affairs are transformed into previous marriages, her children legitimized, and her husband is responsible for the family she brought into their union. To Vergil, Venus was never adulterous.[320] The ancestress of Rome and the Julian line was simply a good Roman matron, not abandoning her children even when marrying into a new family. This imagining of Venus would have been unthinkable mere decades prior to the publishing of the *Aeneid*. The transformation of Venus from the death of Julius Caesar to the death of Vergil is encapsulated within the epic,

[319] See Hallett (2020) 113-126 for an overview of Venus as an example of blended families in Augustan Rome.
[320] Within the timeline of the *Aeneid*, at least.

from an adulterous goddess of sex to the mother of the first emperor, as well as the entire Roman people.

As the mother of Aeneas and the founder of the Roman people, Venus plays a pivotal role in Vergil's epic, the *Aeneid*. Begun shortly after Augustus' victory at Actium and abruptly ended in 19, the epic served as the Roman (and Augustan) origin story.[321] Vergil actively engages with the discourse surrounding Augustus' moral reforms and his centralization of power in Rome. The influence of the reforms embodies Vergil's depiction of Venus. Adultery and sexuality, the quintessential aspects of Venus' mythology, are pushed to the background, while topics such as motherhood and remarriage are emphasized. Vergil suppresses the more erotic versions of Venus while still relying on her role as a goddess of love and sexuality, using language and references which imply, rather than state, her eroticism. Her mythological background is likewise implied, as her past affairs and extramarital children are depicted in a way that invokes a blended family, not an adulterous woman.[322] As the matriarch of a blended family, Venus is placed in the role of a Roman matron, protecting her children and ensuring their success through any means available to her.[323] Within the epic, Venus continues to adopt the mythology of Aphrodite as Aeneas' mother and Vulcan's wife, but the goddess' actions and motivations have a distinctly Roman flair.

In the Roman world, especially after the reforms of Augustus, the most important role a woman could fulfill was that of a mother.[324] Through Augustus' political and financial rewards

[321] The history of the *Aeneid* and the relationship between Vergil and Augustus is discussed on Pp. 15-21.
[322] Hallett (2020) 113-126; Gutting (2009) 41-55.
[323] Gutting (2009) 41-43.
[324] This, as well, was an attempt to reconstitute and reconstruct the past, as motherhood was the most important role for women in the mid-Republic. This waned after the first century with the rise of numerous highly independent women: Fulvia, Clodia, Servilia, Cornelia, etc.

system, not only did motherhood elevate the woman's status, but that of her husband and sons. The more children a woman had, the better, and the more successful the child, the more respectable the mother.[325] A mother was especially commendable for her son's educational upkeep and good morals, as these were the fields in which mothers held some authority over their children.[326] Roman mothers were also expected to have a respectable amount of maternal ambition for their son's political and matrimonial endeavours, supporting them and using familial connections to ensure success.[327] This role was especially important for widows, as male relatives would be employed in place of the father.[328] These ambitions were a source of mutual satisfaction for a mother and son, since his achievements reflected favourably upon them both. It is equally true that a son who died before he could fulfill his ambitions was looked on as especially tragic.[329] Mothers were never meant to outlive their sons, nor were sons meant to die before they had been successful.

Sons were also expected to have a certain amount of respect for their mother's wishes and appeals by exerting *pietas in matrem,* but maternal influence did not hold the same power that the *paterfamilias* could exert over the family.[330] Mothers were often employed as intermediaries, as a means of entreating peace, especially in civil conflicts, by pleading with their fathers, husbands, or sons and hoping they would yield to the mother's appeals.[331] The Roman mother was politically savvy, ambitious, and involved in her son's life, ensuring success through

[325] Sen. *Ad Helviam*; Plin. *Ep.* 3.16; Marcus, *Med.* 1.17.1; Tac. *Agr.* 4; Dixon (1988) 71-73.
[326] Tac. *Agr.* 4; Seut. *Nero,* 52; Plin. *Ep.* 6.20; Dixon (1988) 170-171.
[327] Dixon (1988) 170, 175-179; Hallett (1984) 243-245.
[328] Plin. *Ep.* 2.18, 3.5.15; Tac. *Dial*. 28; A.M. *Med.* 1.4; Dixon (1988) 172.
[329] This is best exemplified by Octavia's son, Marcellus, who was heir to Augustus before his early death. Octavia is said to have never recovered, and to have hated Livia because her children's prospects were elevated due to Marcellus' demise; Sen. *Ad Marciam*, 2.3-5; *RG* 21.1; Verg. *Aen.* 6.860-868; Gutting (2009) 49; Dixon (1988) 73.
[330] Dixon (1988) 174, 179-180.
[331]Cass. Dio. 48.15.2, 48.16.3; Plut*. Brut.* 5; Cic. *Att*. 13.9, 10, 40, *Brut.* 1.18.1; Dixon (1988) 194.

any means available to them. Vergil, living through this transformation of the maternal role in politics and drawing on centuries of exemplary maternal figures, used this model to present Venus as the typical Roman mother and Aeneas as a good Roman son.

In the beginning of the *Aeneid*, we meet Aeneas suffering on the seas.[332] His successful life in Troy had been completely dismantled. His city destroyed, his wife dead, and his family forced to flee. Aeneas' mother, Venus, is devastated by this destruction and her only consolation is that the fates have decreed her son will found a great city and his lineage will form an Empire.[333] When her fellow deities interfere with Aeneas' destiny, Venus approaches her *paterfamilias,* Jupiter, to plead for her son's safety and success:[334]

> Surely your promise that in the future, as years rolled on,
> a leader would come from the Romans, restored from Teucer's blood,
> who would hold the sea and all lands in their power...
> We, your children, to whom you grant the height of heaven,
> have lost our ships (unspeakable!), betrayed to appease the anger of one,
> and have been kept far away from Italian shores.
>
> Verg. *Aen.* 1.234-236, 250-253.

Much of Venus' concern for Aeneas is focused on the dynasty he will build and the future success of Rome as the city of her children, culminating in the birth of Caesar (and by extension, Augustus). The fulfillment of her maternal ambitions through a prosperous son is clearly stated through Venus' pleading. Jupiter's response is similarly fixated on Aeneas' role in founding Rome.[335] Aeneas' success reflects on Venus as well, since the glory of the son reflects upon the mother. Just as a Roman *matrona* would, she fiercely guards her son's inheritance.[336] She places herself not just as Aeneas' mother but as a Trojan herself being kept from Italy and their

[332] Verg. *Aen.* 1.85-222.
[333] Verg. *Aen.* 1.235-236.
[334] While Venus' parentage varies depending on the author, Vergil places her as the daughter of Jupiter.
[335] Verg. *Aen.* 1.239-253. This scene parallels Thetis' supplication of Zeus in the *Iliad* 1.488-611.
[336] Gutting (2009) 42; See Keith (2020) on the maternal lament of Venus.

destiny.[337] When the gods interfere with the fate of the Trojans, Venus is at risk of losing the maternal esteem she is owed through Aeneas. She pleads not just for her son's success but for the respect that Venus would gain from it. By approaching her *paterfamilias,* Aeneas has not only the backing of his mother's ambitions, but he also has the power and authority of the man-in-charge. Here, Venus acts not as a goddess, but as a woman indirectly playing her hand in domestic politics as the daughter and mother of powerful male figures.[338] The goddess, acting as an industrious and attentive mother, uses her familial relationships to help Aeneas whenever possible, just as a Roman *matrona* would.[339] Vergil's Venus is introduced as a mother, determined to see her son fulfill his destiny by enlisting the support of her male relatives who have the authority and power to help.

Venus' interactions with her family continue this theme. As Jupiter allows Aeneas and his Trojans to safely land on the shores of Carthage, Venus calls another of her sons, Cupid, to ensure Aeneas is looked after in the city.[340] The language Venus uses when requesting Cupid's assistance is not that of a goddess demanding help from a fellow deity, but that of a mother requesting one son to help another: 'Son, my strength, my greatest power (...) you know how your brother Aeneas is thrown on the sea around all coasts by bitter Juno's hatred'.[341] Venus acknowledges Cupid as her son and as a brother of Aeneas. There is no mention of their separate parentage or their difference in mortality, Venus is simply asking one son to help another. Vergil does not mention Cupid's other parent in any capacity, though he is frequently cited in Latin literature as the son of Venus and Mars or Mercury.[342] Cupid then acts as the perfect son,

[337] Verg. *Aen.* 1.250-553.
[338] Gutting (2009) 41-43; Dixon (1988) 172.
[339] Keith (2020) 249.
[340] Verg. *Aen*. 1.657-690.
[341] Verg. *Aen*. 1.664, 667-668.
[342] Vergil's suppression of Venus' affairs with Mars and other men is discussed on Pp. 20, 77-78.

obeying his mother's wishes and remaining mindful of her ambitions.[343] Vergil further adapts Venus' aspects here, as Cupid enchants Dido to fall in love with Aeneas so that Venus' son may rest easy and be protected in Carthage against Juno and the treacherous Tyrians.[344] Venus uses her influence as the goddess of love and sex for maternal purposes, not in the mischievous erotic sense that other poets ascribe to her.[345] Her power is also limited to her indirect influence on male relatives, once again acting as a Roman *matrona* in domestic politics. She plays the role as the matriarch of a blended family: Aeneas and Cupid are brought together as brothers who will help one another regardless of parentage.[346] Blended families were exceedingly common due to the frequency of divorce, remarriage, and adoption in late Republican and Augustan Rome, especially after Augustus' reforms, and thus navigating familial relationships among blended families would have been part of the matriarch's world.

Roman *matronae* often remarried after having children, meaning they not only had to navigate relationships between various sons and daughters, but step-parents as well.[347] Venus is no exception to this: she needs the support not only of her father and son to help Aeneas, but of her husband as well.[348] Venus approaches Vulcan in their *thalamo coniugis* to ask him if he will forge a shield for Aeneas.[349] Even as she breathes divine allurement into her request, her supplication is not quite a seduction, although Vulcan is more persuaded by her snowy arms and soft embrace than her speech. Venus asks as a mother for her son, alluding to Vulcan's

[343] Verg. *Aen.* 1.689-720 recounts his obedience to his mother and the swiftness with which he carries out her wishes.
[344] Verg. *Aen.* 1.661-662.
[345] Gutting (2009).
[346] Hallett (2020).
[347] The relationship between Roman stepparents and children is discussed in Bradley (1987) 125-155.
[348] Having received a promise from Jupiter, Venus goes about fulfilling her son's destiny and needs the arms to do so; the importance of this scene and its literary influences are examined by McCarter (2012) 355-376.
[349] This scene is extensively studied by Lada-Richards (2006) 27-72.

willingness to forge arms for other mothers, Thetis and Aurora, so that their sons may be protected.[350] She does not flirt or distract, simply states her desire to protect her own son. This is the only section of the *Aeneid* where Venus' sexuality is overtly emphasised. In this capacity, Venus uses her role as the goddess of love and sex to influence her husband's actions. In this scene, Venus is not switching roles between mother, wife, and goddess so much as embodying all parts of her divinity and maternalism.[351] She uses all available means, including her erotic nature, to advance her goals. Vulcan, as Venus' husband and Aeneas' stepfather, is not angered by the request to aid the child of his wife's affair, and willingly obliges. Vulcan is called *pater,* signifying his role in this exchange; he acts just as a Roman stepfather would, obliged to care for his wife's children from previous marriages.[352] Vergil did not have to look far for examples of this parental role, as the women of the Augustan family, Livia and Octavia, had children from previous marriages whose success depended upon their stepfathers and other male relatives.[353]

By enlisting her father, husband, and son to help Aeneas in his journey, Venus positions herself not only as a good Roman woman, but the quintessential Augustan mother; serving as the matriarch to a blended family, just as many women did as a result of Augustus' marriage reforms, as well as Civil Wars and proscriptions.[354] In an even bolder comparison, Venus could be positioned as a representation of one specific woman in the Julian family, Octavia.[355] The

[350] Thetis: Hom. *Il.* 18.386-617. Aurora: Arct. Mil. *Aeth.* frag. 1; Verg. *Aen.* 8.384. Leach (1997) details the connection between Venus and Thetis in the *Aeneid,* as does Skinner (1997).
[351] Keith (2020) 248-249; Gutting (2006) 263-279.
[352] The title, while commonly given to male gods, carries multiple meanings for Vulcan, as a god, a stepfather, and as later explained, a father himself.
[353] Livia: Vell. Pat. 2.75; Suet. *Tib.* 5; Cass. Dio. 48.44; Huntsman (2009) 138, 149. Octavia: Suet. *Aug*. 63.1; Plut. *Ant*. 33, 87; Ap. *B. Civ.* 5.76; Cass. Dio. 51.15.5. On the complex Julio-Claudian family tree with the descendants of Livia and Octavia, see Corbier (1995) 178-193, figures 12.1-2.
[354] Suet. *Aug.* 34; Frank (1975) 44; Humbert (1972) 146-70; Bradley (1991) 79-99 provides an overview of remarriage and the family structure of ancient Rome.
[355] This idea was first proposed in Hallett (2020).

sister of the *princeps* and wife of Marc Antony featured prominently in triumviral socio-political life as Vergil was growing up and writing the *Aeneid*. She had to learn to cope with the challenges of a blended family consisting of her own children by Marc Antony, children from both of their previous marriages/affairs (whom she raised as her own), and the growing *domus Augusta.*[356] Vergil's portrayal of Venus mirrors this family dynamic with her children by various other men, as well as her current marriage to Vulcan. Venus, as the matriarch of this unconventional family, is presented as a struggling mother whose concern for her son outweighs all else. Octavia and Venus both act as interfering mothers who use marriage and familial relations as a means of gathering political power for their sons.[357] Venus arranges, either through divine intervention or familial connections, two of Aeneas' unions in the *Aeneid*, first with Dido and then to Lavinia. Both of these women are still connected to other men, either through widowhood or betrothal, and need to be persuaded to marry for political gain. This is a similar role Octavia played in the marriages of her biological children and stepchildren, marrying and divorcing them at the will of her brother's political goals or for their own advancement.

A further connection between Venus and Octavia can be drawn through their children's death predating their own: Venus by nature of her immortality and Octavia by the early death of Marcellus.[358] Many women would have gone through this loss during Vergil's age, as Civil War and proscriptions meant the early deaths of many husbands and sons, leaving women to remarry and outlive their children. Aeneas himself is partially named for this tragedy, as Venus' terrible grief (*αἴνόν ἄχος*) is knowing that he is mortal and will die one day.[359] Her only consolation is

[356] Hallett (2020) 113-114.
[357] Hallett (2020) 113-126; Keith (2006).
[358] A death mentioned in the *Aeneid* (6.884) and Octavia's famed reaction to hearing his name is recounted by Donatus in *Vita Vergili* 33.
[359] The origin of Aeneas' name and Venus' punishment is detailed by the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, line 299.

that his children will live on and form their own Empire, as Jupiter promised. This mirrors Octavia's own experience, as she can only see her son's success live on through his memory, and the success of his siblings and family. While Octavia and Venus may not be perfect comparisons, Vergil's portrayal of Venus and the sympathy he felt for Octavia would have resonated with his audience, as both women worked at being the perfect Augustan *matrona.*

Despite the reliance on and references to her various children, Vergil does not present Venus as an adulteress at any point in the *Aeneid*. Aeneas and Cupid are characters within the epic, but another son, Eryx, is mentioned as Aeneas' brother as well.[360] Vergil may imply or reference the goddess' various lovers, but within the epic itself, Venus is presented as the wife of Vulcan and mother of Aeneas, Cupid, and Eryx without mention of her involvement with their fathers.[361] Her relationship to Mars is distanced, as the erotic connection between Venus and Mars as the originating deities of Rome is dismissed. Vergil instead emphasized the connection of one of Venus' female descendants and Mars, separating Venus from the act. This is in stark contrast to two major poems being circulated in Vergil's period: Homer's *Odyssey* and Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura.* Homer's *Odyssey* tells the well-known tale of the golden net, in which Venus and Mars are caught in the act by Vulcan, and Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* begins with an evocation to Venus, begging her to pacify her lover, Mars.[362] These two poems were very popular and were a source of inspiration for Vergil.[363] Other Latin poets made frequent reference to Venus' affairs, so her extramarital behaviour was well known in popular culture. Vergil's suppression of these affairs is a noticeable departure from Venus' poetic nature.

[360] Verg. *Aen.* 5. 24-25, 413, 639.
[361] Hallett (2020) 116-117.
[362] Hom. *Od.* 8.256-366; Lucr. 1.1-49.
[363] Warden (2000) 83-92; Knauer (1981) 71-84; Clausen (1964) 1.

The goddess' adultery is further subverted by Vergil as he recounts Vulcan's affair when Evander relates the narrative of the birth of Cacus, Vulcan's son by another woman.[364] Not only is Vergil dismissing Venus' affairs, but by emphasizing the sexual exploits of her husband, he places the god and goddess on an equal playing field; Venus is no longer the adulterous goddess with a wronged husband, but also the wronged wife of an adulterous god. Her sexual dalliances with other men are forgotten in favour of the punishment her husband suffered for his affair. This also plays into Augustus' morality laws, as now adultery is not only illegal and punishable in the public eye, but Vergil presents supernatural consequences for the gods who commit it as well. The adulterous blame is then shifted from Augustus' ancestress to another god, further suppressing the erotic nature of the goddess while elevating her maternal and matrimonial aspects.[365]

There is one scene within the *Aeneid* that scholars continue to debate; this concerns the role of Venus' sexuality in relation to her son, Aeneas. When Venus has secured the promise of Aeneas' success from Jupiter, she approaches him in disguise to guide him to Carthage. Dressed as an unwed maiden, Aeneas mistakes her for Diana, goddess of the hunt, before realizing that it is Venus in disguise.[366] This scene mirrors the introduction of Venus and Anchises in the *Homeric Hymn of Aphrodite,* leading to the suggestion that Venus is approaching Aeneas as she approached his father, as a potential sexual partner.[367] Others suggest that Venus is giving her son a sneak peek of the woman who waits for him in Carthage.[368] Others still have entirely

[364] Verg. *Aen.* 8.193-226.
[365] Hallett (2020) 118.
[366] Verg. *Aen.* 1.305-417.
[367] *hAphro.* 54-110; Gladhill (2012) 159-168; Reckford (1995); Olson (2012) 55-61; Hardie (2006) 25-41; Oliensis (1997) 294-311; Cyrino (1993): 219-230.
[368] Both women appear as young unmarried maidens and are compared to Artemis, Venus here and Dido at *Aen.* 1. 498-504; Hallett (2020) 114; Oliensis (1997); Wilhelm (1987) 43-48.

dismissed the erotic undertones of the scene, since gods in Greek and Roman epic often use disguises to meet with mortals, regardless of relation.[369] Another possibility is that the reference to the *Homeric Hymn* is not meant to invoke purely erotic tones, but rather remind the reader of the nature of the relationship between Anchises, Aeneas' father, and his mother, Venus. In the *Hymn,* Venus disguises herself as an unwed maiden who was sent by Mercury to marry Anchises and begin a family with him. Venus presents herself as Anchises' lawfully wedded wife and they lie together in a pseudo-wedding night.[370] It is only the next morning when Venus reveals herself and she informs Anchises that if he were immortal, she would have married him right then, thereby implying that she is not currently married to Vulcan and is therefore, not adulterous.[371] Vergil does more than reference Venus' sexuality when mirroring this scene, he reminds the reader that according to Homeric tradition, Venus and Anchises did not have an affair, but a marriage ruined by mortality. Anchises is even acknowledged in the epic as 'deemed worthy of a proud union with Venus'.[372] By presenting their union in this way, Vergil is once again suppressing Venus' affairs and setting her up as the matriarch of a blended family, having lost her husband, Anchises, yet still responsible for their son. This scene, and its debated sexuality, perfectly represents the multiplicity of Venus' aspects within Vergil. She embodies the sexual, the dynastic, and the maternal in one, recalling the pre-Augustan Venus while simultaneously presenting a new interpretation of the goddess in Augustan Rome.

Not only do Venus' relationships with her husband and sons represent the ideal Roman mother, but her unions with Anchises and Vulcan, as well as her role in the seduction and

[369] Keith (2020) 246-247; Smith (1988) 161-178; Wlosok (1967) 106; cf. Hom. *Od.* 13. 320-233; Ov. *Met.* 8. 612-727; *hDem.* 212-232.
[370] *hAphro.* 126-127.
[371] *hAphro.* 241-243.
[372] Verg. *Aen.* 3.475.

remarriage of Dido, complements the contemporary discourse surrounding marriage in Rome. When Venus sends Cupid to ensure Dido falls in love with Aeneas, she must overcome Dido's faithfulness to her recently deceased husband, Sychaeus.[373] Venus has to usurp the continuing obligation Dido has towards her virtue as a *univira* in order to secure Aeneas' safety in Carthage.[374] In Rome, the longstanding virtue of a woman who only married once and remained dedicated to her husband long after his death, an *univira,* was idealized and celebrated in society.[375] After the reforms of Augustus, and the social discourse surrounding remarriage and childbearing, *univirae* are no longer ideal, but a problem to be solved.[376] In Vergil, the dedicated *univira* is usurped by passionate love for her potential new husband, but also by the appearance of his son, Ascanius.[377] Children, as the reason for Roman marriage, are evidence of one's fertility and a token of conjugal love.[378] Cupid, in disguise as the young boy, entices Dido not just through divine means, but by acting as evidence of Aeneas' ability to father a child.[379] This is especially successful in Dido's seduction, as her union with Sychaeus was barren.[380] Venus uses Cupid in disguise to usurp the ideals of the *univira,* enticing Dido into remarriage for the sake of childbearing.[381] The *Aeneid* presents remarriage as a dutiful and fulfilling act for a woman, encouraging those who remain loyal to their first husbands to reconsider. By seducing Dido, Venus uses her role as the goddess of sex and love to ensure her son's safety through Dido's affections, but also persuades a faithful wife to remarry. This is not a role Venus often

[373] Verg. *Aen.* 4.322-324.
[374] Gutting (2006) 265; Putnam (1998) 189-207.
[375] Val. Max. 2.1.3; Liv. 10.23.3-10; Cat. 111.1; Prop. 4.11.36, cf. 4.11.68; Tac. *Ann.* 2.86; *ILS* 4984, 8527, 8559.
[376] This is not to say the ideal did not live on in literary tradition, but it was no longer emphasised in Roman rhetoric as it had once been: Treggiari (1991) 232–237; Humbert (1972) 59–75.
[377] While the term *univira* does not appear in the *Aeneid,* the term by definition applies to Dido.
[378] Treggiari (1991) 3–13.
[379] Verg. *Aen.* 4.33; Gutting (2006) 265-267.
[380] Verg. *Aen.* 4.68; Phinney (1965) 355-359 recounts the various ancient sources on their relationship and lack of children.
[381] Verg. *Aen.* 1.709-722.

plays and seems to connect directly to the Augustan discourse surrounding widowhood during Vergil's lifetime.[382]

Venus in Vergil is unlike any Venus written before his time. The adulterous goddess of sex and lust is rewritten as a caring and strong mother who uses her various aspects to ensure her son's safety and further his political career. The parts of Venus' mythology that no longer suit the *genetrix* of the Julian family are suppressed and overwritten, while her role as the mother of Aeneas is brought to the forefront. Venus becomes the quintessential Roman mother dealing with the complications of a blended family and ensuring Aeneas' fate through divine intervention and familial connections. Her concern for his legacy and safety reflects her maternal aspects, while her sexual aspects are used to better Aeneas' chances of success. Her affairs, while referenced by the existence of her various children, are glossed over (or reworked into pseudo-marriages) while her relationship with her own husband reflects the interactions of a blended family's matriarch. Venus, reflecting the changes in legal and social discourse during Vergil's life, has emerged from the epic as the perfect Augustan goddess.

Horace

Rather than the full transformation in Vergil, Horace's changing portrayal of Venus within his *Odes* exemplifies the transformation Venus went through under Augustan influence.[383] Horace wrote four books of *Odes*, published in two collections in 23 and 13. The first collection contained books one to three, while the second consisted only of book four. It is important to

[382] Tit. Ulp. 14.1; Suet. *Aug.* 34.1; Morrell (2020) 92; Grubbs (2019) 114; Stahl (2016) 222-226; McGinn (1998) 74; Parkin (1992) 13.
[383] Horace's other works have negligible mentions of Venus in relation to months or compliments. The *Carmen Saeculare* of 17 is the only other notable mention, in which a quick reference is made to Augustus' familial connection to the goddess.

note that though the *Odes* one, two, and three were published in 23, they were likely written over a longer span of time as separate collections and then compiled for publication.[384] As a Latin lyric poet, Horace writes on the topics of love, sex, and beauty, with a few dedicatory poems to his patron, Maecenas, and other political figures.[385] For Horace, writing during Augustus' initial rise to power and the peace that followed, poetry walked a fine line between a well-entrenched genre filled with passionate affairs, and a means of voicing support for the *princeps* and his reforms. As the goddess of love, sex, and beauty, Venus serves as a muse for love poets, as well as someone to thank or blame when affairs are not quite what the author expected.[386] Despite his favoured genre and own status as a bachelor, Horace was a vocal supporter of Augustus' moral reforms.[387] While Venus is not mentioned frequently in Horace's work, her brief appearances within his four books of *Odes* speak to the transformation of the goddess during Augustus' rule. The epithets, references, and characteristics of Venus in each book of the *Odes* represents this conflicting combination of dedication to the genre and dedication to Augustus. Venus' role within each book is indicative of the different periods and social discourse within Rome and its literary circles at the time of writing, providing a view of her transformation.

In the first book of *Odes*, Horace is aware of the multiple faces that Venus wears as well as her contradicting roles in poetry and Augustan Rome. His first three references to the goddess celebrate her different roles within the city and in nature, before introducing Venus in her poetic form as the cause of the poet's love and heartbreak for the rest of the book. The first book of

[384] Hutchinson (2002) 517-537 argues strongly for this dating of the books based on events mentioned in each, as well as the titles and dedications given to individuals. Various poems within the *Odes* have been dated to specific events by many scholars, though the publication date is not often called into question: Schmidt (1988); Wilkinson (1956); Mackay (1932).
[385] These are common themes in the poetry of the time, seen in Vergil, Tibullus, and Propertius. On Latin lyric and elegy under Augustus in general, see Spentzou (2013); Merriam (2006); White (1993).
[386] For the role of Aphrodite in Greek poetry, see Breitenberger (2007); Boedecker (1974).
[387] For an overview on Horace's relationship to Augustus, see Pp. 9-15.

Odes, which Horace likely began shortly after the battle of Actium, is a mix of support for Augustus and other politicians of the age, a call for a return to Roman tradition, and love poems regarding various affairs of Horace and his friends.[388] Within the first four poems, Venus is mentioned three times with distinct and different epithets that identify her as Venus Erycina, Cyprian Venus, and Cytherean Venus. The 'smiling lady of Eryx' is asked to restore the Romans to their previous glory in *Odes* 1.2, a poem dedicated to the saviour of the state, the father and first citizen. She is accompanied in this poem by Apollo and Mars, taking her place as one of the Augustan deities who helped Augustus bring peace to Rome. The reference to Venus Erycina is especially fitting here, as her original introduction into the city was in hopes of winning the Second Punic War and bringing peace to Rome.[389]

Horace begins his *Odes* by invoking Venus as a protective-ancestral deity, acknowledging the serious, political role she plays within the Empire, so different from the role she typically plays in poetry. In the following poem, Venus is called upon as the goddess who rules over Cyprus to protect Vergil on his journeys.[390] Here, Venus is not called upon to protect the *patria*, but a friend of Horace as he enters her sphere of influence: Greece and the sea.[391] This invocation of Venus in reference to Vergil also recalls the poet's epic, the *Aeneid,* and the goddess' ability to guide and protect those at sea. The next poem in Horace's first three books is 1.4, in which Venus is referred to by another aspect of her worship: Cytherea. In this poem, Horace slowly transitions from the serious topics of his introduction to those more common in poetry. As winter transitions to spring, Cytherean Venus leads the dancers while the Graces and

[388] Dating is based on Hutchinson's (2002) analysis.
[389] Hor. *Odes.* 1.2.33; Carter (1976) 68.
[390] Hor. *Odes.* 1.3.
[391] Carter (1976) 69.

Nymphs stomp their feet.[392] Here, Horace celebrates Venus in her aspects as a fertility and nature goddess, as well as her role in the transition from winter to spring.

For the next 85 poems of *Odes* books one through three, Venus is mentioned another twenty-three times, always in her role as an erotic deity. After his serious introduction, Horace returns to the realm of poetry and with it, the playful, lust-filled Venus who bestows her gifts and curses without rhyme or reason on Horace, as well as his friends and lovers. It is not until the fourth book of *Odes* that Venus returns to the serious, Augustan Venus with which Horace began his poetry. Horace was a staunch supporter of Augustus' moral reforms, celebrating the return to ancient morals and the *pax Augusta.*[393] The role of Venus in his final book of *Odes* reflects this support, written and published after the *Lex Julia* of 19/18, as Horace turns away from his (and Venus') sexuality and erotic passion. In the first poem of the fourth book, Horace has grown old and tired of the games Venus plays. He begs her to be lenient on his heart and revoke the passion she had once placed there, telling Venus to find a younger man to bestow her passions upon.[394] This signals the return of Venus to her place as a protective, ancestral deity, hanging up her erotic nature alongside Horace's.[395] The next references to Venus within the work continue this transition of Venus' nature. She is next mentioned in relation to the aftermath of the Trojan War and her role in the foundation of Rome, specifically referring to the passage in the *Aeneid* in which she pleads for her son's success.[396] The last reference to Venus is in the final poem of Horace's *Odes,* as Horace calls for his audience to sing the praises of exemplary leaders, 'of

[392] Hor. *Odes.* 1.4.5-8.
[393] Hor. *Carm. Saec.* 18-20; *Odes.* 3.6.17-20, 3.24.27-29.
[394] Hor. *Odes.* 4.1.
[395] Putnam (1986) 42-43; Carter (1976) 69-70.
[396] Hor. *Odes.* 4.6.21.

Troy and Anchises and the children of gentle Venus'.[397] Within these poems, Venus has given up her erotic nature to become a mother, just as an Augustan woman was expected to do.

By the publication of *Odes* 4, the moral reforms and Vergil's version of Venus have had a clear influence on Horace and his perception of Venus' role in the peace and prosperity of Rome.[398] Horace's Venus has changed from *Odes* books one to four, exemplifying the influence that Augustus and Vergil had on the popular reception of Venus. Within Horace's *Odes,* Venus puts aside her childish things and grows up to take the place of a *matrona.* The playful goddess of lust and love poetry was the pre-Augustan Venus, a young girl untethered by morality and duty. By the end of Horace's fourth *Ode,* Venus has become an embodiment of Augustan femininity. It is within the fourth book of *Odes* that Horace must reconcile the playful goddess of his elegies with the mother of the Roman Empire, a transition he manages gracefully by acknowledging the erotic nature of Venus before claiming that he is too old for such passions, and instead turns to more serious matters, leaving Venus behind.

Ovid

> But let it happen to me, that when I die, I wilt in Venus' act,
> dying in the middle and during the work; and say to anyone weeping at my burial:
> 'That death was so fitting of his life!'
>
> Ov. *Am.* 2.10.35-39.

As a younger, more passionate man, Ovid was not so easily turned away from Venus and her erotic nature. In his early works, Venus remains a playful and sexual goddess, steeped in elegiac tradition and taking inspiration from previous Greek and Latin poets. The *Amores, Ars Amatoria,* and *Heroides* all fall into a category of Ovid's elegiac works that are seemingly distant

[397] Hor. *Odes.* 4.15.32.
[398] See Putnam (1986) for an intensive study on Horace's fourth *Ode* and for Vergil's influence on Horace.

from historical and political influences — a continuation of the traditional Venus. In Ovid's early works, Venus fulfills the role she has always played. She is the deity lovers appeal to, give thanks to, or curse, depending on their success in romantic endeavours. When Venus is a character within the poems, she likewise fulfills her traditional roles as an avid adulteress and cause of strife among unsuspecting heroes of myth. This portrayal of Venus was not surprising; the goddess of love did preside over love poetry, but Ovid's continued use of Venus' character within elegy directly opposed the Augustan image of the goddess.

The question of interpreting Venus in Ovid's early poetry comes down to intention and reception. By following elegiac tradition, was Ovid intentionally referencing Venus' immoral behaviour to comment on Augustus and his moral legislation or was this simply how the poetry is received due to the political climate it was written in? A common assumption in scholarship is that any poetry written in Augustan Rome is related to the *princeps* and his moral legislation just as any reference to Venus is an allusion to Augustus and the Julian family.[399] This assumption, however, ignores intent. Readers of Ovid may have seen these comparisons and connections, but Ovid's use of Venus was not always meant to be political or subversive; sometimes, it was simply traditional.[400] Venus wears many faces within the Ovidian imagination. Therefore, using one aspect of Venus in a poem does not necessarily influence all other versions of Venus within Ovid's works.

Venus in the *Amores* shows clear signs of continuing the elegiac tradition, with any subversive undertones coming from her suggested absence.[401] Of the 49 elegies split over five

[399] Merriam (2006) 57-58; Sharrock (1994) 101, 113; Greene (1994) 344-350.
[400] For Venus as subversive, see Merriam (2006) 58-84; Johnson (1996) 125-149. For Venus as both subversive and traditionally elegiac, see Stephens (1958) 286-300. For Ovid continuing elegiac tradition, see Miller (2004) 162.
[401] This is how Merriam (2006) 57-75 presents Ovid's subversion within the *Amores*.

(later three) books, Venus appears in at least 20 of them. She is equally present in the *Ars Amatoria.* For most of the *Amores* and *Ars Amatoria,* Venus represents sex, beauty, and clandestine relationships. Ovid tells us how Venus would be beautiful no matter her colouring, that eunuchs are deprived of Venus' delights, and that Venus has gifted (or cursed) him with too many love interests.[402] He also mentions Apelles' painting of Venus Anadyomene throughout his works, with various sexual implications.[403] These references fall into the pattern of elegiac tradition, without changes to Venus or commentary on the political situation in which Ovid was writing.

There are few places within Ovid's early poems where Venus could appear as commentary on Augustus, that is unless every reference to Venus is meant to be subversive.[404] While Ovid may critique Augustus and his morality laws in some of his passages, his use of Venus is generally relegated to the elegiac world. It has been argued that her relationship with Cupid is meant to comment on Augustus. However, its depiction may have also been influenced by Vergil's portrayal of the mother-son duo.[405] Ovid presents Cupid as the most powerful deity, with Venus as his influential but powerless companion.[406] Venus, in this interpretation, is belittled and overpowered by her own son. She cannot act on her own and loses the threatening edge that the goddess holds in elegiac poetry, relegated to the sphere of pleasure and humour.[407] Her influence, however, falls in line with the influence Venus holds in the *Aeneid*. Venus uses her status as a mother to instruct Cupid, and he obligingly acts on her behalf. This theme of

[402] Ov. *Am.* 2.4, 3, 10, 3.2.
[403] Ov. *Am.* 1.14, *Ars Am.* 3.4, 3.9.
[404] This is the reading Merriam (2006) 61 and Sharrock (1994) 101 recommend.
[405] Stephens (1958) and Merriam (2006) 62-77 argue the former.
[406] Ov. *Am.* 1.2, 1.8.
[407] Merriam (2006) 67-72 argues that Venus' role is subverted in descriptions of Cupid, placing the son above the mother, and therefore Augustus is at the bottom of the political hierarchy dominated by his amorous older brother, cf. Little (1972); Wilkinson (1955).

maternal power becomes increasingly popular within Ovid's works, culminating in several poems in the *Metamorphoses* that focus on different aspects of motherhood. The interpretation of Venus and Cupid's relationship with her also ignores the multiplicity of Venus within Ovid, as Cupid is an equally important elegiac figure, and Venus is often humorous in poetry. Venus can be a feared, powerful goddess in parts of Ovid's work without erasing Cupid's power or her own poetic tradition.

One aspect of Venus that remains with Ovid throughout his works is her connection to and active participation in adultery. Within Ovidian poetry, references to Venus' affairs are frequent; Venus and Mars are often set up as the exemplum of adultery and desire, while Venus and Adonis represent the tragedy of lost love, and Venus and Vulcan represent a pair of unmatched lovers who are trapped by marriage.[408] Venus and Anchises are never mentioned, only implied. This may be because their affair was not romantic or tragic enough for Ovid or due to the connection Augustus held with that particular bloodline. After all, Venus as an adulteress is a common theme within her mythology and elegiac poetry. Ovid uses Venus as an example for other women to follow in the third book of his *Ars Amatoria,* dedicated to teaching seduction to women: 'and though Venus was granted Adonis, whom she still mourns: from whom did she have her Aeneas and Harmonius? Go by the example of the goddesses...'.[409] References to adultery and the goddess' sexual proclivities were not necessarily comments on the *lex Julia,* as Ovid does not deviate greatly from the traditional portrayals of Venus, nor does he include commentary on the laws when relating them to his audience. Only one poem within the *Ars*

[408] Oliensis (2019) 136-149.
[409] Ov. *Ar. Am.* 3.85-86.

Amatoria goes beyond the traditional scope of Venus and her lovers, where Ovid relates the story of Venus and Mars caught by Vulcan in a net.[410]

The story of Vulcan, Venus, Mars, and the net could be read as a step-by-step guide on how Augustus' marriage laws dealt with adultery and the unintended consequences which arose from them.[411] First, a third party informs Vulcan of his wife's adultery, as the law demands, unless they wish to be brought in on similar charges. Then Vulcan, who can no longer legally ignore the deceit, has to act immediately or be charged as a pimp. He then catches them in the act, outing himself as a cuckold. He calls all the gods to witness their humiliation, only to be equally humiliated. As a result of their exposure, Venus and Mars both relegate themselves to islands, going into pseudo-exile. The result, in Ovid at least, is that the lovers, after their exile, become brazen in their affair, therefore claiming that the legislation does not enforce morality. It just brings more shame on the husband than on the wife, at least at a divine level.[412] The story of the net is repeated or referenced by Ovid numerously, as well as by other elegiac poets, but it is only in the *Ars Amatoria* that Vulcan's actions can be read as those of a Roman man catching his wife *in flagrante delicto.* Here, Venus is the punished adulterous wife of a good Roman man, a role she does not usually take on. Ovid's poem shows the negative side of Augustus' morality laws, using Venus as an example of why the laws would not have the impact the *princeps* thinks they will, but rather will allow adulterous relationships to be displayed in public, humiliating all involved.[413]

[410] Ov. *Ar. Am.* 2.561-600.
[411] Sharrock (1994) 121.
[412] Sharrock (1994) 121-122.
[413] Sharrock (1994) 113-122. Cf. Sen. *Ben.* 6.32.1; McGinn (1998) 212-215.

An argument could be made for the subversive nature of *Amores* 1.8, in which 'Venus rules the city of her Aeneas'.[414] Her reign is peaceful and decadent, as Mars has been sent to wage war in far-off lands. This reign allows for all the deceptive, mercenary behaviour of young women to get what they can from their lovers. She presides over a city ruled by moral decadence, perhaps ironically commenting on the moral legislation of her powerful descendant — Augustus.[415] She ensures the gods are deaf to her games so that lovers may act as they will without fear of punishment. Later in the *Ars Amatoria,* when Ovid relates the story of Venus and Mars in the net, Venus forbids anyone trying to catch lovers in the act so that no lovers may suffer the humiliation she has.[416] Venus herself is subverting the morality laws, assisting in the adulterous endeavours of Rome's citizens.

When Ovid is not in dialogue with Augustus' moral legislation, Venus continues her regularly scheduled tormenting of the elegiac lover. She keeps Ovid in her shadow, writing elegy despite his attempts to experiment in other genres.[417] Ovid's desires and sexual prowess are tied directly to her goodwill. She seduces all men to stray from their work to enter her realm.[418] The goddess becomes a much more powerful, foreboding figure in the *Heroides,* recalling the cruelty of Aphrodite in Greek poetry and her role in many of the tragic heroes' and heroines' lives, most notably Hippolytus.[419] Within the *Heroides,* Venus plays a minor role as the cause of strife, specifically in Helen and Dido's letters, but these appearances take their influence from Homer and Hesiod.[420] They are by no means a transformative use of the goddess. While these references

[414] Ov. *Am.* 1.8.41-42.
[415] Merriam (2006) 75.
[416] Ov. *Ars. Am.* 2.561-600.
[417] Ov. *Am.* 2.18.
[418] Ov. *Rem. Am.* 135-144.
[419] Eur. *Hipp.*
[420] For an overview of the intertextuality between Ovid and Hesiod, see Ziogas (2013) 20-54. For Ovid and Homer, see Boyd (2017), especially 181-260.

can certainly be interpreted as subversive, they remain traditional in their portrayal of Venus and her sphere of influence.

This interpretative division softens in Ovid's later works, where Venus takes on a different tone as Ovid moves away from elegiac tradition and into the *Metamorphoses.* Just as Venus goes through a transformation under Augustus, she is transformed within Ovid, from the elegiac, erotic goddess to the dynastic goddess of the earth, sky, and underworld, as all beings are controlled by love. This Venus also takes on the maternal, ambitious aspect introduced by Vergil with an Ovidian flair. Written in 8 CE, this poem steps away from elegy and towards epic, responding to the influence of Vergil's *Aeneid* and the growing uncertainty of Ovid's standing with Augustus; after all, he was exiled only a few months after the epic's publication. The Venus of the *Metamorphoses* is no longer the playful goddess who caused the poet's passions and heartbreaks but a goddess forming a dynasty where she is above all gods. She punishes and rewards her subjects as she sees fit, acting as judge, jury, and executioner against those who would disobey her and, more importantly, against those who would take their sexuality into their own hands.[421]

When we first meet Venus in the *Metamorphoses,* she is trapped in a net alongside her lover while her husband and family mock her.[422] The story is a repeat of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria,* where Sol reports Venus and Mars' affair to Vulcan, who fashions a net and traps the lovers so that the other gods might laugh at them. In this version, however, Ovid changes the ending, and the overall message, of the myth: Vulcan is not the ultimate object of ridicule, nor does Venus exile herself in shame as an adulteress. Instead, she plots her revenge against Sol for his part in

[421] Johnson (1996) 139.
[422] Ov. *Met.* 4.167-189. Venus does appear beforehand in minor references, but this is her first narrative appearance.

Vulcan's trap, ensuring 'he who hurt her secret love would be equally hurt in love'.[423] Here, Venus has reverted to the cruelty of Aphrodite, punishing those who would interfere in her affairs. In reacting to the oppressive nature of Augustus' laws and Venus' transformation within Vergil's *Aeneid,* Ovid takes the goddess' vindictive nature into a new domain: motherhood and dynastic ambition.

The cruel dynastic nature of Ovid's Venus next appears in a myth the goddess of love had not been associated with prior to the *Metamorphoses*: that of Pluto and Proserpina.[424] In this retelling, Venus spots Pluto wandering across Sicily and sends her son, Cupid, to shoot him with a lustful arrow and place the god under their control. Ovid's Venus is presented as the empress of a dynasty and Cupid as her loyal second-in-command:

> You rule the gods above and Jupiter himself, you conquer and control the gods of the sea
> and the god who rules the deities of the sea himself.
> Why does Tartarus hold back? Why do you not advance your
> mother's Empire, and your own? The third part of the world is at stake...
> Ov. *Met.* 5. 369-372.

As the manifestation of love and lust, Venus controls the sky and sea through her command over Jupiter and Neptune. The only corner of the world she does not hold is that of Pluto, and so she plots to force Pluto under her domain. The terminology Ovid uses throughout this passage is very political in nature, emphasizing the goddess' imperial commands as those of an ambitious dynastic ruler eager to enlarge her domain.[425] Venus complains that not only has this third of the world been denied to her, but she is also losing her grip among the Olympians. The virgin goddesses, Athena and Diana, are beginning to influence younger deities and mortals to follow in

[423] Ov. *Met.* 4.191-192.
[424] No surviving text prior to Ovid mentions Venus as a pivotal character in this myth, and it is generally accepted that Ovid is the creator of this version: McAuley (2016) 143-144.
[425] Johnson (1996) 127-128.

their vows of chastity.[426] Unfortunately for Proserpina, who aspires to be like the virgin goddesses, Venus has other plans.[427] By forcing Pluto to fall in love with Proserpina and carry her off to be his bride, Venus' plan is twofold: she gains control of Tartarus and punishes Proserpina for her refusal of Venus' realm.[428] The theme of Venus/Aphrodite as a punisher of those who reject her realm is not original to Ovid, but they are usually a perceived personal slight (Hippolytus or Helen, for example), rather than a rejection of her imperial power.[429] The myth of Dis and Proserpina, which Ovid repeats in other works and is popular among ancient authors, can also be read as a struggle for maternal power.[430] Here, motherhood is not a passive experience opposed to and outside male politics, but the manipulation, use, and abuse of female agency and sexuality. This mirrors the maternal experience of women in Rome, acting as intermediaries in the political sphere. Venus ruthlessly uses her maternal relationship with Cupid as a form of political capital, spreading her Empire at the expense of another's sexual freedom. Ovid's myth demonstrates different ways motherhood can be a basis for female agency within the family and in the political sphere.

Venus' actions within *Metamorphoses* 5 play into a larger theme of the poem: Venus is the ultimate divine authority, ruler of all corners of the world, and to challenge her is to be severely punished. She represents the convergence of imperial, divine, and sexual power; Venus will expand her Empire no matter the cost and force those who deny her realm to obey. The emphasis on this power is furthered by Ovid's removal of Venus from other stories of sexual

[426] Ov. *Met.* 5.375-376.
[427] Ov. *Met.* 5.376-377.
[428] For Venus and her plans of underworld domination, see Barchiesi (1999); Johnson (1996); Hinds (1987) 103-113, 133-134; Otis (1970) 52-59. Johnson (1996) also examines this scene in depth as a commentary on Augustus' imperial power and attempted control of sexuality, specifically as it relates to chastity and the violation of virginity.
[429] Eur. *Hipp*; Hom. *Il.* 3.4.10-20.
[430] McAuley (2016) 143-150.

misconduct within the *Metamorphoses*.[431] Even when she is involved in Hippomenes' pursuit of Atalanta, she is not the main cause of any character's actions; she aided Hippomenes when he appealed to her by helping him to emerge victorious over Atalanta in the competition, but then she punished the two for not honouring her properly. Venus successfully violated the chastity that Atalanta had sworn herself to, but this was not the main reason for her to have been pursued by Hippomenes. The punishment of Proserpina sits firmly within the larger context of dynastic control. This perception of Venus' power, written after nearly 40 years of Augustan rule, cannot avoid being interpreted as a commentary on the *princeps* and the disregard of his morality laws for any right to sexual self-determination.[432]

Beyond the goddess of sexuality, who rules all corners of the earth, Ovid presents Venus as a maternal figure when she is next introduced. Venus' maternal ambitions arise in the final two books of the *Metamorphoses,* beginning with the conclusion of the Ovidian *Aeneid*.[433] Since Ovid avoids retelling the myths featured in Vergil, instead relying on thematic affinity to allude to Aeneas' wanderings after the Trojan War, Venus and her son are not prominently featured until the final moments of Ovid's *Aeneid*. After Aeneas has defeated Turnus, Venus approaches her father, Jupiter, and begs for him to be deified:

> O Father, who has never been cruel to me at any time, now be most gentle,
> I beg you, and to my Aeneas, who from our blood made you a grandfather,
> give some divinity, however small, O excellent one, provided that you give any at all.
> Ov. *Met.* 14.586-590.[434]

[431] The stories of Cyane (Ov. *Met.* 5.409-437) and Arethusa (Ov. *Met.* 5.572-641) sandwich the myth of Pluto and Proserpina, emphasizing Venus' involvement or lack thereof. Ovid also removes Venus from other traditional stories within the *Metamorphoses* where there is no dynastic motivation, such as Myrrha: Ov. *Met.* 5.298-502; Knox (1986) 61.
[432] Johnson (1996) 139-145 strongly and successfully argues for this interpretation of *Metamorphoses* 5.
[433] A standard phrase dedicated to *Metamorphoses* 13.623-14.608, cf. Ellsworth (1986) 27.
[434] Galinsky (1975) 170 sees this line as a humorous comment by Ovid on the lack of importance Aeneas will have as a god, but the line reads as a mother simply begging for her son's continued survival, no matter the amount of divinity granted.

This scene recalls the supplication of Venus in the *Aeneid*, with some notable changes.[435] All the gods consent to Aeneas' deification, and Venus brings her son to have his mortality washed away. She then bestows godhood upon him and stylizes him as Indiges, to be honoured by the Romans with temples and sacrifices. The sexual Venus has been cast aside for a maternal Venus, begging her father to ensure her son is made a god. This short moment in the *Metamorphoses* is the only time Venus acts as a mother without politics or dynastic growth as a motivator. The departure from her Ovidian character speaks to the influence of the Vergilian maternal Venus' relationship with Aeneas on Ovid's work.

With this brief insight into her maternal side, Ovid quickly turns to a more patriotic interpretation of Venus.[436] After she has raised Aeneas to the ranks of the gods, Ovid tells of the Sabine invasions of Rome and how, when Juno opens the gates to the city for the Sabines to enter, Venus alone notices and has the gate closed by allies to protect her city.[437] This episode is short, but firmly places Venus as a guardian of the Romans, watching out for her descendants. After this, Venus appears once more to deify her descendant.[438] *Alma* Venus arrives in Rome in an attempt to stop the assassination of Caesar, hiding him in a fog cloud as the Homeric Aphrodite did to Aeneas. But unfortunately, she is too late to stop fate. Jupiter, in a show of pity for the goddess, allows her to look upon the upcoming fate of her descendants, implying Caesar must fall for Augustus to rise.[439] Upon hearing of the fate that will befall her descendant, 'so, all in vain, anxious Venus threw her words to the heavens, and the gods above were moved...' and though they could not reverse his fate, they agree to raise Caesar to heaven.[440] Venus is left to

[435] Venus' supplication in the *Aeneid* is discussed on Pp. 72-73.
[436] Stephens (1958) 299-300.
[437] Ov. *Met.* 14.780-789.
[438] Ov. *Met.* 15.843-851.
[439] For Venus' connection to deification in the *Metamorphoses,* see Gladhill (2012).
[440] Ov. *Met.* 15.779-780

escort his soul, leaving the comet behind as evidence of his deification.[441] In these moments, Venus has secured the fate of the Roman people.

By the end of his life, Ovid's Venus had come full circle. Unfortunately for Ovid, Venus abandoned him as he made his way to Tomis.[442] His *carmen et error* resulted in a series of poems written about his exile and numerous letters exchanged as Ovid laments his fate, in which Venus appears in nothing more than traditional or topographical references.[443] His early poetry presents Venus through the traditional elegiac lens, with some changes and commentary that could be connected to the Augustan moral reforms. For the most part, she is the somewhat naughty goddess who plays with the poets as she sees fit. Ovid's retelling of Venus, Mars, and the net is one of the only clear indications of Augustus' reforms influencing Ovid's early works. The episode presents the downside of the legislation, emphasizing the husband's humiliation and the affair's publicity. By the time Ovid wrote the *Metamorphoses,* Venus had taken on a new aspect in his imagination. Her dynastic ambition mirrors Augustus', controlling sexuality and punishing self-determination as the *lex Julia* does. She also takes on the role of a politically ambitious mother through her relationships with Cupid, Aeneas, and Caesar, and her protection of Rome during the Sabine invasion. Written decades after his earlier works, these changes present the evolving relationship with both Venus and morality in Rome under Augustus.

Conclusion

When Augustus rose to power in 31, the lasting influence of his presence on Venus and her portrayals would have been unimaginable. Material culture and literature shifted to

[441] Ov. *Met.* 15. 780-782; Suet. *Iul.* 88.
[442] Evans (1983) 93-94, 122.
[443] Ov. *Pont.*1.3.80, 1.10.33, 3.1.117, 5.1.29, *Tr.* 1.2.5-10, 2. 261-262, 295-300, 377-378, 527.

accommodate (or comment on) his role as *princeps* and his moral reforms, placing Venus at the centre of his pantheon and the transforming expectations of femininity in the newfound Empire. In public art, the goddess' sexuality was put aside in favour of matronly dress and the representation of a good Roman family. Her relationship with Mars in statuary took on a distinctly patriotic flair, hinting at, but not explicitly connecting to, their affairs; they were instead celebrated as the two founding deities of Rome and protectors of Augustus' great city of marble. In literature, traditional portrayals of Venus were mostly set aside in favour of a maternal Venus, spearheaded by Vergil's *Aeneid*. This depiction would be picked up and adapted by Horace and Ovid to further comment on the reign of Augustus, specifically his moral reforms. By Augustus' death in 14 CE, Venus had been thoroughly transformed; no longer a Roman Aphrodite, she was now a Roman *matrona*, the *genetrix* of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, and an empress of Rome.

The *lex Julia* and Augustus' familial connection to the goddess meant that Venus' outspoken sexuality and extramarital nature were no longer acceptable. Sculpture and art from the period reflect Venus' classicizing, moral reformation. Depictions of the goddess focus on the modesty of her dress and her association with Cupid, emphasizing the familial relationship the two share, and her role in the prosperity and fertility of the rebuilt Roman state. This relationship and role are further emphasized by Vergil in his *Aeneid*, as Venus becomes a good Roman matron who would do anything to protect and further the political career of her son, Aeneas. Within the epic, Venus' sexuality is repressed and repurposed as a tool for dynastic and political growth. Her power now stems from her relationships with the men of her family, reframing Venus' mythological role into that of a Roman mother.

Horace takes a different approach to the Augustan Venus, acknowledging her patriotic roles in Rome within his first three *Odes* before transitioning to a more traditional elegiac Venus. In his later works, however, the Augustan Venus has taken hold of his poetic discourse, and he transitions back to the patriotic and maternal Venus with which he began. Just as Horace gets older and steps away from his sexuality, so too does Venus in his works. Ovid, in many ways, remains the odd one out of the Augustan poets, not quite toeing the Augustan line but not quite remaining in the traditional literary territory. The Ovidian Venus contains many aspects, from traditional adulteress to dynastic conqueror to patriotic *genetrix*. His use of Venus in early poetry speaks to the continuation of tradition and the encroaching influence of Augustan moral reforms, while his Metamorphic Venus exerts her power over the world by controlling sexual behaviour.

Within these three authors' works, Augustus' impact on Venus' literary portrayals becomes evident. For Vergil and Horace, favoured by the emperor and scarred by the years of Civil War, Venus became a symbol of the changes Augustus implemented. Their Venus was a good, politically minded mother and protector of the Roman people, a worthy ancestress to the *princeps*. Vergil's *Aeneid* presented the *lex Julia* as a guide for how to behave as a Roman woman. Venus is the head of a blended family, encouraging and protecting her son's ambitions while engaging in politics through her relationships with men. This Venus maintains her sexual identity in the most basic, maternal sense: she is a woman who can use her sexuality as a tool to further the success of her family. Horace, recognizing the changing character of Venus in popular discourse, acknowledges the changes and somewhat unacceptable behaviour of Augustus' ancestress before returning to her traditional roles. By engaging with Venus' protective and ancestral aspects, Horace can support the reforms of Augustus without losing the expected depictions of Venus within his chosen genre. Ovid, steeped in tradition and youthful

aggravation, embodies the multiple aspects of Venus within his works. The moral reforms add a dynastic component to Venus' character as an angry, vengeful goddess of Greek tradition, but Ovid never loses sight of the goddess' sexual and humorous side. By the end of the Augustan age, Vergil, Horace, and Ovid had transformed Venus into a goddess intricately connected to the reforms and the soon-to-be all-powerful Julio-Claudian Empire.

Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that, since her earliest appearances, Venus has been a tool of political and social discourse, culminating in the goddess being used by poets to negotiate with moral legislation. Her role in the foundation and protection of Rome allowed politicians to associate themselves with the goddess and present themselves as secondary founders of the city. This association, first promoted by Sulla and Pompey, was fully realized by Caesar. His claim to Venus as a political patron and ancestress to his line brought the goddess to the forefront of the Roman political and military scene. When Augustus rose to power, the goddess claimed an important place in the Augustan pantheon. Venus' appearances in poetry, previously untouched by political affiliation, had to suddenly contend with the *princeps*' power and influence. After the introduction of the *lex Julia* and Augustus' own portrayals of the goddess, the poets of his age used Venus as an exemplum of moral (or immoral) behaviour, motherhood, and dynastic pursuit.

Within Rome's changing moral and social discourse under Augustus, Venus' literary depictions adapted to engage with ideals of sexual morality and womanhood. Not only did Augustus' claim to divine ancestry influence portrayals of Venus, but the introduction of the *lex Julia* meant that much of Venus' traditional literary behaviour was not only immoral but illegal. As demonstrated by this thesis' first and third chapters, poets responded to, interacted with, and adapted to the changing discourse by portraying Venus differently. Vergil presents a transformed goddess, a morally upstanding mother who engages in the political and domestic spheres for the betterment of her son, Aeneas. Horace stands on the precipice of change, his Venus straddling the edges of elegy and epic. He recognizes and responds to a political, Augustan goddess before returning to more traditional elegiac matters. Our final source, Ovid, represents an author who appears, on the surface, to be seemingly unphased by the influence of Augustus and other poets.

Closer examination of his works, however, reveals how Ovid's Venus transformed from the traditional goddess of love and sexuality to become an empress in her own right, preventing her subjects' sexual self-determination.

The current thesis counts itself among the relatively small number of studies on the socio-historical context of Venus' Latin literary portrayals. This thesis concentrated on examining only a handful of Augustan authors, focussing on Vergil, Horace, and Ovid. Further study of the goddess is in order. The goddess presents an opportunity for study in interdisciplinary fields as a female figure in a grey area of morality whose appearance in literature can undoubtedly mean more than the author's personal opinion of Augustus. Within the works of Vergil, Horace and Ovid, however, we can see the importance of the goddess' portrayals and how their evolution can reflect the social, political, and moral climate within Rome. Venus, as an example for all women in the age of Augustus, had to grow up and set aside her immoral behaviour, transitioning into an upstanding Roman matron. How each author went about this transformation speaks to their understanding of Roman society and Augustus' new Empire. From her earliest appearance in Rome, Venus has captured the imagination of poets and artists. She wears infinite faces throughout history, and while only one of them is Augustan, that is the one that altered the course of Venus' existence.

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