

STUDY

Whose Augustus? A Bimillennium in Late-1930s Poland and Hungary*

Penelope J. GOODMAN

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9888-0656>

p.j.goodman@leeds.ac.uk

School of Languages, Cultures and Societies, University of Leeds

Penelope J. GOODMAN: Whose Augustus? A Bimillennium in Late-1930s Poland and Hungary

This article examines events held in the late 1930s to mark the bimillennium of Augustus' birth in Poland and Hungary as a contrasting pair of case studies. It demonstrates that Poles, Hungarians and Italians all saw Augustus as part of a shared cultural heritage, but used him to serve different agendas. Italians used Augustus to pursue soft power, but most Polish and Hungarian commemorators were Classicists seeking to promote their subject. While Poles tended to avoid references to modern Italy in their commemorations, Hungarians regularly used Augustus to praise Italy and Fascism. In this po-

* The research on which this article is based was supported by a Leverhulme Trust Research Fellowship. I thank Orsolya Láng, Joel Heyes and the editors of this special issue for feedback and comments on its content. Any mistakes which remain are my own.

liticised context, even supposedly apolitical commemorations of Augustus could involuntarily serve political agendas, confirming his importance and boosting the narratives used by others for political ends.

Keywords: Augustus – Poland – Hungary – 1930s – Mussolini – Fascism – Classical receptions – Roman imperialism

Introduction

In our era, one common means of engaging with the figures of antiquity is the historical anniversary.¹ Though the anniversaries of historical events became important after the First and Second World Wars, the ‘cult of the anniversary’ which developed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries generally centred around the commemoration of individuals.² As a result, it has tended to adhere to the ‘Great Man’ tradition, reinforcing a canon of historical figures and holding them up as examples. This in itself politicises ancient figures, using them to champion particular values or behaviours. But anniversaries can also serve more explicitly political ends. The lavish commemorations held in 1971 to mark Cyrus the Great’s foundation of the Persian empire are one example.³ Mounted by the Shah of Iran, who wished to assert his secular authority and independence from religious clerics, these commemorations deliberately showcased an ancient individual who predated Islam. The Shah celebrated Cyrus as a national hero and monarch, implicitly casting himself as a modern equivalent.

The bimillennium of the Roman emperor Augustus’ birth on 23 September 1938 was celebrated to highly politicised effect by Fascist Italy. But while Italy’s anniversary programme is well known and has been widely studied, little has been written on commemorations of Augustus outside Italy.⁴ Nonetheless, my own re-

1 Key literature: Roland QUINAULT, *The cult of the centenary, c. 1784–1914*, Historical Research 71, 1998, pp. 303–323 (<https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2281.00066>); Holger HOOCK (ed.), *History, Commemoration, and National Preoccupation: Trafalgar 1805–2005*, Oxford 2007; Thomas OTTE (ed.), *The Age of Anniversaries. The Cult of Commemoration, 1895–1925*, London – New York 2018.

2 Ian BURUMA, *Wages of guilt: memories of war in Germany and Japan*, London 1994; R. QUINAULT, *The cult of the centenary*.

3 Bernard LEWIS, *History: remembered, recovered, invented*, Princeton (NJ) 1975, pp. 4–5.

4 Italian commemorations: Luciano CANFORA, *Classicismo e fascismo*, Quaderni di storia 3, 1976, pp. 15–48; Mariella CAGNETTA, *Il mito di Augusto e la ‘rivoluzione’ Fascista*, Quaderni di storia 3, 1976, pp. 139–181; and further below. Beyond Italy, the major exception is Duplá Ansuategui’s work on Spain, e.g. Antonio DUPLÁ ANSUATEGUI, *Augusto y el franquismo*:

search has identified over 200 Augustan bimillennial events held outside Italy in the late 1930s, many of which were in fact organised by Italians as a means of pursuing soft power abroad.⁵ As such, they form a critical context for the Italian domestic commemorations, revealing the extent to which the same activity was also extended to international audiences. But they also provide an opportunity to investigate who else wished to commemorate Augustus at this time, how they used him to advance their own agendas, and how their activity related to that of the Italians.

This article investigates the commemorations held in Poland and Hungary as a contrasting pair of case studies. These examples encompass a substantial corpus of activity, comprising at least thirteen anniversary events in Poland, six in Hungary, and numerous academic publications and newspaper articles. In a global context, this puts them at the higher end of engagement with Augustus' bimillennium. In addition, while some events in both Poland and Hungary were engineered by Italians, the majority were organised by locals. This means it is possible to explore not only how Italians sought to use Augustus in both countries, but also what Poles and Hungarians made of him. Finally, these two countries offer a balance of similarities and differences which allow us to test the effect of different factors on national responses to Augustus. Both are predominantly Catholic countries in eastern Europe. However, while western Hungary is geographically equivalent to ancient Pannonia, no part of Poland ever fell within the Roman empire. Their political situations in the 1930s were also very different. Poland was subject to escalating German demands on its territory, and while its leaders had once hoped that Italy would want to block Germany's territorial ambitions, this was rapidly starting to look unrealistic. Hungary, meanwhile, hoped that Germany and Italy would support its claims to territory taken from it after the First World War, and worked actively to bring the two powers together. These contrasting circumstances make it possible to explore both the extent to which a geographical relationship with the Roman empire affected levels of investment in Augustus, and his role in expressing different political relationships with modern Italy.

ecos del Bimilenario de Augusto en España, Revista de Historiografía 27, 2017, pp. 137–162 (<https://doi.org/10.20318/revhisto.2017.3968>).

- 5 Penelope GOODMAN, *Retrospective Parentage: Augustus as a Father of Europe*, in: Caillan Davenport – Shushma Malik (eds), *Representing Rome's Emperors: Historical and Cultural Perspectives through Time*, Oxford 2024, pp. 277–278 (<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192869265.003.0011>); Penelope GOODMAN, *Augustus and his bimillennium in the soft power strategy of the Fascist regime*, in: Federico Santangelo – Paola Salvatori – Fabrizio Oppedisano (eds.), *Costruire la nuova Italia: Miti di Roma e fascismo*, Rome 2023, pp. 285–310.

The primary materials used in the study are drawn partly from the archives of the Istituto Nazionale di Studi Romani (INSR), known in the 1930s as the Istituto di Studi Romani (ISR), which itself tracked bimillennial commemorations of Augustus worldwide in the 1930s.⁶ Their President, Carlo Galassi Paluzzi, working with the Ministero degli Affari Esteri (MAE), wrote to Italian diplomats in sixty-nine countries, asking them to report on local celebrations of Augustus. The resulting correspondence reveals much about how and why representatives of Italy promoted Augustus' bimillennium abroad, but its perspective is inherently Italian and Fascist. It has therefore been complemented via the use of digitised online newspaper archives to identify events and commentary generated by Polish and Hungarian people.⁷ Such archives have their own problems, including access limitations reflecting copyright restrictions, coverage limitations reflecting the availability of suitable source materials, and scanning errors leading to textual corruptions.⁸ But digitisation and the keyword searching which it supports allows the identification of events whose theme is known in advance but whose exact dates and locations are not, such as those held to mark Augustus' bimillennium. Between the ISR material and digitised newspapers, it thus is possible to identify plentiful bimillennial events in both Poland and Hungary, and examine the agendas which they served.

Augustus in the 1930s

Before turning to Poland and Hungary, we should review Augustus's status in western thought before the 1938 bimillennium, and especially in the Italian domestic commemorations. This will allow us to see how engagements with Augustus in these two countries matched or differed from views elsewhere. The ancient sources are largely sympathetic towards Octavian / Augustus, reflecting amongst other

6 I thank Elena Iannilli, archivist at the INSR, for facilitating my access to this material.

7 Poland: Wielkopolska Biblioteka Cyfrowa (Wielkopolska Digital Library), <https://www.wbc.poznan.pl/dlibra>; Jagiellońska Biblioteka Cyfrowa (Jagiellonian Digital Library), <https://jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/dlibra> and Biblioteka Uniwersytecka w Warszawie (University of Warsaw Library), <https://crispa.uw.edu.pl/>. Hungary: Arcanum, <https://adt.arcanum.com>.

8 Jim MUSSELL, *The Nineteenth-Century Press in the Digital Age*. Basingstoke 2012; Thomas SMITS, *Problems and possibilities of digital newspaper and periodical archives*, TS. Tijdschrift voor Tijdschriftstudies 36, 2014, pp. 139–146 (<https://doi.org/10.18352/ts.317>); Tessa HAUSWEDDEL et al., *Of global reach yet of situated contexts: an examination of the implicit and explicit selection criteria that shape digital archives of historical newspapers*, Archival Science 20, 2020, pp. 139–165 (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-020-09332-1>).

things his forty-year dominance of Roman politics and society, which made it politically expedient to write favourably about him during his lifetime.⁹ But while he and his supporters presented him as a peace-bringer and ruler of an empire without end, his use of proscriptions and civil wars to overturn an oligarchy and install himself as a *de facto* monarch also generated plenty of criticism. The result is a source tradition capable of supporting diametrically opposed interpretations of the man and his motivations, depending on agenda and context.¹⁰

Since his death, favourable views of Augustus have predominated under monarchies, where he can be used as a paradigm for a benign and capable ruler, and amongst empire-builders, who can justify their own activity by analogy with the beneficent ancient portrayal of Augustus.¹¹ Stories from Suetonius depicting Augustus as a good emperor were eagerly repeated as examples for contemporary rulers by medieval and Renaissance writers.¹² Early Christians also developed the Biblical reference to ‘a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed’ into a claim that the empire-wide peace and security established by Augustus were brought about by divine providence.¹³ The combined image of Augustus as a benevolent and divinely-sanctioned emperor made him attractive to figures such as Charlemagne, whose power stemmed partly from an alliance with the papacy, and later Holy Roman Emperors such as those of the House of Hohenstaufen, who took Augustus’ name or imitated his coins.¹⁴ But Augustus was also used by mon-

9 ‘Augustus’ is an honorific name awarded by the senate in 27 BC. He is conventionally known as ‘Octavian’ between his adoption by Caesar and this award, reflecting his adoptive name of Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus.

10 Penelope GOODMAN, *Best of emperors or subtle tyrant? Augustus the Ambivalent*, in: Penelope Goodman (ed.), *Afterlives of Augustus*, AD 14–2014, Cambridge 2018, pp. 1–31 (<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108529167.001>); Marco BESL, *Augustus als Programm. Eine Rezeptionsgeschichte des ersten Princeps (14–500 n. Chr.)*, Stuttgart 2025 (<https://doi.org/10.25162/9783515137980>).

11 P. GOODMAN, *Best of emperors*, pp. 3–12 and P. GOODMAN, *Retrospective Parentage*, pp. 267–282.

12 Robert BLACK, *From peacemaker to tyrant: the changing image of Augustus in Italian Renaissance political thought*, in: P. Goodman, *Afterlives of Augustus*, pp. 178–186 (<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108529167.011>).

13 Luke 2.1–5; Paul BURKE, *Augustus and Christianity in myth and legend*, *New England Classical Journal* 32, 2005, no. 3, pp. 213–220; Michael SLOAN, *Augustus, the harbinger of peace: Orosius’ reception of Augustus in Historiae Adversus Paganos*, in: P. Goodman, *Afterlives of Augustus*, pp. 103–121 (<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108529167.007>).

14 Jürgen STROTHMANN, *Augustus and the Carolingians* in: P. Goodman, *Afterlives of Augustus*, pp. 138–151 (<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108529167.009>); Jürgen STROTHMANN, *Caesar und Augustus im Mittelalter. Zwei komplementäre Bilder des Herrschers in der staufischen*

archs with secular powerbases to signal their magnanimity and sometimes also their status as patrons of the arts. By comparison, critical views of Augustus have tended to emerge as monarchies have been questioned or overturned, as in the republics of Renaissance Italy or Enlightenment Europe. Edward Gibbon was representative of his age in considering Augustus a 'subtle tyrant' whose establishment of the principate eventually led to the collapse of the Roman Empire.¹⁵

Despite this Enlightenment critique, Augustus enjoyed widespread admiration in the 1930s, thanks largely to European imperialism. This is particularly clear in British historiography. One example is T. Rice Holmes, who argued that monarchy was needed to hold the empire together, and that Augustus' principate brought happiness and prosperity to the provinces.¹⁶ Such interpretations reflected a favourable view of the British monarchy and a belief in the beneficence of British imperialism. But the image of Augustus as a benignly motivated ruler of empire could be found almost as readily in countries which had undergone anti-monarchical revolutions. In France, Léon Homo published a popular monograph on Augustus which passed rapidly over his rise to power and presented him largely as a visionary problem-solver.¹⁷ Homo's Augustus replaced a moribund republic with a new and improved constitution, resulting in peace which supported economic and cultural wealth. The American Mason Hammond likewise viewed Augustus' imperialism as an unproblematised good. He argued that Augustus was a sincere republican, but followed Rice Holmes in believing that if monarchy had followed, that was because it was the only successful way of governing the empire.¹⁸

The political potential of Augustus' bimillennium was first spotted by Italian scholars closely involved with the Fascist regime. The initiative came from Giulio Quirino Giglioli, Director of the Museo dell'Impero Romano. In 1930, the year of Virgil's bimillennium, he proposed a similar celebration of Augustus to the Second Congress of the Istituto di Studi Romani.¹⁹ Giglioli highlighted the capacity of anniversaries 'to attract the entire populace to the cult of a Great Man',

Kaiseridee, in: Manuel Baumbach (ed.), *Tradita et Inventa. Beiträge zur Rezeption der Antike*, Heidelberg 2000, pp. 59–72.

15 Edward GIBBON, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, London 1994 (1776), p. 96.

16 Thomas RICE HOLMES, *The Architect of the Roman Empire*, Oxford 1928–1931.

17 Léon HOMO, *Auguste*, Paris 1935.

18 Mason HAMMOND, *The Augustan Principate in theory and practice during the Julio-Claudian period*, Cambridge (MA) 1933.

19 Giulio Quirino GIGLIOLI, *Per il secondo millenario di Augusto*, Atti del II Congresso Nazionale di Studi Romani, 1931, pp. 277–280.

prompt studies, and inspire feelings of devotion.²⁰ He also related his plans to the aspirations of Fascist Italy: 'Now the victorious and Fascist Italy will celebrate in Augustus the founder of the Empire, the pacifier of the Ancient World, the originator of wise social and political measures, it will celebrate He whom the Romans loved and greeted as Father of the Fatherland, and it will fulfil this duty while all its population, hardworking, trusting, quivering with new life, honour his great past by preparing for a great future.'²¹ Augustus was to be presented as a quasi-religious icon of Fascist values, an ideal ruler, a beneficent imperialist, and an inspiration to future greatness. Giglioli's references to the populace or population show that Italians were his main intended audience. But he also noted that not only Italy but 'all the civilised world' were then celebrating Virgil, revealing an interest in audiences abroad.²² By the time of the bimillennium, the damage caused to Italy's international standing by its invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 made Augustus' reputation as a beneficent imperialist particularly valuable for persuading those audiences of the country's benign motivations.²³

The Italian bimillennial programme centred on Rome, and involved a major exhibition, the Mostra Augustea della Romanità, the clearance of Augustus' Mausoleum, and the excavation and reconstruction of the Ara Pacis Augustae (Altar of Augustan Peace). The Mostra presented a narrative of ancient military might with Augustus as its charismatic leader, complemented by collections presenting Italy as the origin of 'civilised' (i.e. western) society and demonstrating how the Roman empire had disseminated it to the provinces.²⁴ But Italian exhibition visitors were not encouraged to bask in the reflected glory of antiquity. Rather, quotes from Mussolini over the entrance and in the final room urged them to outshine it in the future. The Mausoleum and Ara Pacis were brought together in a new square, the

20 Ibidem, p. 277 (*a richiamare tutto il popolo al culto di un Grande*).

21 Ibidem, p. 280 (*Ora l'Italia vittoriosa e fascista festeggerà in Augusto il fondatore dell'Impero, il pacificatore del Mondo Antico, il suscitatore di saggi provvedimenti sociali e politici, festeggerà Colui che i Romani amarono e salutarono Padre della Patria, e compirà questo suo dovere mentre tutti il popolo suo, laborioso, fidente, fremente di nuova vita, onora il suo grande passato preparandosi a un grande avvenire.*)

22 Ibidem, p. 277 (*tutto il mondo civile*).

23 H. James BURGWIN, *Italian Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period 1918–1940*, Westport (CT) 1997, pp. 125–144.

24 Friedemann SCRIBA, *Augustus im Schwarzhemd? Die Mostra Augustea della Romanità in Rom 1937/38*, Frankfurt am Main 1995; Flavia MARCELLO, *Mussolini and the idealisation of Empire: the Augustan Exhibition of Romanità*, *Modern Italy* 16, 2011, no. 3, pp. 223–247 (<https://doi.org/10.1080/13532944.2011.586497>).

Piazza Augusto Imperatore, created following extensive demolitions in the name of modernisation and sanitisation.²⁵ Again, then, these monuments to Italy's glorious past were pressed into the service of its still greater future. As a grandiose demonstration of Augustus' status, the Mausoleum aligned well with Mussolini's personality-cult. Meanwhile the Ara Pacis had originally celebrated Augustus' establishment of peace and prosperity at home supported by war abroad, echoing contemporary rhetoric about Italy's campaigns in Ethiopia. These projects, though, were only part of a larger programme of activity all over Italy which included the issuing of commemorative stamps and coins, the erection of statues, archaeological excavations, lectures and publications. We can now consider how the bimillennium was used beyond Italy, by both Italians and others.

Poland

Poland is a predominantly Catholic country with a long history of loyalty to the Papacy and strong tradition of Latin studies. These factors have ensured that although no part of Poland ever fell within the Roman empire, it is still considered part of Poland's cultural heritage.²⁶ At the end of the fourteenth century, the Jagiellonian dynasty unified the Polish and Lithuanian kingdoms through marriage, creating a major powerbase which became a Commonwealth in 1569. Several of its rulers used the name 'Augustus', and the Italian scholar Francesco Algarotti commissioned a painting and wrote a poem drawing flattering comparisons between one of them, Augustus III, and his ancient namesake.²⁷ In the late eighteenth century, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth lost its strength and was partitioned between Russia, Prussia and Austria. But Polish interest in Roman history remained strong. Its disenfranchised nobility found comfort in republican concepts

25 Aristotle KALLIS, 'Framing' *Romanità: the celebrations for the Bimillenario Augusteo and the Augusteo-Ara Pacis project*, *Journal of Contemporary History* 46, 2011, no. 4, pp. 809–831 (<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009411413407>); Fabio BETTI et al., *Mausoleo di Augusto, Demolizioni e Scavi: Fotografie 1928/1941*, Milan 2011.

26 Jerzy AXER – Katarzyna TOMASZUK, *Central-Eastern Europe*, in: Craig Kallendorf (ed.), *A Companion to the Classical Tradition*, Malden (MA) 2007, pp. 138–144 (<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118832813.ch0>).

27 Paolo PASTRES, *Algarotti per Augusto e Mecenate a Dresda. Artisti, acquisti e programmi pittorici nei versi di Augusto III del 1743–1744*, *Studi Germanici* 10, 2016, pp. 9–66.

such as *libertas*, and authors who had written during or celebrated the republic like Cicero, Livy and Tacitus.²⁸

After the First World War, the Versailles Treaty recognised Poland's independence, though its borders had to be secured through conflict, especially to the east. The new state was a democratic republic, but internally volatile, and its first head of state, Józef Piłsudski, seized power in the May Coup in 1926. Though he retained the constitution and his role as Defence Minister, he dominated Polish politics through violence and suppression. Piłsudski instigated *Sanacja* (Sanation, or Healing), which he claimed would address corruption, tackle inflation and prioritise the national interest. The rise of Nazism brought German territorial claims on northern Poland, especially the so-called Pomeranian Corridor which separated East Prussia from the rest of Germany.²⁹ Piłsudski signed a non-aggression pact with Germany in 1934 and introduced a more authoritarian constitution in 1935, but died soon afterwards.³⁰ His successors, military officials and ministers who had served under him, perpetuated the Sanation regime while attempting to avoid conflict with either Germany or the USSR.

Gillmeister has examined the thinking of inter-war Polish scholars on Augustus, revealing a general sympathy tempered with reservations.³¹ The key figures were Tadeusz Zieliński (University of Warsaw), Ludwik Piotrowicz (Jagiellonian University, Kraków) and Mieczysław Stanisław Popławski (Catholic University, Lublin), all of whom were born before independence and studied in Germany, Russia or both. Zieliński published on Augustus' religious reforms, viewing the introduction of a ruler cult as paving the way for Christianity.³² He evidently had connections with Italian scholars, since one of his major publications, *La sacra missione di Augusto* (The Sacred Mission of Augustus), was published in the Istituto di Studi Romani's *Quaderni Augustei: studi stranieri* series, which showcased foreign scholarship on Augustus. Piotrowicz published *Dzieje rzymskie*, a major study of Roman history, in 1934, devoting considerable space to Augustus.³³ He saw Augustus as

28 J. AXER – K. TOMASZUK, *Central-Eastern Europe*, pp. 147–149.

29 Stefano SANTORO, *L'Italia e l'Europa orientale. Diplomazia culturale e propaganda 1918–1943*, Milan 2005, p. 295.

30 Ibidem, pp. 295–296.

31 Andrzej GILLMEISTER, *Augustus Polonus. The image of the emperor in Polish historiography in inter-war period. Preliminary remarks*, Studio Ceranea 6, 2016, pp. 257–270 (<https://doi.org/10.18778/2084-140X.06.14>).

32 Ibidem, pp. 258–260 and 263–266.

33 Ibidem, pp. 263.

more moderate than Caesar, respecting tradition yet artfully concentrating power into his own hands. Piotrowicz and Popławski also published popular books on Augustus to mark his bimillennium.³⁴ Piotrowicz's offered the same interpretation as his earlier academic work and Popławski's took a similar line, contrasting Augustus with Caesar and emphasising that he was a first citizen rather than monarch. Piotrowicz and Popławski's works in particular suggest that in Polish eyes, Augustus could only be admirable if he also sincerely respected the republic. This is probably a legacy of Polish investment in the ideals of liberty and republicanism during the partition era: thinking which would likewise explain why Józef Piłsudski carefully veiled his own authoritarianism behind respect for the constitution.

From an Italian perspective, this attention to and sympathy for Augustus presented fertile ground to convey their own messages in Poland. They were in any case pursuing cultural diplomacy all over Eastern Europe. In 1921, the state-supported Istituto per l'Europa Orientale (Institute for Eastern Europe) was founded with the remit of guiding Italy's foreign policy in the region, demonstrating that its historical influence there had been beneficial and 'civilising', and welcoming eastern European scholars to Italy.³⁵ In the mid-1930s, Italy's Ambassador to Poland observed that its political and intellectual classes were interested in Italy, and founded both an Istituto Italiano di Cultura and a Comitato (or Instytut) Polonia-Italia there to promote Italian culture and deepen cultural exchange.³⁶ At this time, Italy viewed Poland's Catholic identity as a means of drawing it away from Germany, and portrayed Poland as a northern extension of Roman civilisation, protecting Europe from the threat of Bolshevism.³⁷

By the time of Augustus' bimillennium in September 1938, the developing alignment between Italy and Germany, combined with Germany's territorial designs on Poland, had weakened Italy's interest in cultural diplomacy in Poland. Nonetheless, the Italian cultural institutions there organised bimillennial events. The most lavish was a tour to Italy, arranged by the Comitato Polonia-Italia and advertised nationwide.³⁸ The Augustan content consisted of visits to the Mostra Augustea della Romanità and archaeological sites in Rome, but it was not exclusive.

34 Ludwik PIOTROWICZ, *Cesarz August*, Kraków 1937; Mieczysław Stanisław POPŁAWSKI, *Oktawian August*, Lublin 1938.

35 S. SANTORO, *L'Italia e l'Europa orientale*, pp. 37–42.

36 Ibidem, pp. 300–302.

37 Ibidem, pp. 297–299.

38 E.g. *Przyjaźń polsko-italska*, Kurier Poznański, 23 June 1937, p. 6; *Wer möchte nach Italien?*, Freie Presse (Łódź), 8 August 1937, p. 5.

The publicity also offered opportunities to encounter ‘countless treasures of Italian art and culture from ancient times to the present day’ and evaluate ‘new institutions and organisations of contemporary Italy’, including attending celebrations for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Italian empire and a reception by the Governor of Rome.³⁹ The tour was thus designed to attract participants with the promise of cultural experiences, including the commemoration of Augustus, while ensuring they returned home with a positive impression of contemporary Italy and Fascism. Polish newspapers reported that 270 people participated, indicating substantial interest in Augustus, Italy or both.⁴⁰

The Comitato Polonia-Italia and Istituto Italiano di Cultura also organised several bimillennial lectures. Some were delivered by Italians, such as Guido Volturmo Gardelli, Secretary of the Łódź Comitato Italia-Polonia, who spoke on the Mostra Augustea della Romanità, and Guido Calza of the University of Rome, who spoke for the Warsaw Istituto Italiano di Cultura on Augustan Ostia.⁴¹ Calza’s willingness to travel across Europe to talk about Augustus indicates how committed such figures were to promoting his celebration abroad. But other lecturers were Poles who were evidently friendly towards the Italians. Edmund Bulanda, Rector of the University of Lwów, head of their Department of Classical Archaeology and President of the Comitato Polonia-Italia, spoke for the Lwów branch of the Istituto Italiano di Cultura on Augustan art.⁴² His talk was attended by the Italian Consul in Katowice, who reported back to the MAE and ISR that Bulanda had exalted the great figure of Augustus and drawn a happy comparison (*felice paragone*) between him and the Duce which a full audience had applauded warmly.⁴³ The Consul’s eagerness to relay these details to Rome reveals the purpose of these events from a Fascist perspective. The regime’s officials wished to know that Augustus was being

39 *Uroczystości ku czci Cesarza Augusta*, Kurier Poznański, 17 July 1937, p. 6 (*niezliczonymi skarbami sztuki i kultury włoskiej od czasów starożytnych po dzień dzisiejszy*); *Przyjaźń polsko-italska*, Orlownik, 24 June 1937, p. 5 (*nowych instytucyj i organizacyj współczesnej Italii oraz jej życia*).

40 *Dwutysiąclecie Imperium Rzymskiego*, Głos Narodu, 7 September 1937, p. 8.

41 AJR, *Odczyt o Italii. La Mostra Augustea della Romanita*, Kurier Łódzki, 29 June 1938; M. POD, *Wielkość cesarza Augusta. Obchód 2000-lecia w Instytucie Włoskim*, ABC: pismo codzienne, 27 April 1937, p. 4.

42 *Lwów W Dwutysięczną Rocznicę Cesarza Augusta*, Gazeta Lwowska, 9 June 1938, p. 2; Natalia BULYK – Roman BEREST – Olena TOMENIUŁ, *Lviv Classical Archaeology Before World War II*, *Archaeologia Polona* 62, 2024, pp. 269–291 (<https://doi.org/10.23858/APa62.2024.3769>).

43 INSR archives, Partizione 6, Busta 219, Fascicolo 57, Polonia: MAE, Telespresso to the ISR, 18 July 1938.

used abroad to attract audiences to talks which also gave a flattering impression of Mussolini and Fascist Italy.

One further talk organised by the Warsaw Istituto Italiano di Cultura is notable because its speaker was an adviser in the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Witold Kozłowski.⁴⁴ Kozłowski was also markedly eager to disseminate his material. His lecture, delivered in April 1937, was published in the *Comitato Polonia-Italia's* magazine, *Polonia-Italia*, and shared in two Polish academic forums: a lecture series in Warsaw organised by the *Polskie Towarzystwo Filologiczne* (Polish Philological Society) and the journal *Przegląd Klasyczny* (Classical Review).⁴⁵ The published versions present Augustus as a Great Man who put Rome on solid foundations, whose power was based on universal consent and who developed the idea of the constitutional state. This portrayal reinforces the impression that the ideal Polish Augustus respected the republic, while Kozłowski's government role may also mean that he was viewing Augustus as an analogy for Piłsudski. Kozłowski further argued that Caesar planned to establish an eastern-style monarchy, but Augustus had committed to Roman, western values, so that the battle of Actium was the final victory of west over east for values 'a hundred times more effective and real than blood and soil'.⁴⁶ Here, the fearful references to an eastern power and the belittling of 'blood and soil' probably reflect the contemporary position of Poland, caught between the USSR and Nazi Germany, of which Kozłowski must have been keenly aware. He appears to have believed that Italy could still offer a better alternative, since he drew an approving parallel between Augustus and Mussolini, arguing that both believed in the principle of power based on consent.⁴⁷

So far, we have dealt with events organised by Italians, though this has included two Polish speakers, Bulanda and Kozłowski. Numerous bimillennial events and publications were also generated by Poles. One high-profile example was an afternoon of lectures, Latin poetry and music at the Jagiellonian University, Kraków, in March 1938.⁴⁸ Though hosted by Poland's leading University and deliv-

⁴⁴ M. POD, *Wielkość cesarza Augusta*.

⁴⁵ Witold KOZŁOWSKI, *O wielkości Augusta*, *Polonia Italia* 5, 1937, pp. 3–9; *Cesarz August w sztuce*, *Kurjer Warszawski*, 26 May 1937, p. 4; Witold KOZŁOWSKI, *O wielkości Augusta*, *Przegląd Klasyczny* 3.8, 1937, pp. 635–652.

⁴⁶ W. KOZŁOWSKI, *O wielkości Augusta*, p. 7 (*stokroć bardziej efektywną, realną, niż krew i ziemia*).

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

⁴⁸ *Uroczystość 2000-lecia urodzin cesarza Augusta na Uniwersytecie Jagiellońskim*, *Głos Narodu*, 25 March 1938, p. 3.

ered primarily by Poles, this event fundamentally concerned Poland's relationship with Italy. A substantial contingent of Italians was invited, and advance newspaper reports show that it was intended to culminate in the presentation of an honorary doctorate to Pietro De Francisci, Rector of the University of Rome. In practice, De Francisci did not attend. The reason given was ill health, but he managed to deliver lectures in Leuven, Brussels and Cologne the following week.⁴⁹ Similarly, Giulio Quirino Giglioli was named amongst the expected guests, but not those who attended. It seems that both men pulled out at a late stage, perhaps for political reasons. The event took place only a fortnight after Germany's annexation of Austria (*Anschluss*), when high-profile Italians may have wished to avoid appearing to support another country in Germany's territorial sights. Nonetheless, numerous Polish and Italian eminences attended. On the Polish side, these included Adam Krzyżanowski, Pro-Rector of the Jagiellonian University and Piotr Małaczyński, Vice-Voivode of Kraków. On the Italian, they included Giuseppe Cardinali, Pro-Rector of the University of Rome and Biagio Pace, Professor of Ancient Topography and a member of the Italian Chamber of Deputies.

On the day, three Jagiellonian University professors gave lectures on Augustus preceded by Italian summaries. One speaker, Gustaw Przychocki, outlined the influence of Augustan literature in Poland, thus portraying Poland as owing a cultural debt to Italy. The lectures were also preceded by a performance of 'Gaude Mater Polonia', a historical anthem honouring the Polish Saint Stanislaus, and interspersed with poetry by Horace and Prudentius, some set to music. The Italian visitors enjoyed lavish hospitality, while Polish newspapers described the event as a confirmation of the centuries-old relationship between the Jagiellonian University and Italy.⁵⁰ The Polish and Italian parties also exchanged visits to each other's local administrative seats: the Kraków mayoralty and the Istituto Italiano di Cultura.⁵¹ In sum, the event constituted an intensive demonstration of interest in Augustus, Latin and Christian culture by the Polish hosts to their Italian guests, which the latter politely reciprocated. The Italian Consul in Katowice again attended, describing the event to the MAE as 'a significant expression of Italian-Polish friendship'.⁵²

49 *Uroczystości 2000-lecia cesarza Augusta w Krakowie*, Głos Narodu, 28 March 1937, p. 3; *Conferenze del prof. De Francisci sul bimillenario di Augusto*, Corriere della Sera, 7 April 1938, p. 2.

50 *Delegacja Uniwersytetu Rzymskiego w Krakowie*, Nowy Dziennik, 27 March 1937, p. 17.

51 *Uroczystości 2000-lecia cesarza Augusta w Krakowie*, Głos Narodu, 28 March 1937, p. 3.

52 INSR archives, Partizione 6, Busta 219, Fascicolo 57, Polonia: MAE, Telespresso to the ISR, 31 May 1938 (*una significativa manifestazione di amicizia italo-polacca*).

Other bimillennial events seem to have been aimed primarily at Polish audiences. The main organisers were Classicists, evidently keen to share their subject with an interested public. At least three lecture events besides that at the Jagiellonian University were organised by Polish academics. One was an overview of Augustus' career by Tadeusz Zieliński, delivered for the Warsaw Polska Akademia Literatury (Polish Academy of Literature).⁵³ Zieliński presented Augustus as a proud and ambitious man who subsumed his will to reason under the influence of Stoic philosophy, resulting in the formation of the principate, a stable empire and flourishing Latin literature, but personal unhappiness for him. The other two events were heavily advertised in local papers, showing that their organisers wanted to reach a wide public. One was a series of six lectures organised by the Polskie Towarzystwo Filologiczne (Polish Philological Society), which opened with another talk by Zieliński on Augustus' religious mission.⁵⁴ The other was an individual lecture by Hieronim Markowski in the University of Poznań's public lecture series.⁵⁵ Though I have found no press coverage of its content, Markowski also published an article in *Przegląd Klasyczny* offering a more developed version of Zieliński's argument that philosophy had transformed Augustus from a cruel to a moderate ruler.⁵⁶ This perhaps exemplifies the reservations about Augustus which Gillmeister identified as characteristic of Polish academia, while it also amounts to an argument by analogy for politicians to listen to intellectuals. Markowski may have felt the latter point keenly, since he had been dismissed from a position as Director of the Wąbrzeźno High School in 1931–1932 for disagreeing with the educational measures of Piłsudski's Sanation project.⁵⁷

Schoolteachers, too, used the bimillennium to engage pupils. Their efforts are recorded in the Classics periodical, *Filomata*, digitised by the Wielkopolska Biblioteka Cyfrowa (Wielkopolska Digital Library). This journal, aimed at school audiences, ran a knowledge competition about Augustus.⁵⁸ It also carried accounts of school events in Stanisławów, Lwów, Kraków and Pabianice involving perform-

53 Tadeusz ZIELIŃSKI, *Cesarz August*, Rocznik Polskiej Akademii Literatury 1937–1938, pp. 3–20.

54 *2000-lecie urodzin cesarza Augusta*, Kurjer Warszawski, 23 May 1937, p. 12.

55 *Cesarz August*, Express Kaliski, 7 December 1937, p. 9.

56 Hieronim MARKOWSKI, *Doradcy filozoficzni Augusta*, Przegląd Klasyczny 3, 1937, no. 7–8, pp. 571–594.

57 Aleksander CZARNECKI, *Album Wąbrzeski*, Liceum Wąbrzeźno 2006, <https://liceum-wabrzezno.pl/zsowno/index.php/szkola/historia-szkoly/29-album-wabrzezski-aleksander-czarnecki-2006-rok> (09. 04. 2025).

58 *Konkurs Ze Znajomości Kultury Rzymskiej*, Filomata 98, 1938, pp. 337–338.

ances of lectures, poems, sketches, debates, dancing and singing by Latin classes.⁵⁹ The reports were written by participants, and all refer to their pride in the enthusiastic responses of their schoolmates, suggesting a spirit of subject advocacy. The Lwów event is particularly interesting, since it consisted of a mock trial of Augustus, and thus gives an indication of the range of opinions on Augustus available to pupils in 1930s Poland.⁶⁰ The prosecution focused on Augustus' bloodthirsty seizure of power, though also covered Ovid's exile and moral decay within the imperial household. However, the defence swayed the jury by presenting the views of provincials who appreciated Augustus' beneficent administration and highlighting his patronage of the arts. This outcome demonstrates the appeal of narratives of beneficent imperialism in this period, since the pupils apparently considered this factor to outweigh and justify the violent seizure of political power.

Anniversary culture favours admiring accounts of the individual being commemorated, but critical views sometimes emerge in response. So many academic articles on Augustus and his bimillennium appeared in Poland that the journal *Eos* published a review of them.⁶¹ This included a discussion of the paper published by Witold Kozłowski in *Przegląd Klasyczny* in which he approvingly compared the military foundations of Augustus and Mussolini's regimes. The reviewer described Kozłowski's work as 'more a panegyric than an objective account', suggesting that Augustus' supposed universal consensus was simply a flattering clique of clients and that the idea of him going to war to defend western values should be 'seriously questioned'.⁶² This response indicates the limits of toleration for admiring accounts of Augustus in 1930s Poland, whether or not it was also spurred by disagreement with Kozłowski's position on Mussolini.

Another article by Tadeusz Sinko in the journal *Przegląd Współczesny* (Contemporary Review) is striking for his awareness of Italy's political agenda and efforts to distance Polish engagement with Augustus from it.⁶³ Sinko opened by arguing that participation in the bimillennia of Virgil and Horace had expressed Po-

59 Krysia NAWŁOKA, *Sprawozdania: Gimn. SS. Urszulanek w Stanisławowie*, *Filomata* 95, 1937, p. 187; Helena DYMÓWNA, *Sprawozdania: Gimn. żeńskie Tiwa Żyd. Szkół Sr. we Lwowie*, *Filomata* 97, 1938, pp. 293–296; Janina ZIÓŁKOWNA, *Sprawozdania: Gimn. im. S. Münnichowej w Krakowie*, *Filomata* 99, 1938, pp. 397–399; Jadwiga DEBICHOVNA, *Sprawozdania: Gimnazjum w Pabianicach*, *Filomata* 105, 1938, pp. 186–187.

60 H. DYMÓWNA, *Sprawozdania*.

61 J.S. – Nikita DUMKA, *2000lecie cesarza Augusta*, *Eos* 39, 1938, pp. 118–124.

62 Ibidem, p. 121 (*raczej panegiryk, niż obiektywne ujęcie; bardzo mocno kwestionowane*).

63 Tadeusz SINKO, *Dwutysiąclecie cesarza Augusta*, *Przegląd Współczesny* 10, 1937, pp. 3–19; A. GILLMEISTER, *Augustus Polonus*, pp. 268.

land's membership of a wider Latin culture, but that 'The Augustan celebrations [*in Italy*] are a historical projection of the resurrection of the Roman Empire, expanded by Ethiopia, which was never conquered by ancient Rome.'⁶⁴ This shows that he recognised Italian portrayals of Augustus as a beneficent imperialist as attempts to justify their own aggression. Nonetheless, Sinko argued, Poles could honour Augustus as the founder of the Roman empire, which had allowed civilisation to radiate outwards to 'barbarian' central Europe, paving the way for Christianity. In other words, he still believed Poland had benefited from Augustus' beneficent imperialism. 'So,' he concluded, 'what is a political holiday for Italy is again a cultural holiday for us.'⁶⁵

Having justified his engagement with Augustus despite his discomfort with the Italian agenda, Sinko then offered an account typical of 1930s Poland's overall sympathy towards Augustus, tempered with reservations. His narrative was self-consciously balanced, starting from the contrasting assessments of Augustus in Tacitus' description of his funeral and refraining from endorsing either side, but his overall appraisal was favourable.⁶⁶ Sinko was clear that Octavian / Augustus had used force to secure power and played on the weaknesses of others, but saw him as a '*princeps*-president' rather than a monarch and presented his reign as beneficial for the state, provincials, Latin literature and the spread of Christianity. This balance sheet, with the violent rise to power on one side and beneficent imperialism and the patronage of the arts on the other, is similar to that of the Lwów school pupils in *Filomata*.

Meanwhile, two newspaper articles show the appeal of the bimillennium for Polish Catholics, and the role of Catholicism in shaping international allegiances. One, in the Kraków-based Catholic paper *Głos Narodu*, reported on the Mostra Augustea della Romanità.⁶⁷ Its author, Father Doctor Piotr Bober, mainly described its contents, but his interest in Christianity is clear from the amount of space devoted to it. More than a quarter of Bober's text consists of discussion of the Christian material in the main room on Augustus, and the room on early Christianity which he described as 'most dear to the heart of every Catholic.'⁶⁸ Bober also noted the 'discreet allusions to the contemporary maritime policy of Italy' in the room on

64 T. SINKO, *Dwutysiąclecie*, p. 3 (*Uroczystości Augustowskie stanowią historyczną projekcję wskrzeszenia imperium Romanum, powiększonego o niezdobytą nigdy przez starożytny Rzym Etiopię.*).

65 Ibidem (*Co więc dla Italii jest świętem politycznym, dla nas jest znów świętem kultury*).

66 Tac. *Ann.* 1.9-10.

67 Fr Dr Piotr BOBER, *List z Rzymu*, *Głos Narodu*, 6 March 1938, p. 7.

68 Ibidem (*najbardziej drogich sercu każdego katolika*).

ancient Rome's equivalent and stated outright that modern Italy sought the same hegemony over the Mediterranean, but made no comment on whether this should be applauded.⁶⁹

A second article in the same paper, published under the pseudonym 'Polonus', was more explicitly political.⁷⁰ This article discussed official Nazi visits to Rome and the Mostra Augustea della Romanità, organised to nurture the growing political alliance between Germany and Italy. It characterised the Nazis as neo-pagans, unable to comprehend the relationship between *romanità* and Catholicism and baffled by the Christian content in the Mostra. The piece also suggested that the Italians' *romanità* distinguished them from their German visitors, making them more cosmopolitan, even if they sometimes expressed their supposed superiority in unpleasant ways. Unqualified praise was reserved for the Catholic church, which the author believed acted as a check on the Fascist regime's excesses, questioning rapprochement with Germany and drawing attention to the persecution of religion there. The anxieties around both Germany's behaviour and Italy's support for it are clear, as is the role of Catholicism in sustaining Poland's relationship with Italy nonetheless. These two articles indicate that Augustus' association with Christianity contributed significantly to Polish interest in him, and that the Italian perception of Poland's Catholicism as a fruitful basis for diplomatic relations was well founded.

Hungary

Like Poland, Hungary has a long history of engagement with ancient Rome through the Catholic church, humanist scholarship and the self-fashioning of its rulers.⁷¹ However, the western half of Hungary was once the ancient province of Pannonia, established under Augustus, allowing claims of a direct connection with the Roman empire. The Kingdom of Hungary was a major political power in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but this period ended with defeat by the Ottomans at the Battle of Mohács (1526).⁷² The country was then broken up into sepa-

69 Ibidem (*dyskretne aluzje na temat dzisiejszej polityki morskiej Italii*).

70 POLONUS, *Swastyka w Rzymie*, Głos Narodu, 25 November 1937, p. 1.

71 J. AXER – K. TOMASZUK, *Central-Eastern Europe*, pp. 137–144.

72 Miklós MOLNÁR, *A Concise History of Hungary*, Cambridge 2001, pp. 41–86 (<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107050716>); J. AXER – K. TOMASZUK, *Central-Eastern Europe*, pp. 141.

rate parts, but these were reunited under Habsburg rule, and Hungarian pressure for independence eventually led to the formation of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1867. After the First World War, the victorious Allies sought to punish the defeated Central Powers through measures which included reallocating two-thirds of Austria-Hungary's territory to other nations under the Treaty of Trianon (1920).⁷³ During the inter-war period, the desire for revision of this treaty fuelled nationalistic politics centred around promises to recover the lost territories. Evocations of ancient Pannonia could be used to support these arguments, since it had included parts of Yugoslavia (now Croatia) removed from Hungary by the Treaty.

Inter-war Hungary was technically a Kingdom, but the throne remained vacant. In practice, its regent and head of state from March 1920 onwards was Miklós Horthy: a military commander who had suppressed a short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic and ran an authoritarian, anti-communist regime.⁷⁴ His ministers sought relationships with nations which they hoped would strengthen Hungary economically or support their calls for revision of the Treaty of Trianon, including Italy.⁷⁵ Italy also pursued relations with Hungary, hoping to create an alliance which could resist Slavic, French or German power, and the relationship intensified in the mid-1930s after Italy's invasion of Ethiopia.⁷⁶ During this period, Hungarian Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös (1932–36) did much to bring Italy and Germany together into the Rome-Berlin axis, though he died before it was formalised. His successors continued the policy of alignment with Germany, including the introduction of antisemitic laws and closure of some newspapers.⁷⁷

The political relationship between Italy and Hungary was bolstered by cultural diplomacy. In 1920, a Società Mattia Corvino was founded by Italians and Hungarians in Budapest to develop cultural relations between the two countries.⁷⁸ Other measures included the foundation of a Budapest Società Dante Alighieri in 1924, several branches of the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in 1935, and a Hungarian branch of the Istituto di Studi Romani in 1937.⁷⁹ References to shared ancient heritage and artefact exchanges were also used in state diplomacy. In 1929, a column

73 M. MOLNÁR, *A Concise History*, pp. 262–263.

74 Ibidem, pp. 261–278.

75 S. SANTORO, *L'Italia e l'Europa orientale*, pp. 94–95.

76 M. MOLNÁR, *A Concise History*, pp. 278–279; S. SANTORO, *L'Italia e l'Europa orientale*, pp. 207–208.

77 M. MOLNÁR, *A Concise History*, pp. 280–281.

78 S. SANTORO, *L'Italia e l'Europa orientale*, pp. 98–102.

79 Ibidem, pp. 103 and 211–215.

from the Temple of Peace in Rome was erected in the grounds of the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest in memory of Italy's role in the War of Independence of 1848–1849.⁸⁰ In 1936, Hungary presented Italy with a copy of an ancient water organ found near Budapest at Aquincum, a Roman military base which became the capital city of Pannonia Inferior.⁸¹ Then, in 1937, the Italian King Vittorio Emanuele visited Aquincum during a state visit to Hungary.⁸² According to the Budapest paper, *Pesti Napló*, the King observed while there that: 'The past is proof that the two countries were interdependent. This connection must be maintained. This close connection still exists.'⁸³ The reference to interdependence evokes a relationship of equals, rather than the imposition of Roman imperial power, suiting the King's purpose of using ancient history to strengthen the relationship between Italy and Hungary in the present day.

Italians also used Augustus' bimillennium for the same purpose. The Pécs branch of the Istituto Italiano di Cultura already had a strong relationship with the local University, which had included successfully prompting them to introduce a course on Fascist culture in 1934.⁸⁴ As the bimillennium approached, its Director, Saverio De Simone, suggested an event to unite 'the best Hungarian and Italian forces for the sake of a better future for the two countries', to which the University responded warmly.⁸⁵ The resulting event opened and closed with musical performances of the Hungarian and Italian national anthems and addresses from the University's Professor of Roman Law.⁸⁶ In between, two lectures were delivered. The first, by Lajos Villani, Head of the Department of Culture in the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, likened Augustus' regime to a constitutional monarchy, perhaps with Italy's literal and Hungary's technical equivalents in mind, before arguing that the idea of Rome and its fight for peace against barbarism had been absorbed first by the Church and then Mussolini. The second, delivered in Italian by

80 *Restaurálták a Forum Romanum-oszlopot a Múzeumkertben*, *Octogon: Architecture & Design*, 29 June 2021, <https://www.octogon.hu/design/olasz-emlek-a-muzeumkertben/> (08. 04. 2025).

81 Katalin ÉDER, *Különleges látogatók: III. Viktor Emánuel olasz király és Ilona olasz királyné a Fővárosi Múzeumban – 1937 májusában*, *Tanulmányok Budapest Múltjából* 44, 2020, p. 187.

82 *Ibidem*, pp. 185–198.

83 *Az olasz uralkodópár budapesti tartózkodásának utolsóelőtti napja*, *Pesti Napló*, 22 May 1937, p. 1 (*A múlt annak bizonyítéka, hogy a két ország egymásra van utalva. Ezt a kapcsolatot fenn kell tartani. Ez a szoros kapcsolat továbbra is fennáll.*)

84 S. SANTORO, *L'Italia e l'Europa orientale*, p. 222.

85 *Augusztus emlékünnepe a pécsi egyetemen április 29-én*, *Dunántúl*, 28 April 1938, p. 5 (*a legkiválóbb magyar és olasz erőket a két ország szebb jövőjének érdekében*).

86 *Augustus császár kétezereves évfordulójának megünneplése*, *Pécsi Napló*, 6 May 1938, p. 4.

De Simone himself, presented Augustan Rome as the embodiment of the European spirit and his empire as spread by values and ideals and bringing prosperity and peace. Both speakers thus presented Augustus as reigning benevolently over a great civilisation which had been inherited by Europe and was now embodied in Italy. The careful balance between them, with one speaker from each nation, was mirrored politically in the attendance of the Hungarian Mayor and the Italian Consul for Pécs.

All other bimillennial events in Hungary took place in Budapest, and were organised by Hungarians. However, several were attended by Italian diplomats or representatives of Italian cultural organisations, indicating close collaboration and support. The main players were Classicists responding to public interest in the bimillennium. The Literary Department of the Royal Teacher Training Institute in Budapest included the bimillennium in their peer training programme, thus equipping teachers to cover it in schools.⁸⁷ Several academics also delivered lectures. Often, though, these took place in the presence of Italians, and the events were framed as displays of Hungarian-Italian friendship or included expressions of support for Italy's Fascist regime. For example, András (Andreas) Alföldi spoke on the Prima Porta statue of Augustus at a joint meeting of the National Hungarian Society of Archaeology and Art History and the Hungarian branch of the Istituto di Studi Romani.⁸⁸ The lecture was introduced by Tibor Gerevich, who was President of both organising bodies and Director of the Hungarian Historical Institute in Rome, so had close connections with Italy. Gerevich noted that Hungary could claim a share of Augustus' legacy because he had initiated the conquest of Pannonia, and that Fascist Rome had remained faithful to the Augustan tradition: remarks which were reported proudly in the Italian press, where they would have demonstrated Italy's international prestige and the supposed civilising influence of ancient Rome.⁸⁹

Alföldi published his work on the Prima Porta Augustus in the same year.⁹⁰ The published version avoided any reference to the present, instead arguing that the two seated female figures on the cuirass were personifications of Dacia and Germania. But he paid tribute to Augustus himself as 'a true peacemaker of the cul-

87 *Az Ifjúsági Egyesületek Működése*, Értesítője 1938, pp. 51–52.

88 *Augustus császár emlékezete a Régészeti és Művészettörténeti Társulatban*, Nemzeti Ujság, 11 November 1937, p. 7.

89 *Il bimillenario di Augusto celebrato a Budapest*, Corriere della Sera, 12 November 1937, p. 3.

90 András ALFÖLDI, *Zum Panzerschmuck der Augustusstatue von Prima Porta*, Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts. Römische Abteilung 52, 1937, pp. 48–63.

tural world' and an outstanding personality who modestly declined religious honours and ruled in a sober fashion.⁹¹ This assessment was typical of the era, but a review by Assenmaker of Alföldi's thinking on Augustus shows that he later revised his opinion, coming to see him as a *de facto* monarch who achieved power primarily thanks to Caesar's legacy.⁹² It seems that the bimillennium inclined Alföldi towards a sympathetic view of Augustus, but that once it had passed he became more critical: probably partly in response to Syme, with whose work he engaged closely.⁹³

Meanwhile, other Hungarians used the bimillennium to express outright admiration for Fascist Italy or further its agenda. In 1938, an organisation known as the Magyar Nemzeti Szövetség olasz osztálya (Hungarian National Association, Italian Department) was founded, launching its activities with a lecture series entitled 'A fasiszta imperializmus mint az antik Róma gondolat kifejezője' (Fascist imperialism as an expression of the thought of ancient Rome).⁹⁴ The title shows that its goal was not merely to study Italy, but to present Fascist imperialism as grounded in ancient precedents, and this was evidently appreciated by the Italian Ambassador in Budapest, who consistently attended the meetings or sent his representatives. The first lecture was delivered by László Mihály, the organisation's Secretary General, who had spent half a year in Rome on a scholarship funded by the Fascist government.⁹⁵ He was introduced by the Italian Ambassador and prefaced his talk with an opening in Italian, thus signposting the cordial relations between the two nations. Under the title, 'Augustus és az új latin szellemiség' (Augustus and the new Latin spirit), Mihály credited Latin culture with giving light and air to the Hungarian soul, claimed an organic connection between the ancient Roman empire and modern Italy, and described Fascism as a turning point into a new era of peace and justice like that of Augustus. This could not have been better calculated to appeal to the Italians present, and it is no surprise that, according to the *Nemzeti Ujság*, the audience stood up and applauded for Italian-Hungarian friendship.⁹⁶

József Révay, a novelist and journalist with a Classics degree, also gave a bimillennial talk. Révay had published a novel in 1937 on the relationship be-

91 Ibidem, pp. 48 and 63 (quotation p. 48, 'ein wahrer Friedensbringer der Kulturwelt').

92 Pierre ASSEMAKER, *Prince héritier et princeps togatus: l'Octavien-Auguste d'Alföldi entre César et le principat*, in: James Richardson – Federico Santangelo (eds.), *Andreas Alföldi in the Twenty-First Century*, Stuttgart 2015, pp. 167–186.

93 Ibidem, pp. 175–177.

94 *Megalakult a Magyar Nemzeti Szövetség olasz osztálya*, Budapesti Hírlap, 3 March 1938, p. 7.

95 *Ünnepi előadás az első római császárról*, Magyarország, 13 April 1938, p. 9.

96 *Mihály László*, *Nemzeti Ujság*, 13 April 1938, p. 9.

tween Horace and Augustus in both Hungarian and Italian, entitled *A költő és a császár* or *Il poeta e l'imperatore* ('The Poet and the Emperor'). Widely praised in the Hungarian press, this novel recounted how Horace, the former republican, became reconciled to Augustus' programme of reform, which he and Virgil helped to shape through their poetry.⁹⁷ The talk was an opportunity to promote the novel, and Révay duly spoke on Augustus as a literary patron. He argued that political patronage should not go too far, since the best literature comes from a place of freedom, and noted that Augustus did not welcome criticism, but only in order to convey his view that Augustus' regime was at its best when receptive to the input of writers. These reflections on the relationship between writers and politicians may have been informed by his own experience of writing a book on Gyula Gömbös while he was still in office.⁹⁸

Révay was also editor of a magazine, *Tükör*, where he published two bimillennial articles by himself and two by others, all expressing admiration not only for Augustus but also Mussolini and Fascism. One of Révay's articles, an overview of Augustus' career, took the *Res Gestae* as the 'unvarnished truth' and was unsurprisingly laudatory, presenting Augustus' rise to power as predestined and his exercise of it as constitutional and beneficent.⁹⁹ This article also used the *Res Gestae* to make claims about contemporary Hungary and Italy. According to Révay, Augustus' conquest of Pannonia marked 'the beginning of Roman culture in Hungary' and was 'truly a certificate of honour for Hungarian humanism': that is, it supported Hungary's claim to membership of western civilisation.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, his invasion of Ethiopia, whose failure Révay elides as much as did Augustus, meant that 'the second Roman Empire is linked to the first by an undeniable legal continuity'.¹⁰¹ Thus, Révay used Augustus' text to justify Italy's claims on Ethiopia. He also published an article by a contributor which presented Augustus and Mussolini as the destined instruments of the idea of Rome, their political positions as constitutional, their building programmes and social reforms as closely equivalent and their empires as

97 E.g. *A költő és a császár*, Színházi Élet, 30 May 1937, p. 67; *A Könyvnap könyvei*, Ujság, 2 June 1937, p. 4; *A költő és a császár*, Pesti Napló, 6 June 1937, p. 41.

98 József RÉVAY, *Gömbös Gyula élete és politikája*, Budapest 1934.

99 Idem, *Augustus, a haza atyja*, *Tükör*, 1 October 1937, pp. 737–742.

100 Aug. RG 30; J. RÉVAY, *Augustus, a haza atyja*, p. 739 (*Az emlékiratnak ez a mondata a magyarországi római kultúra kezdetét jelenti s így valósággal a magyar humanizmus nemeslevele*).

101 Aug. RG 26.5; J. RÉVAY, *Augustus, a haza atyja*, p. 739 (*Így a második római császárságot tagadhatatlan jogfolytonosság kapcsolja az elsőhöz*). On this passage and its claims: Alison COOLEY, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti: text, translation and commentary*, Cambridge 2009, pp. 224–228.

necessary, beneficent and peace-bringing.¹⁰² Between them, Révay's contributions to the bimillennium show his desire to suggest strong cultural links between Hungary and Italy and disseminate the same rhetoric about Augustus and Mussolini as representatives of Fascist Italy.

The Hungarian press also published various appreciative accounts of Augustus, often using him to express support for Mussolini, Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany or the Horthy regime. The Mostra Augustea in Rome received considerable coverage, especially when Hitler visited it in May 1938, reflecting Hungarian interest in the alliance between Germany and Italy which the visit was designed to strengthen.¹⁰³ Máthé Elek in the *Budapesti Hírlap* compared Augustus and Mussolini, arguing that Fascism was fighting for the same construction of empire and consolidation of world peace as Augustus.¹⁰⁴ *Pesti Napló's* Rome correspondent similarly described Augustus as God's messenger, beloved by the people, and Mussolini as 'another ambassador of peace and justice, whom Hungary always thinks of with a grateful heart'.¹⁰⁵ And the magazine *Vasárnapi Könyv* reviewed Augustus' career, hitting the conventional notes of peace, beneficent imperialism and artistic patronage, but also drawing analogies between late republican and modern political groupings.¹⁰⁶ The author identified four: self-interested aristocrats and capitalists; naïve democrats; Catiline's Bolshevik-like followers; and the People's Party, which was the largest and wanted a dictatorship that would favour the masses. The first three neatly encompass the groups against which Horthy's regime positioned itself, leaving him as the leader of the People's Party, and thus the modern equivalent of both Caesar, the great statesman and general, and Augustus, the emperor who maintained republican forms.

Other articles, though, took the bimillennium as a prompt for political critiques. Géza Supka, a journalist with a background in archaeology and art history, published an article in the socialist newspaper *Népszava*, which was periodically sued or banned by Horthy's supporters, comparing Augustus with Mussolini but slating Augustus in order to criticise Mussolini by proxy.¹⁰⁷ Supka's criticisms in-

102 Mario BRELICH, *Augustus és Mussolini*, Tükör, 1 January 1938, pp. 58–60.

103 E.g. *Látogatás az Augus-teo-kiállításon*, Budapesti Hírlap, 7 May 1938, p. 2; *Hitler és Mussolini újabb tanácskozása*, Új Magyar-ság, 7 May 1938, p. 5.

104 Máthé ELEK, *Duo Milia*, Budapesti Hírlap, 23 September 1937, p. 1.

105 *Az Ara Pacis — a béke oltárának újra-avatása Rómában*, Pesti Napló, 2 October 1938, p. 38 (*béke és igazság egy másik nagykövete, akire Magyarország mindig hálás szívvel gondol*).

106 *Augustus, Az első római császár*, Vasárnapi Könyv 28, 1938, no. 17, pp. 9–13.

107 Géza SUPKA, *Az első diktátor*, Népszava, 28 November 1937, p. 7.

cluded the violent seizure of power, the suppression of opposition and the use of sham elections, and he added that while a new era did begin during Augustus' reign, it was that of Christianity and would sweep away the dictatorial regime which he had established. Meanwhile, two Jewish authors, Dániel Várnai and Rudolf Szántó, were sympathetic towards Augustus but highly critical of his contemporary imitators. Várnai, also writing for *Népszava*, argued that Augustus had restored the senate's rights and created peace, but that the spirit of his age highlighted the unwillingness of those living under modern authoritarians to criticise them, and that he had been delusionally appropriated by Fascism, which was closer to Caesarism in its violence and illegality.¹⁰⁸ Szántó, writing for *Pesti Napló*, which was dissolved by the Horthy regime in 1939, credited Augustus with establishing peace, improving Rome, behaving modestly and administering effectively.¹⁰⁹ But he was utterly exco-riating about the legacy of his imperialism, which he characterised as an exercise in white supremacy based on racial and blood myths, practised particularly by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. These examples demonstrate that the bimillennium could be used as a vehicle for criticism of Hungary and its allies, perhaps in terms which could not be voiced directly.

Conclusion

Poles, Hungarians and Italians coalesced around Augustus at the bimillennium of his birth, clearly all considering him part of "their" heritage. Differences in their relationships to Augustus and the ancient Roman empire were certainly acknowledged, so that direct analogies usually took Augustan Rome as a proxy for modern Italy rather than Hungary or Poland. But commemorators do not appear to have considered Hungary and Poland's different geographical relationships with the former territory of the Roman empire of particular importance. While József Révay presented Augustus' conquest of Pannonia as a key moment in Hungary's creation, Tadeusz Sinko described him as the founder of an empire which had gradually spread civilisation to places like Poland. These narratives of direct and indirect inheritance allowed both speakers to claim stakes in Augustus. The fact that they were treated as equivalent also reveals that Augustus was not being commemorated in purely historical terms. Rather, he had become a symbol of the post-antique,

108 Dániel VÁRNAI, *Hétközben*, *Népszava*, 3 October 1937, p. 4.

109 Rudolf SZÁNTÓ, *Az Imperator 2000-ik születésnapjára*, *Pesti Napló*, 25 September 1937, p. 1.

Christian European culture in which Poland, Hungary and Italy all shared. This was stated explicitly by some commemorators, such as Saverio De Simone who presented Augustan Rome as the embodiment of the European spirit.

Nonetheless, commemorators from the three countries, and within both Poland and Hungary, viewed Augustus from different perspectives and used him to further different agendas. Italians used Augustus to pursue soft power and build alliances: in Poland through a tour to Italy and lectures by Italian speakers, and in Hungary through an event designed to draw Hungarians and Italians together in Pécs. In these contexts, they emphasised Augustus' establishment of peace, the beneficence of ancient Roman imperialism, Rome's role in the creation of western civilisation and spread of Christianity, and Italy's role as its glorious successor. Their goal was clearly to persuade local people that Fascist Italy had a leading role to play in shaping the future of western civilisation and was approaching it with good intentions, whether by implied analogy or by explicit assertion. But although Italians made political use of Augustus' bimillennium in both Poland and Hungary, neither country was an urgent foreign policy priority for Italy. In practice, most bimillennial activity in both was generated by locals.

The Poles and Hungarians most involved in commemorating Augustus were Classicists and other intellectuals. Many were clearly eager to promote their subject. This is apparent in the pride in classmates' responses expressed by Polish contributors to *Filomata*, while the Hungarian writer József Révay, who had a relevant novel to promote, shows how subject advocacy could overlap with commercial motivations. But local political agendas are also identifiable, and indeed some commemorators held political roles: notably, Witold Kozłowski, an adviser in the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Lajos Villani, Head of the Department of Culture in the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In both countries, a range of positions on Italy and Fascism were expressed, including active admiration for Fascism, critiques of it, and a pragmatic desire to maintain good relations with Italy. But differences in the overall tenor of engagement between Poland and Hungary are also clear, reflecting their political relationships with Italy. In Poland, only Edmund Bulanda and Witold Kozłowski used the bimillennium to refer favourably to Mussolini, though the Jagiellonian University event also cultivated Italian support. Other Poles avoided references to Italy, or expressed anxiety about its activities, like Tadeusz Sinko and the journalist 'Polonus'. By contrast, numerous Hungarian commemorators praised Fascist Italy explicitly. Perhaps in response to this, it was also in Hungary rather than Poland that the bimillennium was used to ex-

press outright criticism of Fascism and authoritarianism, particularly by Jewish authors in the anti-Horthy press.

Given the political agendas identifiable in so much of this activity, we may return to Tadeusz Sinko's claim that 'what is a political holiday for Italy is again a cultural holiday for us'. Can such a distinction truly be drawn? In reality, the political and the cultural are not so easily separable, but shape and feed into each other. The claim is also particularly questionable in the case of Augustus, a politician whose historical actions could readily be used as analogies for contemporary political stances. Thus Witold Kozłowski in Poland was able to express his faith in Mussolini by drawing a favourable comparison between his and Augustus' claims to have based their power on consent, while Géza Supka in Hungary was able to speak out against Mussolini's authoritarianism via a critical account of Augustus. These uses of Augustus as a proxy for particular political positions were explicit, but many others were strongly implicit.

The practice is particularly obvious in beneficent framings of Augustus' imperialism as a means of justifying Italy's invasion of Ethiopia. Italians did this widely, as did some of their supporters such as József Révay. Sinko was aware of the behaviour, linking the Italian commemoration of Augustus with their 'resurrection' of the Roman empire in terms which show his disapproval. Nonetheless, he cited the spread of Roman civilisation from the empire to Poland – an indirect form of beneficent imperialism – as grounds for a cultural celebration of Augustus. It thus appears that Sinko believed imperialism could be beneficent in the abstract, even if Italy's was not. Such beliefs were widely shared at this time, and closely associated with Augustus. Indeed, they underpinned his status as an icon of European culture, since the contemporary consensus followed Sinko in believing that his beneficent rule of the empire had embedded a civilisation which later became that of Europe. Yet a belief in beneficent imperialism is also a political position with political implications, even if Sinko did not recognise it.

Sinko's position was thus internally inconsistent, and clearly designed to justify his own bimillennial engagement with Augustus despite his awareness of Italy's political agenda. But the fact that he felt compelled to say something shows that the political use of Augustus by Fascists and their supporters presented a problem for Classicists who wished to commemorate his bimillennium without endorsing their political views. Many other Classicists in both Poland and Hungary took part in bimillennial events without making any comment on political uses of Augustus. But it is hard to believe that they were entirely unaware of it. Some had their lec-

tures framed in pro-Fascist terms, as when Tibor Gerevich introduced András Alföldi by suggesting that Hungary and Fascist Italy shared in Augustus' legacy. Others spoke in the same series or published in the same journals as those who were politicising Augustus, making this readily visible to them. Some, in fact, were probably supportive of Fascist Italy, especially in Hungary where the country was considered an ally. But the example of Sinko suggests that in Poland especially, others were not.

For them, the intensive contemporary politicisation of Augustus meant that even if they believed they were speaking or writing about him from a purely cultural and apolitical perspective, they were in fact helping to legitimise those using him for political ends. Their participation in the bimillennium confirmed that he was an important figure. They also typically said admiring things about him, portraying him as a beneficent imperialist and benign monarch, because that was the scholarly consensus at the time. Since those same claims were also used by Italian Fascists and their supporters to justify their own imperialism and Mussolini's autocracy, they bolstered these narratives. In this sense, even actions which an individual considered apolitical in fact had political consequences because of the wider context in which they were operating. The only way those who wished to talk about Augustus at time of his bimillennium could have done so without this effect would have been to explicitly condemn the Fascist political agenda: not merely distance themselves from it like Sinko. Certainly, it was possible for contemporaries to do this, as the Hungarian journalists who criticised Fascism through the medium of Augustus showed. With our knowledge of where the Fascist project led, it is easy to wish that more Classicists had joined them, rather than attempting an apolitical stance. But it is not too late to take a similar approach when working on aspects of the ancient world which are used for political purposes by the far right today.

Komu patřil Augustus? Bimilenium v Polsku a Maďarsku na sklonku 30. let 20. století

Penelope J. GOODMAN

Dvoutisícileté výročí narození římského císaře Augusta 23. září 1938 bylo intenzivně slaveno fašistickou Itálií, ale připomínalo se i v mnoha dalších zemích po celém světě. Tento článek zkoumá připomínkové akce konané v Polsku a Maďarsku, zemích, které byly vybrány jako kontrastní dvojice případových studií pro výzkum dopadů jejich odlišných historických vazeb na Římskou říši a odlišných vztahů s moderní Itálií na jejich vnímání císaře Augusta. Za využití archivních zdrojů a dobového tisku článek ukazuje, že Poláci, Maďaři i Italové vnímali Augusta jako součást společného kulturního dědictví, přičemž skutečnost, že území Polska geograficky nikdy nepatřilo k Římské říši, ovlivňovala toto vnímání jen velmi málo. Tento vliv byl nicméně využíván k prosazování různých agend, a to jak mezi Polskem a Maďarskem, tak v rámci nich samotných. Italové jej v obou zemích využívali k uplatňování měkké síly a budování spojení, ačkoliv to nepovažovali za hlavní prioritu. Většinu připomínkových akcí místo toho vedli polští a maďarští klasicisté (odborníci na klasická studia). Tito lidé zjevně viděli ve výročí příležitost k propagaci svého oboru. Dobovému politickému kontextu se však nedalo vyhnout; zde se objevily určité rozdíly mezi Polskem a Maďarskem. Polští klasicisté připomínající Augusta měli tendenci vyhýbat se odkazům na moderní Itálii nebo vyjadřovat obavy z jejích aktivit, kdežto jejich maďarští kolegové pravidelně využívali dvoutisícileté výročí k explicitní chvále Itálie a fašismu, v čemž se odráželo úzké politické spojení Maďarska s Itálií v daném období. Tato skutečnost stavěla do obtížné pozice ty organizátory oslav v Polsku i Maďarsku, kteří neschvalovali aktivity fašistické Itálie. V Polsku se někteří pokoušeli tyto dvě věci oddělit s argumentem, že Augusta připomínají v čistě kulturním, nikoliv politickém duchu. Protože ale ostatní kolem nich vykreslovali lichotivé paralely mezi Augustem a Mussolinim, nebo dokonce považovali augustovský Řím za zástupný symbol pro tehdejší Itálii, nebyl tento postoj zcela přesvědčivý. Daný kontext znamenal, že i údajně apolitické připomínky Augusta potvrzovaly jeho kulturní význam a často také prezentovaly stejné narativy o blahodárném imperialismu a laskavé vládě, které upřednostňovali ti, kdo se jej snažili politizovat. Alternativní přístup byl modelován v Maďarsku, kde hrstka

novinářů využila císaře Augusta k vyjádření otevřené kritiky Mussoliniho, fašismu a tehdejšího agresivního imperialismu.

Creative Commons

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution – NonCommercial – NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. The license terms are available here: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>.

