



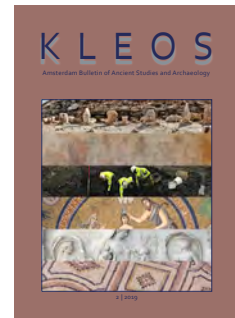
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Revisiting Statues: The appropriation of Pompeius Magnus at the Forum of Augustus

SANDER EGBERINK

ABSTRACT

Ever since Paul Zanker published his book *'Forum Augustum'* in 1968, there has been debate regarding the Forum of Augustus as a 'propaganda forum'. In this article, a novel approach is suggested to add to this debate by borrowing the notion of 'appropriation' from cultural history. In order to attune this approach to the study of ancient monuments, the three questions of how, why and who serve as analytical tools to study the process of appropriation. The case under study is the group of Republican statues at the Forum of Augustus, more specifically the statue of Pompeius Magnus. The result of the analysis is twofold:

1. appropriation is a useful notion for the study of monuments in which the past played a pivotal role;
2. psychological preparation, selection criteria and deliberate alterations, as well as the design of comparison for visitors, were all highly relevant in the appropriation of the Republican past in the *Forum Augustum*.

INTRODUCTION

The transition of the Roman Republic to the Roman Empire was by some accounts an inevitable event.¹ Despite the fact that the old political remnants of the Republic were still clearly visible in society, the reality was undeniably different. The Republic was still present in collective memory, and Augustus' new regime found adequate ways to exploit the heritage of the previous political institution.² This exploitation is visible in his *Forum Augustum*, which may be seen as an example of the new imperial ideology in a political and cultural sense, all stemming from the values of the

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¹ See the first chapter of Levick 2010, 23-62.

² Gowing 2005, 20-23.

Roman Republic.³

The Forum of Augustus is one of the most studied monuments of the Roman world (Figure 1-3). It has been labelled as a culmination of Augustan ideology, propagated through extensive means of 'propaganda' interwoven in the ideological message of the forum's statues.⁴ As the debate regarding the purpose and message of the Forum of Augustus is still ongoing, this article hopes to add to this debate by providing a novel approach to the study of this important Roman monument.⁵ Crucial to this end is the concept of (*cultural*) *appropriation*, as developed by Robert S. Nelson in *Critical Terms for Art History* (2003).⁶ Nelson mainly concerns himself with the theory of appropriation in the present day. In this article, his theory will be used as an analytical tool for the study of the past. In doing so, this study hopes to show that even well-studied monuments such as the Forum of Augustus can still prove valuable as an object of study in the light of new ways of thinking. Moreover, by stepping outside the conventional discourse concerning the Forum of Augustus, this new analysis allows for an alternative approach to and interpretation of the significance of both the Forum of Augustus and the role played by the Republican past in the Roman Empire.

The main question this article poses is how the Republican past was appropriated at the Forum of Augustus. To narrow the subject down, this article will specifically look at the representation of Pompeius Magnus among a statuary group at the Forum of Augustus; the *summi viri*, the 'most prominent men' of the Roman Republic.⁷ The article starts with an overview of the term 'appropriation' as developed by Nelson, followed by a thorough analysis of appropriation drawing on the case of Pompeius among the *summi viri*. This specific case will serve to exemplify the process of the appropriation. The analysis will focus on the depictions of and alterations to the Roman Republican past in relation to Augustus, and leads, ultimately, to the construction of a new narrative focused on Augustus.

3 Zanker 1988, 192-194.

4 The term propaganda can in some ways be seen as problematic with regard to antiquity. Barbara Levick calls the term anachronistic, yet refrains from providing an alternative. She suggests that the term "may be used with caution [...] (and) is still legitimate for use in connection with Roman History"(Levick 2010, 10-11). See also: Hekster 2005, 245-247. This article is aware of the controversy concerning the term and, following Levick, uses it with caution. However, it goes beyond the scope of this article to propose a new term that may work better. See also: Zanker 1988, 192-194.

5 Zanker 1968; Spannagel 1999; Geiger 2008; Luce 2009; Van den Hengel 2009; Shaya 2013.

6 Nelson 2003.

7 Van den Hengel 2009, 271.

SETTING THE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK: CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

In modern literature and society, the term 'appropriation' has become a ubiquitous phenomenon. Commonly known as 'cultural appropriation', it has come to serve left- and right-wing political movements alike, and serves as an explanation for certain cultural movements.⁸ Regarding the appropriation of the Roman past, the extensive usage of *romanità* by Benito Mussolini's fascists in the 1920s and 1930s comes to mind as one of the more recent examples.⁹

Nelson begins by defining appropriation through an etymological lens, in which the term roughly means 'to make one's own'.¹⁰ Appropriated, Nelson says, means "annexed or attached" and "belonging to oneself" on the part of the appropriator.¹¹ This should be seen in light of a process of appropriation, or in Nelson's words: "taken positively or pejoratively, appropriation is not passive, objective, or disinterested, but active, subjective and motivated."¹² According to Nelson, the true power of appropriation is that it is completely unopposed and, above all, that it involves selectively taking over something that was once meaningful and complete. In so doing, it forms a 'second system', which means a newly formed narrative.¹³ This newly formed narrative coincides with the process of appropriation, which occurs before and after the formation of the second system. In other words: the process of appropriation is under constant influence by various factors, as a result of which the newly created system, thus, either fades away or is suppressed, deliberately altered, or radically transformed over time into a new myth.¹⁴

Another important feature of appropriation is closely related to the execution of a particular process of appropriation in which the surroundings play an important role, known as 'psychological preparation'.¹⁵ However, Nelson refrains from giving a clear definition of the term, and thereby leaves the reader to come up with their own interpretation. I shall elaborate on psychological

8 Nelson 2003, 163-165.

9 A state-sponsored culture in (Italy's) Fascist times, *romanità* was perceived as the idea of Romanness, including a resurgence of old Roman (cultural) values. These were appropriated by the Fascist regime in order to construct a modern Fascist narrative. *Romanità* was an overarching element in Fascist Italy, present in various types of media such as newspapers, stamps, film and music, but also architecture and rhetoric. See: Arthurs 2012; Stone 1999.

10 Nelson 2003, 162.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 163.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., 164.

15 Ibid., 161.

preparation in the following section, since I believe it is a vital aspect of appropriation in a monumental style such as the Forum of Augustus. In addition to psychological preparations, the alteration coinciding with the selectivity of the appropriated subject is another vital aspect of any kind of appropriation, as “it cuts away the privileged autonomy”.¹⁶ The alterations and selectivity of appropriation will be explained through the selection criteria for the *summi viri*.

Following Nelson, I propose to see appropriation as an active process, instead of a passive one. However, Nelson leaves questions unanswered such as the *how* (in what way did the appropriation occur), the *why* (the purpose of the appropriation) and the *who* (who carried out the appropriation).¹⁷ In this article, I will discuss the questions of the how, the why and the who to structure my analysis and to use these questions as analytical tools for the application of Nelson’s theory of appropriation.

At the same time, appropriation is hard to define; it can encompass not only ideas and ideals but also the past. Moreover, it is often the case that the *how*, the *who* and the *why* merge and are difficult to disentangle when explaining a specific case of appropriation. The *how*, the *who* and the *why* should be seen as analytical structuring tools, yet at the same time be regarded as entangled instead of separate when considering the results. Appropriation may be tentatively regarded as the taking over of certain practices, elements, or aspects from one culture into another culture, and the deliberate alteration at the hands of the appropriator. The previously mentioned *romanità* of Mussolini is frequently cited as an example of appropriation.¹⁸

The main point I wish to make in this article, however, is that we are not dealing with a clear form of cultural appropriation in the case of the Republican past. The Forum of Augustus is an exemplary case to state that appropriation does not necessarily concern culture *per se*, since the process of appropriating is much more diverse and complex and, thus, exceeds culture. The complexity of the process of Augustus appropriating his own past does not carry the same contemporary consequences as appropriating the culture of an oppressed minority. The past is merely invoked without oppressing or stealing from an existing group of people. Therefore, we should refrain from viewing the appropriation at the Forum of Augustus with modern connotations of the term.

16 Nelson 2003, 172.

17 Swetnam-Burland 2010, 138.

18 Stone 1999; Notaro 1997, 59.

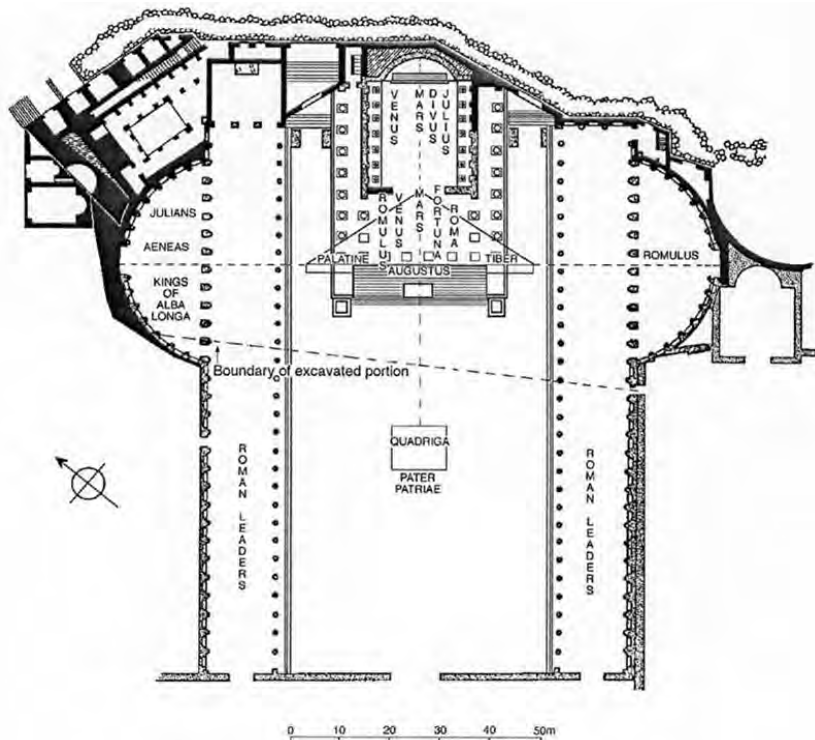


Figure 1
 The location of the Roman leaders, the *summi viri*, on the eastern side of the Forum of Augustus (after Galinsky 1996, fig. 111).

Instead, one should regard the characteristics of appropriation in a broader sense.

Despite the fact that Augustus himself was a remnant of the Roman Republic, the above, combined with the gradual formation of the Principate, is what allows us to speak of a clear appropriation of his own past. Thus, Augustan propaganda exploited the memory of a Roman Republic as an abstract concept of ideas and moral examples through the *Forum Augustum* and *summi viri*, maintaining the illusion of a still functioning Republic.¹⁹

This brief overview of insights into appropriation is relevant for our understanding of the specific appliance of appropriation in this article. A monument can represent, exemplify or symbolise simplified meanings of complicated events such as the history of the Roman Republic. In doing so, monuments not only embody this memory,²⁰ but they also propagate it to the general public through added alterations.²¹ The Forum of Augustus serves as a highly tangible example of this, as I will show by posing the questions of the *how*, the *why* and the *who*.

THE HOW: PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROPRIATION AT THE FORUM

From its very beginning, the *Forum Augustum* was intended to evoke an overwhelming feeling, diminishing the importance

19 Gowing 2005, 19-24; Wallace-Hadrill 1993, 53-55.

20 For memory, see: Assman 2006; Flower 2006; Wiseman 2015; Popkin 2016.

21 Alterations consist of the changes of a story and the selection of events. Shaya 2013, 83.



of anyone who entered (Figure 1-3). This may be regarded in light of psychological preparation.²² As noted, Nelson refrains from developing the term. However, that does not mean it has no potential. As stated before, a crucial aspect of psychological preparation is the assembly and composition of the environment, in this case staging the Forum of Augustus as a monumental environment. Psychological preparation at the Forum of Augustus could be regarded as a means to somehow intimidate the visitor, be it through splendour and stunning architecture or through the immensity of the scale. Consequently, any visitor to the forum would already be unwillingly engaged by it before they reached, in this case, the *summi viri*.

Psychological preparation occurred at the Forum of Augustus through three features. The first is the composition and use of materials. The *Forum Augustum* was decorated with the most valuable and luxurious types of marble. The main square was paved with a white marble known as *Luni*, matching perfectly with the yellow-red marble known as *giallo antico*, which clad the columns of the hallways on either side of the square.²³ The materials used are too numerous to list here, but these two examples show the thoughtfulness of the constructors regarding the material effects of the forum.²⁴ Secondly, when considering the extent of this material splendour with the immense scale of the forum, which measured 125 metres by 118 metres, it becomes

Figure 2
Reconstructive view of the Forum of Augustus (<http://fori-imperiali.info/en/002-2/2-2/> accessed on 20-03-2019).

²² Nelson 2003, 162.

²³ For more information on the marble, see: Galinsky 1996, 202-203; Goldsworthy 2014, 388.

²⁴ Zanker 1988, 193.



clear that the Forum of Augustus must have overwhelmed or, in other words, 'psychologically prepared' its visitors.²⁵

The effect of psychological preparation would also be generated by the boundaries of the forum, the last feature. The rear of the Forum of Augustus was guarded by a 33-metre high tufa wall, used to protect it from the fires of the Subura. This wall secluded the forum from the rest of Rome, making it an area *alien* to and *separate* from the crowded city.²⁶ Thus, the seclusion combined with the other environmental elements of the forum influenced the viewpoint and feeling of the visitor. Through this combination, the term gets its strength and thereby its value for the narrative at the Forum of Augustus. In other words: psychological preparation was a precursor imposed on visitors, influencing their state of mind before arriving at the narrative of the *summi viri*.

THE WHY: SELECTING SUMMI VIRI

The statuary group of the *summi viri* were part of a larger arrangement of statues, often referred to as 'the hall of fame'.²⁷ These statues were a selection of heroes from the history of the Roman Republic. While the exact number of statues is unknown, it is fair to assume that the total number in this hall of fame was well over a hundred statues. Though all evidence is fragmentary,

Figure 3

Reconstructive view of an exedra in the Forum of Augustus, with a trial scene (<http://fori-imperiali.info/en/002-2/1-2/> accessed on 20-03-2019)

²⁵ Van den Hengel 2009, 255.

²⁶ Wallace-Hadrill 1993, 57-58; Van den Hengel 2009, 256, 258.

²⁷ Geiger 2008, 2.

we are able to clearly identify 26 men of the *summi viri*.²⁸ They included Scipio Africanus of the third century BC and statesmen from the period just before the Augustan period, such as Marius and Cornelius Sulla.²⁹ These 26 statues stood in a crescent in the eastern corner of the forum (Figure 1 and 3). All were regarded as triumphators from the Republican past and were respected for their role in the Roman military or for their propagation of Roman values, thereby serving as an example for future Romans.³⁰ Therefore, it is the *summi viri* at the *Forum Augustum* where appropriation of the Republican past can be recognised.³¹

Prominent among the *summi viri* was Pompeius Magnus (Figure 4). Pompeius will serve as an exemplifier of the process of appropriation. The selection of Pompeius as a case study in this article is based on the allure that the name of Pompeius Magnus carried, as well as his deeds and their importance for the building of the Roman Empire. All these elements make him a valuable comparison with Augustus, as is argued further on in this article.

The presence of Pompeius amongst other Republican *summi viri*, such as A. Postumius Regillensis and Tiberius Gracchus, requires explanation.³² Why include him in this specific company of men, and not another group? The inclusion of Pompeius was likely based on his defeat in the civil wars by Julius Caesar, Augustus' adoptive father. In addition, the son of Pompeius, Sextus Pompeius, fought against Augustus in the Sicilian revolt of 36 BC.³³ Therefore, the presentation of Pompeius not only exemplifies the victory of Julius Caesar, but it is possible that displaying Pompeius as a member of the *summi viri* also invoked the former and his opposition against Julius Caesar, and the opposition of Sextus against Augustus. The statue of Pompeius should be considered as a representation of the lineage of Pompeius and, therefore, the statue symbolises a direct opposition to Augustus and his ancestors at the forum. This direct opposition makes the appropriation of Pompeius a precarious matter.

It is exactly here where the appropriation of Pompeius, and, for that matter, other Republican heroes, reaches its peak. It explains why Augustus would display Romans who clearly fought

Figure 4
Bust of Pompeius Magnus/
Pompey the Great (106-48
BC) Museo Correr, Venice,
Italy (photograph by
Sander Egberink 2017).



28 Goldbeck 2015, 35; Shaya 2013, 89.

29 Geiger 2008, 147, 154-155.

30 Gowing 2005, 146; Van den Hengel 2009, 271; Suetonius, *Augustus*, 31.

31 Luce 2009, 403-408.

32 A. Postumius Regillensis was famous for the victory against the Latins in 496 BC, and promptly became seen as the builder of the temple of Saturn. Tiberius Gracchus was famous for a triumph celebrated in 178 BC over the Celtiberians; Gowing 2005, 142.

33 Goldbeck 2015, 40; Luce 2009, 403-406.

against him and his ancestors. The *summi viri* were put together in such a way that the narrative of its 'members', including Pompeius and Marius, was largely and intentionally altered.³⁴ A new narrative was formed and displayed in various ways: through the selection of the specific men – and accordingly the absence of other important men of the Republican period – and through the selection of deeds that were mentioned on the bases of the statues.

To start with the deeds: these were listed at the bottom of the statue. Various in sort, the deeds concerned different kinds of achievements, from the foundations of temples to military triumphs. Though evidence is poor, it is fair to state that the inscriptions mainly listed men with military achievements.³⁵ Yet despite their great accomplishments, the prominent men of the *summi viri* all had a tainted past with a black page in their narrative of glory. Pompeius was, for instance, nicknamed 'the butcher' in the civil wars under Sulla and Marius.³⁶ However, such black pages did not form an obstacle for the appropriation process as such. For inclusion, on which side of Rome's history of civil wars one once stood was irrelevant.³⁷ What mattered was how a person had contributed to the grandeur of the Roman state, the *maiestas imperii*.³⁸

Maiestas imperii – based on virtues such as discipline or achieving peace, combined with achievements such as territorial gains or military victories – may be seen as a vital criterion for selection and appropriation.³⁹ What also mattered was the relationship between Augustus and the potential *summi viri*, which possibly influenced the selection process to a greater extent than other criteria. The Forum of Augustus, then, functioned as a threshold for who was worth remembering and appropriating, and who was simply not worthy. The selection of those men regarded as worthy or unworthy was also influenced by alignment with the newly created narrative of the Imperial family and their ancestors. The inclusion occurred by the grace of Augustus, representing the shift in control over public memory and opinion from the Senate to Augustus himself.⁴⁰

34 Galinsky 1996, 197; Goldsworthy 2014, 389.

35 Luce 2009, 404; Shaya 2013, 88.

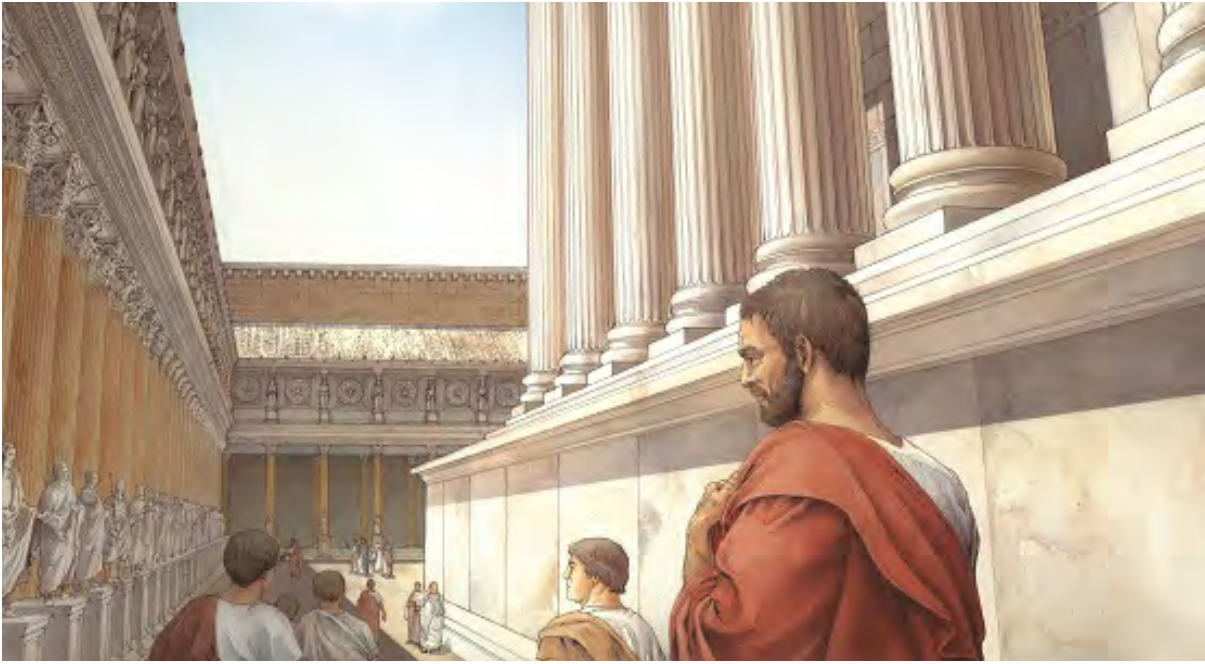
36 For Pompeius 'the butcher', see: Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Deeds and Sayings*, 6.2.8; Gowing 2005, 142-143.

37 Geiger 2008, 156.

38 Galinsky 1996, 197; Goldsworthy 2014, 389.

39 Shaya 2013, 88. Josephine Shaya talks of the importance of virtues of the *summi viri* such as discipline, fortitude and piety, and she emphasises peace and prosperity as well. I agree that these played an important part in the selection process, which could be assessed by contextualizing it within *maiestas imperii*.

40 Flower 2006, 115, 117, 122.



THE WHO: COMPARING STATUES, CHANGING APPROPRIATIONS

The purpose of the *summi viri* was to evoke comparisons. In order to understand the purpose of these comparisons, it is vital to realise that the target audience was not just the elite; the forum could be entered by anyone (Figure 5).⁴¹ It should come as no surprise that a comparison between Pompeius and Augustus would probably lead to the conclusion that Augustus had been more valuable for the grandeur of the Roman state than Pompeius, at least according to Augustus.⁴²

It is worth wondering whether a comparison between Augustus' and Pompeius' military accomplishments would sufficiently exalt Augustus. I believe that what exalted Augustus above the rest of the *summi viri* was a combination of the criteria of *maiestas imperii*. The accomplishment of ending the civil wars and bringing peace to the Roman Empire compensated for his lack of militarism. At the same time, it served as a comparison with, for instance, Appius Claudius Caecus, also among the *summi viri*, who had constructed the Via Appia in 312 BC.⁴³ In my view, the deciding factor in these comparisons, and a vital aspect in countering the illiteracy of the larger part of the population who visited, was the central position of Augustus' statue in the middle of the forum.⁴⁴ Whilst the *summi viri* stood in a crescent circle in

Figure 5

Reconstructive view of the Forum of Augustus from the north-east.

Left: The eastern portico, with the statues of the illustrious members of the Gens Iulia and of the history of Rome.

In front: the southern portico, adjacent to the Forum of Caesar.

Right: The Temple of Mars Ultor (<http://fori-imperiali.info/en/002-2/> accessed on 20-03-2019).

⁴¹ Zanker 1968, 13-14.

⁴² Luce 2009, 404.

⁴³ For Appius Claudius Caecus, see: Shaya 2013, 88.

⁴⁴ For the statue of Augustus, see: Van den Hengel 2009, 251.

the eastern corner, the placement of the statue of Augustus – to be seen in the light of psychological preparation – made him the central point of attention and thus the most valuable for *maiestas imperii*.

These comparisons and alterations formed the basis of a new 'myth'. Appropriation is not a static process; it changes over time. The original narrative either fades away or gradually transforms into a new one: namely, the second system.⁴⁵ The transformation happens over time, often without a clear and visible initiator deliberately steering for the change.⁴⁶ The (Late) Roman Republic was the original narrative that gradually was transformed by various types of propaganda over the course of the reign of Augustus; the *Aeneid* of Virgil is a prime example of this propaganda.⁴⁷ Comparing Pompeius to Augustus, the latter becomes raised on an even higher pedestal, enhancing his persona and status. Augustus became an embodiment of an abstract idea of Roman qualities, detached from the person himself, but nevertheless forming an example for future emperors.⁴⁸

The Forum of Augustus serves as a tangible example of how this myth was propagated and of what it was constituted. This newly formed 'myth' went further than simply aggrandising Augustus. The comparison in place showed Augustus' value for the *maiestas imperii*, yet simultaneously made him a 'successor' of these Republican heroes, the *princeps* he proclaimed to be, not the emperor he actually was.⁴⁹ Making Augustus a successor, the *summi viri* provided him and the Julian family with legitimacy for his rule. As a result, people slowly forgot how Augustus had ascended to power, with the new myth taking over.⁵⁰

In sum, it may be possible to say that the formation of this new myth could only occur because of the fact that Pompeius – and, in a larger perspective, all the *summi viri* – had been altered through appropriation. Selectivity, therefore, forms a vital part of appropriation, as it provides the comparison needed for this new myth.

This process of alteration, by which Pompeius and his identity – in the broadest sense of the word – was appropriated,

45 Nelson 2003, 164.

46 Ibid., 164.

47 I am aware of the controversy surrounding the *Aeneid*, however, I withhold in taking a stance in this debate, since it is beyond the scope of this article, see: Zanker 1988, 193.

48 Gowing 2005, 143-145.

49 Zanker 1988, 192-193.

50 Ibid., 192-193.

can be repeated indefinitely.⁵¹ New and differing aspects useful to appropriation by a second system often come up and either replace the current narrative or are added to it. The Forum of Augustus, as a monument, forms the basis for the additions and continues the appropriation process.⁵²

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article discussed the Forum of Augustus, a landmark of monumentality in early Imperial Rome. The monument has been analysed through the novel approach of appropriation, as developed by R. Nelson. Whereas appropriation is a contemporary theory used to understand the present, I have proposed applying it to the past, more specifically to the statues of the *summi viri* in the Forum of Augustus. To study this case through the lens of appropriation, I have used the questions of the *how*, the *who* and the *why* as analytical tools to structure the argument.

The analysis of the *how* concerned the question of how appropriation occurred. Psychological preparations turned out to be a vital element in the general appropriation process at the *Forum Augustum*, as well as for the specific case of the statue of Pompeius. The analysis of the *why* question explained the purpose of appropriation. The selection process for appropriation played a central role, especially the selection criteria of *maiestas imperii* for the *summi viri* and the deliberate alterations that coincided with these. These alterations served the construction of a newly formed narrative, propagated by the *summi viri*, which aggrandized the persona of Augustus. The analysis of the *who* question concerned itself with who was behind the appropriation process. In this case, the appropriator was Augustus, with his forum serving as a transparent mechanism for this process. The appropriation of Pompeius, in particular, played a vital role in the formation of a second system, namely the newly constructed narrative of Augustus. Crucial for this formation were the comparisons between Pompeius and Augustus, a process in which appropriation was flexible since it could be altered indefinitely.

As this article demonstrates, appropriation is a useful concept to apply to monuments for which the past plays an important role. The group of the *summi viri* statues on the Forum of Augustus has served as a tangible example of this. Besides the application of appropriation, its perception in the Roman past as part of memory practices may also be a viable topic of study. The topic

⁵¹ Nelson 2003, 163.

⁵² Assman 2009, 6.

of perception is beyond the scope of this article, but it may be interesting in the future to combine the notions of appropriation and perception in order to highlight both the process and the reception of a monument.

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