THE EMPEROR AND PUBLIC WORKS IN THE CITY OF ROME

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The way that the public image of Roman emperors was shaped has been the object of scholarly study since Zanker published his *Augustus und die Macht der Bilder*. In many cases, these studies concentrate on the messages that the man in power tried to convey with the structures he had built, his art program, his coins, his inscriptions, and so on. They deal with the interpretation of sculpture, with building policy, with the location of inscriptions and statues, and with the communication of the emperor's virtues.

However, the perception of imperial power results not only from the image that an emperor is able to communicate, but also from his deeds and benefactions. As Béranger wrote: "L'exercice du pouvoir est inséparable des soucis. *Imperare, curare* (φροντίζειν) ne sont pas pour rien synonymes. Le second sonnait mieux que le premier et présentait sous un jour favorable l'activité du chef."¹ In this view ruling implies taking care of, *providentia*.²

In this paper, I will return to the representation of power as indicated in the words of Béranger. I hope to demonstrate that Agrippa's efforts in the sphere of public works in the city of Rome supported Octavian's/Augustus' ruling position from 33 BC onwards. It is my aim to show that these efforts were effective not only because Augustus gave the impression that something was done for the people in the city, but also because these efforts really did make a difference to the living conditions of those people.

In his *Plebs and Princeps*, Yavetz argues that the aedileship of Agrippa in 33 BC was meant to demonstrate the ruler's concern for the common people.³ I think he is right. In the long term, however, such a demonstration will only survive in the memories of the people if the emperor continues his efforts.

This paper will discuss that part of Agrippa's activities in the field of urban public works that may have had a substantial effect on day-to-day life in the city. For that reason, it will centre neither on public works like temples, theatres and other magnificent buildings, nor on gifts to the people. The focus is on those public works that are hardly visible to the eye because they lie

¹ J. Béranger, *Recherches sur l'aspect idéologique du principat* (Basel 1953), 195.

² For *providentia* and other imperial virtues on the coins of later emperors see C.F. Noreña, 'The Communication of the Emperor's Virtues', *Journal of Roman Studies* 91 (2001), 146-168.

³ Z. Yavetz, *Plebs and Princeps* (Oxford 1988, rev. ed.), 89.

underground for the most part, the real infrastructure. Those are the sewers and the water supply.

The significance of the urban infrastructure is recognized for instance by Schneider, who suggested that a clearly effective infrastructure is important for the legitimacy of the emperor's power.⁴ This may be true in the first century AD, but where did this idea stem from? Were the initial years of Octavian's/Augustus' reign decisive? Emily Gowers, analysing the symbolic value of the Cloaca Maxima, called attention to a metaphor of Varro.⁵ In his Menippean satire *Marcopolis*, Varro compared a city to a human body: *sensus portae, venae hydragogiae, clauaca intestini*. The senses are the gates, the veins the aqueducts/waterworks, the sewers the intestines.⁶ In this analogy of the body, the aqueduct is given the role of vein containing essential liquid, and the sewer is given the role of waste-disposal unit. Just as veins and intestines are essential for human well being, a city cannot do without aqueducts and sewers.

At the end of the republic, Rome was in bad health. The population of the city must have grown enormously, especially in the first half of the first century BC. Nevertheless, from 125 BC onwards, not a single new aqueduct had been commissioned and illegal tapping occurred frequently.⁷ Civil war and political strife must have consumed almost all financial resources. It is safe to assume that little attention was paid to the maintenance of the sewers and the upkeep of the existing aqueducts. Therefore, both the water supply and the drainage systems must have been in bad condition.

In 36 BC, Agrippa defeated Sextus Pompeius at the battle of Naulochus in order to secure the corn transports to the city and bring its food shortage to an end. By that time, the office of aedile was so little sought after that no candidates for election were available.⁸ A few years later, in 33 BC, the year that started with Octavianus as consul (II), Agrippa took the office of aedile and performed his assignment in a remarkable way. In addition to games, presents, free entrance to the baths throughout the year, and a distribution of olive oil and salt, he took in hand and paid for the repairs to public buildings, streets, sewers, and aqueducts.⁹

⁴ H. Schneider, 'Infrastruktur und politische Legitimation im frühen Prinzipat', *Opus* 5 (1986), 23-51.

⁵ E. Gowers, 'The Anatomy of Rome from Capitol to Cloaca', *Journal of Roman Studies* 85 (1995), 23-32; H. Bauer, 'Cloaca Maxima' in E.M. Steinby (ed.), *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae*, vol. 1, A-C (Rome 1993).

⁶ J.-P. Cèbe, *Varron, Satires Ménippées. Édition, traduction et commentaire*, vol. 8, *Marcopolis-Mysteria* (Rome 1987), Fragment 292 (290).

⁷ Sextus Iulius Frontinus, *De aquis urbis Romae* 76.1-2.

⁸ Dio Cassius 49.16.2.

⁹ Dio Cassius 49.43.1-4.

Cloacae

Dio Cassius, telling about Agrippa's activities as aedile, brings the purging of the sewers into prominence. It is one of the first events that he records for the year 33 BC. Even the boat trip that Agrippa made through the Cloaca Maxima after he had unblocked mountains of debris, is recorded for 33 BC.¹⁰ If Dio is right, Agrippa started the process of city recovery right from the beginning of his period of involvement in urban life. He saw to the cleaning of the sewer system at the first possible moment and brought it to a favourable conclusion at great speed. Excess rainwater and street refuse were carried down, so that fewer people had to walk the streets with their feet wet in the dirt. Near contemporaries of Agrippa like the authors Dionysius of Halicarnassus who lived in Rome from 30 BC, and Strabo who visited the city a little later, included the sewers when they expressed great admiration for the capital of the Roman Empire.¹¹

Nevertheless, cleaning up sewers cannot have been an accepted way to earn fame. This kind of activity must have been lowest in esteem. As a consequence, "... one cannot purge a city of its dirt except by staining (...), in Agrippa's case, one's public image."¹² Rather, Agrippa's taking up the office of aedile after his terms as praetor (40 BC) and consul (37 BC) as well as his efforts in favour of the city sewers, show that this co-worker of Octavian was kowtowing to the people of Rome.

Water supply

Up to the first century BC, water from the existing aqueducts was distributed from *castella*, which were situated just inside the republican city wall. They must have distributed the greater part of the water that reached the city within the area enclosed by the wall. In the first half of the first century BC, however, magnificent gardens were built north of the city, and luxurious villas were constructed on the right bank of the Tiber. And what is more, during the civil wars, people from the lower strata of society probably settled in Transtiberim, on the Campus Martius, and along the via Appia. Because of the lack of archaeological evidence it is impossible to know for certain whether Transtiberim received water (from the aquae Appia, Anio Vetus or Marcia) through the Tiber bridges. It is, however, not very likely, since little attention

¹⁰ Dio Cassius 49.43.1; Plinius Maior, *Historia Naturalis* 36.104.

¹¹ Dionysius Halicarnassensis, *Antiquitates Romanae* III.67.5; Strabo 5.3.8.

¹² Gowers 1995, op.cit. (n.5), 31.

had been paid to the aqueducts in that period of time. Nor is it plausible that buildings on the Campus Martius and the *horti* beyond were supplied with water from the aqueducts. So the people living outside the city wall must have still relied on traditional sources such as wells, cisterns and the river to meet their need for water.

When Agrippa took over the responsibility for the urban water supply in 33 BC, he saw to it that the three older aqueducts were repaired.¹³ Also he ensured that the aqua Tepula was interrupted in order to join this aqueduct with the aqua Iulia under construction.¹⁴ When his aedileship came to an end, Agrippa did not withdraw from his task, but pursued his activities, as if he were – as Frontinus put it – a *curator aquarum* for the rest of his life. The aqua Virgo is an eye-catching result of this.

The volume of water entering the city must have increased considerably (see table 1). Around 25 BC, the volume must have sufficed for the inhabitants of the city. The quantity available in 19 BC probably created the right condition for ample water use, for example in the baths of Agrippa and in water works in gardens in or near the city centre.

From Frontinus' introduction to one of the *senatus consulta* on the issue of water supply from 11 BC, it can be inferred that under Agrippa's leadership public fountains were built in the entire urban area, inside as well as outside the republican city wall.¹⁵ This implies that Agrippa extended the distribution network beyond the Servian Wall. Although Frontinus does not mention explicitly that Agrippa started this extension right from the beginning of his activities in 33 BC, it is likely that this was the case. The most obvious indication is the building of the Specus Octavianus, a branch from the Anio Vetus, leading to a distribution point near the via Appia, south of Porta Capena. Judging by the name of this branch, it was built before 27 BC. It must have served the area along the Via Appia. Furthermore it is likely that Agrippa saw to it that the older aqueducts were pushed on to Transtiberim and to the Campus Martius before he built the aqua Virgo.¹⁶ The latter aqueduct was finished in 19

¹³ Frontinus, *De aquis urbis Romae* 9.9.

¹⁴ Frontinus, *De aquis urbis Romae* 9.1-2.

¹⁵ Frontinus, *De aquis urbis Romae* 104.1.

¹⁶ Frontinus, *De aquis urbis Romae* 11.1 mentions that Augustus had the aqua Alsietina built in 2 BC for his Naumachia Augusti in order not to exhaust the water supply for that part of the city. If so, other aqueducts must have brought water into Transtiberim at that moment of time. In addition to the aqua Virgo, these aqueducts must have been the aquae Appia, Anio Vetus and Marcia, of which Frontinus wrote that they supplied the right Tiber bank. The *regiones* VII and IX also received water from aqueducts repaired by Agrippa (*De aquis urbis Romae* 79.2; 80.2; 81.2). See R. Taylor, 'A citiore ripa aquae: Aqueduct river crossings in the ancient city of Rome', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 63 (1995), 75-103.

BC, and was the first to have its end outside the republican city wall. It must have distributed its water outside the wall right from the start. Only after this aqueduct was finished was water available in sufficient quantity to supply the baths of Agrippa, and maybe some of the gardens in the north and at the opposite Tiber bank (see figure 1).

Figure 1

In republican times, the water brought to the city by means of the aqueducts was meant for the public at large. Some of this water was given to the grounds of the most distinguished men of the republic, the *principes civitatis*. The authority to grant such a private tap lay in the hands of the censor, or if there were no such official, in the hands of one of the aediles. Complaints about unlicensed private connections and the decades of little attention for the water

supply make it plausible that by the middle of the first century BC a substantial number of people had made their private connection to the public water supply without proper consent. It must have been part of Agrippa's greater plan of aqueduct repair to take away unauthorized private branches and connections to the mains. In addition, if acting in the approved republican manner, he may have redetermined – as written down in his *commentarii* – to whom the privilege of a private connection to the public water supply was given.¹⁷ In any case, Agrippa divided the available quantity of water as best as he could between public buildings, public fountains and private people.¹⁸ His private *familia aquarum* kept up the system.

In sum: Agrippa raised the volume of water available to the city, extended its distribution to the entire built-up area, and made a sensible division between consumer groups, taking into account the republican rules. Furthermore he saw to the maintenance of the system.

What is the significance of Agrippa's acts in the field of the urban water supply in the long term? In my opinion his significance is twofold. The first time that the consequences of Agrippa's efforts for the urban water supply came to the fore was shortly after his death. In 11 BC, Augustus decreed by edict the right to own a tap to the people mentioned in Agrippa's *commentarii*. Subsequently, he turned over the whole business to his *beneficia*.¹⁹ This must mean that he took over the granting of water concessions. He also established standard sizes of the conduits and appointed a *curator aquarum* with the senate's consent.²⁰ Furthermore he promised a major repair of all aqueducts, and ordered new branches to supplement the aquae Appia and Marcia.²¹ At that moment, legislation regarding water supply was formally adjusted to the existent situation. The *princeps* assumed responsibility for these public works, while entrusting an official with the authority to supervise the execution of the practical aspects. Agrippa had solved the problems in this field and had prepared the way for the emperor's formal take-over. It was clear, for both the urban population and future emperors that from then on the upkeep and extension of the water supply system were imperial duties. Agrippa's second,

¹⁷ This is deduced from Frontinus, *De aquis urbis Romae* 99.3: Augustus quoque edicto complexus est, quo iure uterentur qui ex commentarii Agrippae aquas haberent, tota re in sua beneficia translata; For republican rules see G. de Kleijn, *The Water Supply of Ancient Rome, City area, Water, and Population* (Amsterdam 2001), 93-100.

¹⁸ Frontinus *De aquis urbis Romae* 98.2-3.

¹⁹ Frontinus, *De aquis urbis Romae* 99.3.

²⁰ Frontinus, *De aquis urbis Romae* 99.4-5.

²¹ *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* 20.2 and Frontinus, *De aquis urbis Romae* 5.6. Repairs were finished in 5 or 4 BC (CIL 6.1244).

equally significant contribution was that he substantially raised the water volume available to the city. This is particularly clear when compared to Frontinus' time.

In the years that Octavian tried to turn himself into a *princeps senatus*, he stressed his concern for the Roman republic. These were the early years of Agrippa's acting as if he were *curator aquarum*. It is likely that Agrippa stuck to the republican reservedness when granting water privileges. That meant, according to Frontinus, that only the *principes civitatis* were given a private water supply to their grounds. As a consequence, there was only a small number of private taps, and the majority of the total amount of water was given to the public. It is shown that the total volume in AD 97 had almost tripled compared with that of 25 BC.

Table 1: Water quantities.²²

	Total volume per day
ca. 34 BC	At most 191,000 m ³
ca. 25 BC	At most 283,000 m ³
ca. 19 BC	At most 338,000 m ³
ca. 97 AD	At most 635,000 m ³

Frontinus also provides data on the subject of water division (table 2).²³ By his time, about one third of the total water volume was distributed to the general public. If these data may be combined, the inference must be that the total amount of water tripled in the first century AD, whereas the public share diminished from almost full to about one third. Assuming that the size of the urban population had not changed in the course of the century, the available volume per person at the end of the first century must have been roughly equal to that of 25 BC.

²² The numbers are derived from calculations made by civil engineers: D.R. Blackman, 'The volume of water delivered by the four great aqueducts of Rome', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 46 (1978), 52-72; H. Fahlbusch, 'Über Abflußmessung und Standardisierung bei den Wasserversorgungsanlagen Roms', in *Wasserversorgung im antiken Rom* (München & Wien 1989, 4th ed.), 134.

²³ Frontinus, *De aquis urbis Romae* 78.

Table 2: Water division according to Frontinus *De aquis urbis Romae* 78

	quinaria			quinaria	
in urbe	4,063	29 %	emperor	1,718	12%
			private people	2,345	17%
Extra urbe	9,955	71%	emperor	1,708	12%
			private people	3,845	27%
			public	4,401	32%

Conclusion

In 33 BC, the inhabitants of Rome were given the impression that Octavian was concerned about their poor living conditions. He made Agrippa humble himself for the well being of the people. And Agrippa's acts did have an impact: he really did improve the living conditions of the people at large. Augustus' *providentia* was shown not only by images and ideas, but also by a lifelong concern about the peoples' basic needs. In this matter, as in many other ways, Augustus can be regarded as the one who set the pattern that his successors followed.

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