POLITICAL APOLLO: FROM CALLIMACHUS TO THE AUGUSTANS¹)

BY

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Octavian’s claim to be under the special protection of Apollo gave rise to a tension in Augustan poetry between Apollo, the god of poets, and ‘political Apollo’. While some references to Apollo are clearly traditional, others acquire specific Augustan connotations. Given the pervasive influence of Callimachus in Augustan poetry, and the fact that he too wrote under court patronage, it is worth investigating Callimachean uses of Apollo for possible parallels between Callimachus and the Augustans in their poetic use of ‘political Apollo’. By way of introduction I shall first summarise the Augustan poets’ use of Apollo, before considering some Callimachean references to him and examining the links between Callimachus’ use of Apollo and that of the Augustans.


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Of the Augustan poets, Horace in particular uses Apollo in contexts which have contemporary, often political, application\(^3\). He develops the literary convention, that Apollo inspires poets, into what has been called the 'vates concept’\(^4\), claiming the authority of Apollo when, as a poet divinely inspired, he comments on what is wrong in the contemporary world, or gives advice to Octavian\(^5\). Other aspects of Apollo to which Horace frequently alludes, in connection with the civil wars, are those of Far-Shooter and Healer; horrified by the atrocities of war, he sees in Apollo not only a defender of the state, but also the protector and divine counterpart of Octavian, to whom he looks to save the state and restore peace\(^6\).

For Vergil too Apollo is both the god of poetic inspiration and the patron of Octavian\(^7\), and in the Aeneid Apollo underlines Vergil's vision of Rome's destiny and mission: Apollo repeatedly guides the Trojans in their search for their new home, and protects both Ascanius and Aeneas, as well as other leaders and founders, like Evander\(^8\). These leaders are types of Augustus, and Vergil uses Apollo to emphasise links between Aeneas and Augustus\(^9\). He also refers specifically to Apollo of Actium, as being instrumental in the victory of Augustus\(^10\).

By contrast with the political associations built up around Apollo by Horace and Vergil, Tibullus’ references to the god are conventional literary ones, in keeping with the non-political character of

\(^3\) More than half his references to Apollo occur in poems which have some political significance.
\(^5\) See especially Carm. 3,4; 4,6; cf. 1,2,30-32; 1,31; 4,2.
\(^6\) Carm. 1,2; 1,12; 1,21; 1,31; 3,3; 3,4; Carm. Saec.
\(^7\) Georg. 3 proem, Ecl. 4. Ecl. 5,35 draws a parallel between the Julian house and Apollo, since Julius Caesar may be identified with Daphnis (Coleman, R: Vergil: Eclogues, CUP 1977, on 5,35).
\(^8\) Aen. 3,79 ff.; 3,358 ff.; 6,12; 7,241; 9,638 ff.; 8.333.
\(^9\) 3,274 ff. (mention of the Trojan city founded at Actium recalls Octavian's foundation there of Nicopolis; the dedication of the shield by the Trojans foreshadows Octavian's dedication of trophies after Actium; and the games celebrated there bring to mind Octavian's Actian games); 4,142 ff. (where Aeneas—like Octavian—looks like Apollo. Octavian had a statue of Apollo, with his own features, set up in the Palatine temple [Schol.Cruq. ad Hor. Epist. 1,3,17; Servius ad Verg. Ecl. 4,10]); 6,69 f.; 791-795; cf. Georg. 4,560-562.
\(^10\) Aen. 8,671-713; 720-722.