
Heidelberg

F.-H. Mutschler

AUGUSTUS' RELATIONS WITH
THE AEMILIi LEPIDI –
PERSECUTION AND PATRONAGE

The emperor Augustus, both in his early years of power as Octavian and later as princeps, was interested in developing active support of members of Rome’s oldest noble families as a means of legitimizing his authority\(^1\). One such family, the Aemilii Lepidi, received both favoritism and persecution at the hands of the emperor. It is the aim of this paper to examine closely Augustus’ relations with this particular family and determine the motivation behind these acts of patronage and punishment. Hopefully this exercise will shed some light on the inner workings of the Augustan principate and on the emperor’s treatment of “friends and enemies”.

The Aemilii Lepidi, a branch of one of Rome’s patrician gentes maiores, had produced numerous magistrates since the early third century B.C.\(^2\). The family’s most illustrious member was a M. Aemilius Lepidus who was twice consul (187 and 175 B.C.), censor (179 B.C.), pontifex maximus, and six times princeps.

---

1) An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Duquesne History Forum in October, 1979 and supported by a summer research grant from Western Kentucky University. See Sir Ronald Syme, The Roman Revolution (Oxford, 1939), especially pages 236–237, 244, 369–386. See also Arthur Ferrill, Prosopography and the Last Years of Augustus: Historia 20 (1971), 718–731 for a discussion of the prosopographical method and some of its problems.

2) For details of the family’s history, see my dissertation, The Aemilii Lepidi (Newark, Delaware, 1973 – University Microfilms nr. 74–8754).
Augustus' Relations with the Aemilii Lepidi 181
ceps senatus. Another M. Aemilius Lepidus, the rebellious consul of 78 B.C., had brought some dishonor on the family name, at least in the eyes of the optimates. Two of his sons, L. Aemilius Paullus (cos. 50 B.C.) and M. Lepidus the future triumvir, represent divergent factions within the family, the former basically Republican and the latter strongly Caesarian 3).

The first family member known to have had a relationship with Octavian was this latter brother. Lepidus had been one of Julius Caesar's close friends and trusted administrators and had served both as his consular colleague and as his master of the horse. In the wake of Caesar's assassination, Lepidus effectively stabilized the situation by occupying the city with his soldiers 4). He was also the intermediary who reconciled Octavian and Antony and joined with them in 43 B.C. to form the Second Triumvirate 5). His two colleagues casually brushed Lepidus aside after he had given them seven of his legions for the campaign against Brutus and Cassius, even though he had capably administered Rome and the west in their absence. Octavian sent Lepidus off to govern the province of Africa in 40 B.C. and summoned his assistance in the war against Sextus Pompey in 36. After helping Agrippa defeat Sextus' forces, Lepidus tried to reassert himself as a triumvir. However, Octavian gained control of Lepidus' soldiers and stripped him of all powers except his life office as pontifex maximus 6).

There is plenty of evidence to indicate that Octavian mistreated Lepidus from the time of the victory at Philippi. First by taking his triumviral provinces and splitting them with Antony and later by treating him as a subordinate in negotiations during the Sicilian campaign, deposing him from the triumvirate, and exiling him, Octavian showed his disdain for his former colleague 7). After becoming emperor, Augustus continued his harass-

3) For a discussion of Paullus' temporary defection to Caesar, see my article The Career of L. Paullus, cos. 50: Latomus 38 (1979) 637-646.
5) Eutrop. 7.2; App. B.C. 4.2; Livy Per. 119; Oros. 6.18.
6) See L. Hayne, The Defeat of Lepidus in 36 B.C.: Acta Classica 17 (1974) 59-65 and my article which follows it, esp. 70-73. Antony would later (Dio 50.1.3; Plut. Ant. 55) complain about Octavian's treatment of their colleague, but no evidence survives of an official protest in 36.
7) Dio 49.8.3.
ment of Lepidus by summoning him to Rome and ridiculing him in the Senate\(^8\).

The chief reasons behind the mistreatment of Lepidus appear to have been ambition and jealousy. Octavian was the weakest member of the triumvirate at its origin, at least in terms of the division of lands, and he was determined to change that situation from the beginning. Once he had risen above Lepidus, he wanted to make it clear that the equality agreed upon in 43 was no longer in effect. With the threat of Sextus Pompey gone, Octavian no longer needed Lepidus and he feared a combination of his two colleagues against him\(^9\). Augustus was likely jealous of the distinguished family Lepidus represented, in contrast to his own relatively obscure origins, and of the office of pontifex maximus which he could believe was rightfully his. As young C. Octavius in 44 B.C. he may have harbored some resentment against Lepidus because Julius Caesar had preferred to name Lepidus *magister equitum* instead of Octavius\(^10\).

The second family member dealt with by Octavian was Lepidus' own son of the same name. This young man was arrested by Maecenas as administrator of Rome and later executed for plotting to kill Octavian upon his victorious return from Actium\(^11\). Appian even says that young Lepidus was sent to Octavian at Actium, perhaps to prevent him from becoming a martyr for the discontented in Rome\(^12\). It may be that the young man was trying to arouse opposition to Octavian and build up support for the return of his father to power. The former triumvir, likely removed from the scene in exile at Circeii, was not involved, although his wife, Junia, was accused of knowledge of her son's plot\(^13\). In any case, the young Lepidus was executed and the extent of his guilt will probably never be known.

---

8) Dio 54.15.4–7.
9) Appian (B.C. 5.93) relates Octavian's apprehension about Antony's sending the messenger Callias to Lepidus in Africa.
10) Dio (44.5.3) includes among the honors voted Caesar the right for his son or adopted son to be pontifex maximus. See Aug. Res Gestae 2.10. Pliny the Elder (N.H. 7.147) lists Caesar's choice of Lepidus as a *repulsa* for the future emperor.
11) Vell. Pat. 2.88.1–3; App. B.C. 4.50; Livy Per. 133; Sen. De Clem. 1.9.5–6; Suet. Aug. 19.1; Dio 54.15.4.
13) Appian (B.C. 4.50) tells the ironic story of Lepidus, trying to ease his wife's judicial problems, appearing before the consul Balbinus, who had earlier been proscribed by the triumvirs.
Octavian's patronage of the Aemilii Lepidi began with the triumvir's nephew, Paullus Aemilius Lepidus. Paullus had apparently fought with the Republican forces under Brutus, but by 36 B.C. he was with Octavian in Sicily. He may have been one of the former enemies reconciled to Octavian and rewarded in the group of sixty-seven men receiving the praetorship in 38. Octavian's favor is shown in Paullus' selection as one of the suffect consuls in 34. The office by then had lost its independent power, but it was still an honor to receive the consulship and it added distinction to Paullus' rededication of the Basilica Aemilia, now also called the Basilica Paulli.

It is not known exactly when Paullus married Cornelia, Octavian's step-daughter who had perhaps been adopted by him during his marriage to Scribonia, but the wedding was very likely another sign of Octavian's favor. The emperor's closeness to Cornelia is attested to in Propertius' lovely elegy concerning her death. Augustus' patronage of Paullus' career also led to a proconsulship, entry into the augural college, and the distinction of being one of the final pair of "Republican" censors (22 B.C.). Another marriage tie to the imperial family, an even closer one, came with the wedding of Augustus' granddaughter, the younger Julia, to the eldest son of Paullus and Cornelia, L. Aemilius Paulinus (Lepidus). The rebuilding of the Basilica Aemilia after a fire had damaged it in 14 B.C. was largely subsidized by Augustus and Paullus' friends, although probably credited to Paullus or his son.

---

14) Suet. Aug. 16.3; see my article on Paullus, A Note on P. Lepidus: C.Ph. 73 (1978) 42-45.
15) Dio 48.43.1-2. His father was proscribed by the triumvirs and Dio (54.2.1) says Paullus was also included. Suetonius (Aug. 16.3) reports that Paullus' slave attempted to kill Octavian in 36 to gain revenge for the father's proscription.
16) Degraffi, l. i. XIII 1, p. 251, 254, 283, 288; Tac. Ann. 3.72; Dio 49.42.2-3.
17) Prop. 4.11, esp. lines 55-60. See Ernestine F. Leon, Scribonia and Her Daughters: T.A.P.A. 82 (1951) 168-175.
18) Dio 54.2.1-3; Suet. Claud. 16; Vell. Pat. 2.95.3; CIA 3.573.
19) Suet. Aug. 64. Syme (R.R., 378, 422) has suggested that Paullus married Claudia Marcella (minor), the niece of Augustus, after Cornelia's death. Erich Bayer, Die Ehen der jüngeren Claudia Marcella: Historia 17 (1968) 118-123, expresses the view that Paullus' son married her prior to his marriage to the younger Julia. Neither argument is strongly convincing, but neither can be rejected on the basis of the scanty evidence at hand.
20) Dio 54.24.3. The Aemilius referred to could also be Quintus (cos. 21 B.C.) instead of Paullus or his son.
Augustus’ relationship with Paullus was apparently one of patronage through the bestowal of political and religious distinctions and through marriage ties in return for loyal service and the active and visible support of a man with Republican credentials and the name of one of Rome’s greatest families. Paullus’ life serves as a good example of the role played by many Roman nobles under the principate. They could win, often with far less competition, the various offices and other honors once held by their ancestors, but they were expected to serve their imperial patron loyally and they had to realize that the positions which had commanded such respect in former times no longer possessed independent power. For a consul in imperial Rome, the once majestic fasces would prove to be hollow.

Another member of the Aemilii Lepidi similarly favored by Augustus was Q. Aemilius Lepidus. Although he has frequently been identified as the triumvir’s younger son, I believe it much more likely that his father was Manius Aemilius Lepidus (cos. 66 B.C.)21. Quintus was elected consul in 21 B.C. after a bitter political struggle which threatened Augustus’ control in Rome and convinced the emperor that Agrippa should be given special powers over the city. Augustus made an effort to let the Romans choose between L. Silvanus and Q. Lepidus, but Horace’s indication that the other consul, M. Lollius, chose Lepidus as his colleague, perhaps to end the campaign violence quickly, could mean that Augustus made the decision22.

The emperor’s support of Quintus is apparent a few years later in 17 B.C. when he is recorded as a member of the XVviri sacris faciundis. During the spectacular Secular Games of that year, Q. Lepidus must have played a major role as a member of that college. An inscription lists him third of the fifteen members, behind Augustus and Agrippa, and another inscription, probably added to the records of the Ludi Saeculares in this period, emphasizes the role of a Manius Aemilius as a magister of the Xviri for the supposed games of 236 B.C.23. Quintus may have been the direct descendant of this decemvir and the inscription would thus stress the religious continuity and legitimacy of Augustus’

21) See my dissertation (n. 2 above), 278–280, for my documentation of this view.
22) Hor. Ep. 1.20; Dio 54.6.
23) CIL 12, p. 29, frg. XLVI; VI 32323, lines 150–154; see L. R. Taylor, New Light on the History of the Secular Games: A.J.P. 55 (1934) 101–120.
Augustus' Relations with the Aemilii Lepidi 185
games and of his subordinates. Quintus was also rewarded with a
marriage alliance to the imperial family when his daughter,
Aemilia Lepida, was engaged to one of Augustus' grandsons and
intended successors, L. Caesar. 

The two sons of Paullus Lepidus (cos. suff. 34 B.C.) and
Cornelia came very close to the center of power under Augustus.
The elder one, L. Aemilius Paullus, was married to the emperor's
granddaughter, the younger Julia. One should remember that
Paullus' mother and Julia's were half-sisters. Paullus was given the
clear honor of serving as consul with his brother-in-law, the heir-
apparent C. Caesar, in A.D. 125.

For some reason, presumably to gain real power, L. Paullus
apparently decided to risk his favored position in the imperial
family. He was involved in a conspiracy with Plautius Rufus and
was executed. It is likely that the incident took place in A.D. 6,
when a Publius Rufus was involved in stirring up talk of a revolt
in Rome over a grain shortage, the extensive destruction caused
by a fire, and an inheritance tax. It is also very tempting to tie in

24) Tac. Ann. 3.23. It is interesting to note that M. Lollius, Quintus' consu-
lar colleague, was honored by the marriage of his granddaughter to C. Caesar
25) Dio 55 (ind.); Degrassi, L. I. XIII 1, p. 526/7. Inscriptions in Athens and
Delos (Bull. hell. 3 [1879] 153–155) indicate that he may have served earlier in the
east.
27) Suet. Aug. 19.1; Schol. Juv. 6.158. The argument of J. Scheid (Les
frères Arvales, Paris, 1975, 90–93) and Sir Ronald Syme (History in Ovid, Ox-
ford, 1978, 140, 211) that Paullus was the frater Arvalis whose place in the college
was taken by Drusus Caesar in May of A.D. 14 (CIL VI, 2023 a), and thus must
have been only exiled for his earlier conspiracy, is not totally convincing. The
testimony of the Scholiast on Juvenal (6.158) that “... [Julia] nupta Aemilio Paulo,
cum is maiestatis crimine perisset, ab avo relegata est...” cannot be rejected with-
out stronger evidence to the contrary. The frater Arvalis could also have been
Paullus' father, the censor of 22 B.C. As Scheid points out (pp. 58–60), he was
certainly a viable candidate for holding that office. Although he would have been
old by A.D. 14 and he is often called Paullus Aemilius Lepidus instead of L.
Aemilius Paullus, the variety of names used for him (see esp. Dio 49.42.2, 54.2.1,
54.24.3 and Suetonius, Aug. 16.3) and Dio's (ind. 55) designation of his son as
"L.f." suggest that he may have been the frater Arvalis, thus permitting the
Scholiast's statement about the son's death to be accurate.
28) Dio 55.27.1–4. The fact that Paullus' brother Marcus was consul in
Paullus' conspiracy with the subsequent exiles of his wife, the younger Julia, her brother, Agrippa Postumus, and the poet Ovid. The engagement of Paullus' and Julia's daughter to Claudius was broken quod parentes eius Augustum offende-rant, indicating that both parents were involved in the offensive act.

Although the whole affair must remain very sketchy, it is not difficult to envision a combination of events - the return of Tiberius to power after the deaths of Lucius and Gaius, social unrest in Rome, military problems on the borders, the aging of Augustus, the absences of Tiberius to command the army - which together might have caused Paullus, Julia, and Agrippa Postumus to take a chance at gaining the power that they had considered rightfully theirs before Tiberius' return. If the opportunity were not taken, their chances for the future would appear even dimmer as the Tiberian faction gradually consolidated its position. Dio says that Tiberius made repeated trips to Rome in this period because he feared Augustus' favor might shift to someone else. Agrippa Postumus was a viable alternative and Paullus' marriage to Julia would strengthen his family's position for eventual succession. Whether he hoped to rule through or with his brother-in-law or had some vague dream of a restoration of the Republic is not clear. When his chance presented itself, his plans were discovered, he was executed, and his name was condemned to obscurity.

M. Aemilius Lepidus, Paullus' younger brother, was ultimately the most successful family member in both winning strong imperial approval and staying alive to enjoy it. Lepidus was chosen as consul for A.D. 6 and, although his colleague was

A.D. 6 should not preclude dating the conspiracy to that year. His loyalty to Augustus and Tiberius cannot be doubted and he could not have intervened successfully on his brother's behalf if he had wanted to do so.


31) Dio 55.27.5.
replaced by a suffect at mid-term, he served for the whole year\(^{32}\).
Lepidus was next honored by being made one of Tiberius' assistants in the campaign to put down revolts in Pannonia and Dalmatia. Late in A.D. 8 Tiberius placed Lepidus in command of his troops in winter quarters at Siscia in Pannonia and in the following year Lepidus marched the army through difficult, hostile territory to meet Tiberius in Dalmatia. For this successful march and perhaps also for his contributions to the subsequent victory over the Dalmatians, Lepidus received the *ornamenta triumphalia* from Tiberius, an honor later confirmed by the Senate\(^{33}\). The trust that Augustus and Tiberius placed in Lepidus when they gave him command of the army is especially remarkable when one considers that the conspiracy of his brother had very likely just occurred a couple of years earlier.

In A.D. 14 Lepidus was entrusted with another military command, this time over the imperial forces in Spain. It was probably about the same time, the year of Augustus' death, that the emperor included Lepidus in a group of potential *principes* and described him as *capacem, sed aspernantem*\(^{34}\). Lepidus continued his distinguished career under Tiberius, achieving both the proconsulship of Asia and an imperial marriage alliance, his daughter marrying Germanicus' son, Drusus\(^{35}\). Both Velleius Paterculus and Tacitus testify to the fact that this M. Lepidus was an exceptionally fine man as well as an excellent general and leader, a man clearly deserving the imperial offices and honors which he received\(^{36}\).

The last member of the Aemilii Lepidi to achieve distinction under Augustus was Manius Aemilius Lepidus, who became consul for the first half of A.D. 11\(^{37}\). The facts that his presumed father, Quintus (cos. 21 B.C.), had been favored by the emperor

---

33) Vell. Pat. 2.114.5–115.1–3; Dio 56.12.1, 17.2. Velleius calls him (2.114.5) *vir nomini ac fortunae Caesarum proximus*.
35) Tac. Ann. 6.40; L'Année Epigraphique (1934), 24 (nr. 87); CIL VIII, 9247.
36) Tac. Ann. 4.20; Vell. Pat. 2.114.5, 125.5; probably also Sen. Contr. 2.3.23, 9 praef. 5. On Seneca's comment, see my dissertation (n. 2 above), 299.
37) CIL I\(^2\) 1, p. 29 ad ann. 11 p. Chr., Degrassi, p. 530–531.
and that his sister had been engaged to L. Caesar and later married to one of Augustus’ generals, P. Sulpicius Quirinius, may have helped gain imperial support for him\(^{38}\). He continued to serve under Tiberius and was honored with the proconsulship of Asia and with entry into the augural college\(^{39}\).

Augustus’ relations with the Aemilii Lepidi were, on the whole, positive. As with other noble families, the emperor courted their support and patronized their careers. In his early days he desired to legitimize his revolutionary, unconstitutional position by associating members of the great families with his movement. Men like Paullus Aemilius Lepidus (cos. suff. 34 B.C.) were especially useful because of their affiliations with the Republican cause. After achieving sole power in the state, Augustus wanted to develop the stability associated with the institutions of the Republic. If members of the old nobility had not played major roles in the Senate and held the chief magistracies, any claim to a restoration of the Republic would have appeared ludicrous. Patricians were particularly attractive recruits, not just because they could hold the few positions still reserved to their class, but also because they added a special luster from Rome’s earliest days and because they provided suitable marriage partners to complement the newly-acquired patrician status of the imperial family\(^{40}\).

In return for the support of the nobles, Augustus was pleased to dispense or at least give his assistance in gaining political and religious offices, to provide financial help either to maintain a family’s senatorial status or in aiding the restoration of public works associated with specific families, such as the Basilica Aemilia, to establish marriage ties with the imperial family, or, if the person were qualified, to bestow military commands. Marriage alliances both legitimized Augustus’ family and created future support for the continuation of the principate.

The persecution of Lepidus the triumvir, possibly including the execution of his son, is an individual case that reflects Octavian’s driving ambition and vindictive jealousy. Augustus was not proud of his own violent activities as a triumvir and Lepidus was a

\(^{38}\) On the marriage to Quirinius, see Suet. Tib. 49.1; Tac. Ann. 3.22.
\(^{39}\) Tac. Ann. 3.32; CIL III, 7089, VIII, 9247.
\(^{40}\) See E. T. Salmon, Augustus the Patrician (Toronto, 1974), esp. 3–17 on the emperor’s interest in strengthening the patrician class.
Augustus' Relations with the Aemilii Lepidi

living reminder of those days and of Octavian's position of equality with two other men. Lepidus' longevity as pontifex maximus also must have galled Augustus, but the emperor was perceptive enough to avoid making the mistake of either stripping Lepidus of his lifetime office or killing him to get it 41). The execution of L. Aemilius Paullus (cos. A.D. 1) is a different situation. The man had been favored to the point of marriage into Augustus' direct line, but the closer a man got to the center of power, the more vulnerable he became to temptation and to personal attacks from others interested in the succession. The sudden deaths of his two brothers-in-law and the return to power of a different line, that of Tiberius, shattered Paullus' dreams, shut him off from power, and propelled him in desperation to the conspiracy which he hoped might salvage his future. When challenged or crossed, the emperor's punishment was swift. Paullus' treachery, however, did not preclude Augustus or Tiberius from trusting and rewarding his brother Marcus.

The reign of Augustus was a transition stage for the Roman nobility. Despite the return to Republican offices, continuing service in the Senate, and marriage ties into the imperial line, the old noble families gradually died out. Both Augustus' family and the Aemilii Lepidi disappeared before the end of the first century, but the political system Augustus had inaugurated would last, in one form or another, for several hundred years. A new nobility of imperial service, especially associated with military command, soon replaced the Republican families. The power of the Republican magistracies was never restored with the form and as time passed ties to the old families became relatively unimportant. Romans with the name Aemilius Lepidus were apparently alive as late as the fifth century A.D., but no record survives to indicate that they achieved any prominence 42). The Republican aristocracy never fully recovered from the devastations of the civil wars and their rule in the new state was a temporary one. With a new nobility established, and even emperors arising from non-Roman

41) See Aug. Res Gestae 2.10, where Augustus carefully avoids mentioning Lepidus by name, but where his bitterness toward his former colleague is expressed.
42) Rut. Nam. 307–308 indicates that there were still members of the family in his time (early fifth century).
The Later Aemilii Lepidi

Marcus Branch

72. M. Aemilius Lepidus (cos. 78)

81. L. Aemilius Paullus (cos. 50)

82. L. Aemilius Lepidus Paullus
(cos. suff. 34)

73. M. Aemilius Lepidus
(cos. 46, 42, IIIvir r.p.c.)

74. M. Aemilius Lepidus († 30)

115. L. Aemilius Paullus (cos. A.D. 1)  
Julia the Younger (Augusti neptis)

169. Aemilia Lepida (engaged to Claudius)

75. M. Aemilius Lepidus (cos. A.D. 6)

167. Aemilia Lepida  
(† A.D. 39)  
Drusus Caesar

76. M. Aemilius Lepidus
(Germanici f.)

Manius Branch

62. M.'Aemilius Lepidus (cos. 66)

79. Q. Aemilius Lepidus (cos. 21)

63. M.'Aemilius Lepidus (cos. A.D. 11)

170 Aemilia Lepida (engaged to L. Caesar)

171. Aemilia Lepida  
Galba

Numbers refer to Pauly-Wissowa, Realencyclopädie
Augustus' Relations with the Aemilii Lepidi

origins, Republican names represented a threat and were no longer of great use. They died out or maintained a low profile in a Roman world which would have been incomprehensible to their ancestors.

Western Kentucky University Richard D. Weigel

INSTITUTIO ORATORIA 10.3.25
A SUGGESTION

In the third chapter of his tenth book (sections 22-27), Quintilian discusses the desirability of seclusion for furtherance of effective study, comments on practical adaptations of that ideal, and defends his disagreement with one school of thought on the matter. The sections dealing with seclusion in a rural setting are, paradoxically, filled with personifications of temptations and distractions. Quintilian clearly takes issue with some educators, asserting that 1.) retreat into the pleasures of the country is not an encourager of diligence (studiorum hortator, 23); 2.) pleasant surroundings, in fact, entice the student's mind away from studies (necesse est avocent, 23) and toward themselves (ad se trahunt, 24); and 3.) the pleasure of the outdoors, so much touted by some, relaxes the contemplation rather than sharpening it (remittere potius voluptas ista videatur cogitationem quam intendere).

The reading of one sentence in the following section (25) is debated, and I here offer a solution to the problem. Winterbottom, in his Oxford Classical Text edition, prints the sentence thus:

Ideoque lucubrantes silentium noctis et clusum cubiculum et lumen unum velut †rectos† maxime teneat.

Sundry editions have preferred variant readings (tectos, erectos). Yet another reading, sound on several counts, suggests itself: rector for rectos.

1) For variants earlier proposed, see the apparatus of Spalding's old edition (Leipzig, 1798), with critical supplement by Zumpt (Leipzig, 1829), as well as Radermacher's Teubner text (1959). Of the standard editions, Winterbottom's