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Why Servius anyway, in any form?

Sometimes the Servian commentaries assist us to pinpoint moments in time from the first four centuries of Virgil reception, at other times we can speculate, but it is important to note, and to assert that, although there are tendencies, there is no single hermeneutic outlook in Servius, as there is no single moment of history in play. The outlook of the late fourth century may predominate, but the perpetuation of received notions about literary texts and the environments in which they are produced happens wherever readers talk about texts whose virtues guarantee the continuing of interest in those texts. Ideologically speaking, then, this commentary which I will call "Servius" for convenience's sake, might be expected to cover a wide spectrum. For these purposes it does not seem to matter whether we distinguish between Servius and DServius; there is no ideological consistency to each of the traditions. Servius reflects originary Augustan propaganda, contemporaneous with the publication of the poetic texts in question, and also to reflects concomitant opposition to that propaganda; at the same time it would not be surprising to find a variety of attitudes from the Julio-Claudian period, in which adulation and resistance, the latter in figures such as Lucan and Cornutus, who appears in Servius, create a Crocean reading of Virgil as elucidating contemporary, post-Virgilian history and ideology. Or, if we take Statius and Martial at their word, a hardening in the nature of literary patronage in the Flavian period, before Suetonius wrote his *Life of Virgil*, clearly has the potential to create a back-formation that may be responsible for the genesis of some of the fictions about patronage that we find in Servius, for instance:

tunc ei proposuit Pollio ut carmen bucolicum scriberet, quod eum constat triennio scripsisse et emendasse. item proposuit Maecenas Georgica, quae scripsit emendavitque septem annis. postea ab Augusto Aeneidem propositam scripsit annis undecim, sed nec emendavit nec edidit Serv. praef. in Aen. 1

Literalist readings of Eclogue 4.1-3 and Georgics 2.40-42 naturally lead to the suggestion that Pollio and Maecenas "proposed" the first two poems, and Augustus is the obvious candidate for the *Aeneid*.

My interest in this paper is the emperor, both the historical Augustus, in his dealings with Virgil and Virgil's poetry, and the Augustus, constructed over time, by whose received and constructed qualities the Virgilian hermeneutics of Servius would be affected. I will look in particular at the way Octavian/Augustus appears in Servius, and will attempt to distinguish various lines of thought on this topic that lie behind the ideological formation of the commentary.