**Shield of Augustus (AE 1952, 165)**

Marble copy of the 'clipeus aureus' (Golden Shield) of Augustus.

**Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.):** Honorific

**Original Location/Place:** Sanctuary for emperor worship in the colonia of Arelate (Arles).

**Actual Location (Collection/Museum):** Arles Museum

**Date:** 26 BCE

**Physical Characteristics:**
Round, marble shield, with curved face, on which the inscription is placed, surrounded by a border of 10 cm width. A post at the base of the shield and bronze clasp indicate that it originally stood on a pillar (see Benoit, *Le sanctuaire d'Auguste*, p. 51).

**Material:** Luna Marble.

**Measurements:** diameter: 96.5 cm

**Language:** Latin

**Category:** Roman

**Publications:**
Benoit (1952) p. 48-53 (**AE** 1952, 165)

**Commentary:**
This inscribed marble shield was excavated from a cryptoporticus in the Roman colony of Arelate (Arles). The text of the inscription reveals that it is a copy of the *clipeus aureus*, the golden shield that the Senate and the people of Rome awarded to Augustus, and which he recorded in chapter 34 of the *Res Gestae*. The shield was discovered in 1951 in the subterranean galleries of the *horrea* (warehouses) of the Forum (Seston, “Le Clipeus virtutis d’Arles”, p. 286). Fernand Benoit believed that it, and the statues which were also discovered in the same cryptoporticus, were part of the ornamentation of a sanctuary of Augustus that was consecrated there, and which had survived until its destruction in the fourth century CE (see Benoit, “Le sanctuaire d’Auguste”; Seston, “Le Clipeus virtutis d’Arles”, p. 286 for an alternative proposal for the deposition of objects).

The text of the shield appears to be an almost exact copy of the inscription on the “Golden Shield” awarded to Augustus in 27 BCE, which was displayed in the new, Julian Senate House in Rome. The reference in the marble copy of to the eighth consulship of Augustus firmly places it in 26 BCE however, which is at odds with the description given by the *Res Gestae* of the dedication of the Golden Shield, which appears to have occurred a year earlier. It is possible that the marble copy was set up in Arles later than the original version in Rome, following his passing through the town on his way back to Italy from Spain, however there has been much debate as to whether the Golden Shield in Rome was actually dedicated later than the other honours awarded to him in 27 BCE (for this debate see Benoit, “Le sanctuaire d’Auguste”; Seston, “Le Clipeus virtutis d’Arles”; Lacey, *Augustus and the Principate*, p. 93-94). Whatever the date of the dedication in Arles, it is clear that it was evidence of the strength of commitment to Augustus in a relatively new colony of Rome. Having supported Julius Caesar against Pompey, the town was resettled as the *Colonia Iulia Paterna Arelatensium Sextanorum*, the “ancestral Julian colony of Arles of the soldiers of the Sixth” in 46 BCE, and grew to be of some significance in the region of Gallia Narbonensis.

The Golden Shield had been dedicated to Augustus on account of his excellent government of the Roman people. His abilities were due to certain qualities that he embodied and which were repeated on the marble shield in Arles: virtue, clemency, justice and piety (*virtus, clementia, iustitia, pietas*). These characteristics epitomised his “uniquely moral leadership” and were, as Karl Galinsky has stated, an example of the “reciprocity between the princeps and the senate and the people...[the qualities listed] speak to the merits Augustus has already demonstrated and to his obligation to continue such in the future. They are also the virtues of the *res publica* and as such are shared by all. Augustus thus confirms a tradition and restores it to its original purpose” (*Augustan Culture*, p. 80). These ‘qualities’ were not new to Rome; *virtus, clementia, iustitia* and *pietas* were all attributes used by previous figures, such as Sulla, Pompey and Caesar, in varying ways to demonstrate their suitability for leadership and as justification for their actions (see Classen, *Virtutes Romanorum* p. 282-83). Augustus, however, used them not only in reference to his own exceptional abilities, but also as belonging to the *res publica*, the state, which he represented; the use of these attributes were therefore broadened out, with Augustus’s ‘restoration’ of Rome...
essentially based on the restoration of these qualities in the Roman people (Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, p. 80-81).

The four qualities listed on the shield are presented in two pairs: *virtus* and *clementia* in line 5, and *iustitia* and *pietas* in line 6. Although this pairing is certainly worthy of comment, the individual qualities should first be further explained. *Virtus*, or ‘virtue’, was a quintessential aspect of the Roman character from the early days of the Republic. Derived from the Latin word for man, *vir*, it carried competitive connotations of military success and bravery in battle, and was crucial to the characterisation of great statesmen (Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, p. 84). For the Roman noble of the late Republic, “*virtus*...consisted in the winning of personal preeminence and glory by the commission of great deeds in service to the Roman state” (Earl, *Moral and Political Tradition* p. 21). The “*virtus*” of Augustus here is clearly in reference to his victory at Actium, a great battle waged in the name of the Roman people and for their security, and the resultant *pax Augusta* (Augustan Peace), but it is also forward-looking; the “great deeds in service to the Roman state” described by Donald Earl above included Augustus’s policy of foreign expansion as well as internal consolidation of order. As well as defeating a “foreign enemy” of Rome, Augustus demonstrated his *virtus* through the continued addition of new territory to Roman power, such as Egypt, Pannonia, Moesia, Noricum and Raetia, all of which were brought under Roman control through his leadership (Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, p. 84). Augustus’s *virtus* was therefore a dual concept; it referred simultaneously to his reestablishment of political order through military campaigns (Actium) and his “service” to Rome through continued foreign expansion.

*Clementia*, or clemency, was paired with *virtus* here precisely because of the connection with military success. It was a word that had come to be associated particularly with Julius Caesar, after Cicero used it to describe his lenient treatment of Pompey’s soldiers who had capitulated to him at Corfinium in 49 BCE, compared with Pompey’s demand for proscriptions (Cicero, *Letters to Attalus*, X.7.1; VIII.11.2). Augustus understood this *clementia* as a defining attribute of Caesar, and “inherited” it from him, promising the Senate after the Battle of Philippi that he would acthumanely “after the manner of his father” (Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, XLVIII.3.6). This demonstration of clemency to his enemies became a cornerstone of Augustan ideology and was expressed repeatedly in the *Res Gestae* (see chapter 3-4; 26; 30-32). As long as the conquered enemy was not hostile to Rome, and was “submissive” to the *pax Romana*, Augustus promoted the principle of clemency as an example of his superior leadership. This was, perhaps, at odds with the behaviour demonstrated by Octavian during his ruthless persecution of Julius Caesar’s assassins and his own political enemies, the memory of which would still have been remarkably recent in 27 BCE, but this is why the statement of it here, and in the *Res Gestae*, was so important. Augustus was reaffirming the kind of standard of behaviour set for him by his father, and restating his intention to follow this model to the Roman people. In this instance, *clementia* related not only to his *virtus* in military matters, but also his individual treatment of fellow citizens, with whom he emphasised the reciprocity of their relationship (Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, p. 85).

*Justice* (*iustitia*) had long been heralded as a crucial characteristic of a good ruler. However, its appearance in the text of the Golden Shield and this replication of it here had clear Augustan implications; *iustitia* under Augustus meant a return to the just and fair application of the law, particularly within the sphere of government and politics. The legality of his rule was a key concern for Augustus, and one that he emphasised throughout the *Res Gestae* too (e.g. 5.1, 5.3, 6.1, 10.2) in order to make clear that his singular rule was constitutionally acceptable. “Justice” was also concerned with “injustice” and tyranny, the fight against which – in the form of Caesar’s assassins and Mark Antony – was presented as the motivation for Augustus’s actions to begin with. Although seemingly separate from the military connotations of *virtus* and *clementia*, *iustitia* also included a reference to war and foreign policy; according to traditional Roman concepts of war, they should only be waged if “pious and just,” meaning that those fought by Augustus, both domestically and in foreign territory, conformed to a certain set of standards and values rather than being inspired by personal gain (see *Res Gestae*, chapter 26; Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, p. 85-6).

The final quality listed on the shield was arguably the most important: *pietas* (piety). Of the four characteristics given here, it was the most inherently Roman and the one that carried the most weight in terms of ideology. Karl Galinsky has suggested that *pietas* existed as a counter-weight to *virtus*; it was a “cooperative” virtue that balanced the competition and self-aggrandisement of *virtus*, “representing the time-honoured Roman ideal of social responsibility, which includes a broad spectrum of obligations to family, country and gods” (*Augustan Culture*, p. 86). In the inscription from Arles, however, the *pietas* is directed particularly at the gods and the fatherland (*erga deos patriamque*), which for the Romans could not be separated; the security of the Roman world depended on the support of the gods, thus their worship represented just one expression of good citizenship and love for one’s country (Seston, “*Le Clipeus virtutis d’Arles*”, p. 293). It was a reciprocal bond that required unselfish input from all in pursuit of a shared, common good (Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, p. 88). The inscription from Arles, therefore, firmly identifies Augustus as acting for Rome and for the Roman people; after the instability of
the civil wars, Augustus restored order by returning to the long-held, traditional values upon which Rome had been founded. *Pietas* also contained a domestic quality too, especially through the filial duty epitomised by Vergil’s description of Aeneas’s carrying of Anchises [2] away from Troy [3]. Just as Aeneas acted to support his father, Augustus demonstrated his devotion to his family by avenging Julius Caesar’s death, before taking on the role of father himself to the Roman people, in whose best interests he wielded his authority. Yes

The four qualities, or virtues, listed on the marble shield from Arles form, therefore, almost an “Augustan constitution” (Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, p. 88). They were both a statement of his principles of leadership, but also a set of values to which he — and crucially the Roman people — could be held accountable. He was, as Karl Galinsky has described, the “guarantor of these principles; their implementation was not his alone, but needed to be shared by all” (*Augustan Culture*, p. 89). The fact that these qualities were listed on a shield in Arles, and possibly from a sanctuary dedicated to the worship of his *genius*, is indicative of the reciprocal nature of the behaviour that the virtues characterise, and the success of spreading the sense of necessary reciprocity in the provinces; the colony of Arelate engaged with the values of Augustus’s leadership and demonstrated their loyalty and commitment to it through the construction of a sanctuary and the copy of the shield. Indeed, the shield itself became a much-imitated motif across a range of media, including coins and altars, on which it was often paired with the civic crown and laurel trees also awarded to Augustus in 27 BCE and described in chapter 34 of the *Res Gestae* (for a list of examples, see Cooley, *Res Gestae*, p. 267-9). The virtues listed on the shield embodied the *auctoritas* of Augustus, and the replication of it on monuments across the Roman world clearly signifies the success with which it was felt.

Keywords in the original language:

- *senatus* [4]
- *populus romanus* [5]
- *Augustus* [6]
- *imperator* [7]
- *divus filius* [8]
- *clipeus* [9]
- *virtus* [10]
- *iustitia* [11]
- *clementia* [12]
- *pietas* [13]
- *deus* [14]
- *patria* [15]

Thematic keywords:

- *Augustus* [16]
- *shield* [17]
- *Roman Senate* [18]
- *Roman people* [19]
- *Roman virtue* [20]
- *Roman piety* [21]
- *Roman justice* [22]
- *Roman clemency* [23]
- *Roman province* [24]
- *Gaul* [25]
- *imperial cult* [26]
- *imperial virtues* [27]

**Bibliographical references:**

- Benoit, Fernand, “*Le sanctuaire d’Auguste et les cryptoportiques d’Arles*” [28], Revue Archéologique 39 : p. 31-67

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