

Constructing power in Augustus' Rome

The *Aeneid* - Anchises in the Underworld

The following passage is an extract from the *Aeneid*, an epic poem written during Augustus' reign which tells the story of Aeneas, the founder of Rome. This extract is set in the Underworld, where Aeneas' father Anchises points out Rome's future heroes. A particular place is set aside for Romulus, Augustus' mythological ancestor, and for Augustus himself.

Anchises talks about Romulus (Augustus's distant ancestor):

... viden, ut geminae stant vertice cristae,
et pater ipse suo superum iam signat honore?
en, huius, nate, auspiciis illa incluta Roma
imperium terris, animos aequabit Olympo,
septemque una sibi muro circumdabit arces,
felix prole virum ...

*See how Mars's twin plumes stand on his crest,
and his father marks him out for the world above with his own emblem?
Look, my son, under his command glorious Rome
will match earth's power and heaven's will,
and encircle seven hills with a single wall,
happy in her race of men ...*

Aeneid 6, 779 - 784

Anchises talks about Augustus:

"huc geminas nunc flecte acies, hanc aspice gentem
Romanosque tuos. hic Caesar et omnis Iuli
progenies magnum caeli ventura sub axem.
hic vir, hic est, tibi quem promitti saepius audis,
Augustus Caesar, Divi genus, aurea condet
saecula qui rursus Latio regnata per arva
Saturno quondam, super et Garamantas et Indos
proferet imperium.

*Now direct your eyes here, gaze at this people,
your own Romans. Here is Caesar, and all the offspring
of Iulus destined to live under the pole of heaven.
This is the man, this is him, whom you so often hear
promised you, Augustus Caesar, son of the Deified,
who will make a Golden Age again in the fields
where Saturn once reigned, and extend the empire beyond
the Libyans and the Indians.*

Aeneid 6, 788 - 795

How do these passages link past, present and future
to explain Augustus' place in history?

How is Augustus' reign presented?