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Augustus, Justinian, and the Artistic Transformation of the Roman Emperor

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of History  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Masters of Arts in History

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by  
Zachary Rupley  
May 2009

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Keywords: Augustus, Justinian, Art History, Roman Emperor

## ABSTRACT

Augustus, Justinian, and the Artistic Transformation of the Roman Emperor

by

Zachary Rupley

The purpose of this thesis project is to discuss and describe the transformation of the image of Roman Emperor through artistic representation and cultural demonstration. The ultimate goal is to determine why the presentation of the office changed so greatly. I have selected certain works of art depicting the first Roman Emperor, Gaius Octavian Caesar, best known as Augustus, and Justinianus, the greatest Roman Emperor. More than 500 years separates these two men, whose only connection, at first sight, is that both served as Roman Emperor. I will analyze each piece of art, discuss its history, determine what each piece represents and discuss the cosmetics of the Emperor in the work. Once both Emperors have been dissected artistically, I intend to answer the question of why the office of Roman Emperor changed so thoroughly over 500 years by observing cultural and world developments between the first and sixth centuries of the Common Era.

## CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT .....	2
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	5
2. AUGUSTUS .....	9
The Career of Augustus .....	9
The Romano-Hellenic Artistic Tradition .....	16
Pre-Augustan Sculpture .....	25
The Image of Augustus .....	26
The Prima Porta Statue of Augustus .....	29
Augustus on the <i>Ara Pacis</i> .....	39
Augustus as the <i>Pontifex Maximus</i> .....	48
The <i>Gemma Augustae</i> .....	52
Coinage .....	57
3. JUSTINIAN .....	67
The Career of Justinian .....	67
The Byzantine Artistic Tradition .....	74
The Column of Justinian .....	80
The Victory Medallion of Justinian .....	91
The Mosaic of Justinian at the Basilica of <i>San Vitale</i> .....	94
The Barberini Ivory.....	108
Coinage .....	112

Chapter	Page
4. THEMES IN THE CORRUPTION OF THE PRINCIPATE.....	118
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	128
VITA .....	145

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

From its foundation under Augustus until its final death at the hands of the Ottoman Turks, the office of *Imperator Romanorum* appeared in a myriad of shapes and forms. However, during its 1500 year life span the office never changed so much as it did between those signal years linking the first and sixth centuries of the Common Era. Concerning these changes, the Emperors Augustus and Justinian symbolize the opposite ends of the artistic and ideological spectrum. The imperial imagery of Gaius Julius Caesar Octavian, the *trivirm* destined to become the Emperor Augustus, served as the impetus of the burgeoning Imperial Cult, focused upon this distinguished individual who unified the Mediterranean basin into a “world empire.” In observing the art of Augustus the trained eye notes that the concept of the Hellenistic monarchy and godhood is avoided. The young Emperor understood his need for atonement following his violent younger days, and his self-portrayal as a Hellenistic king in competition with Marcus Antonius during the civil war was chief among those past mistakes best forgotten. Instead, as Augustus he held to the idea of “first citizen.” Styled the *princeps*, he served as a civil servant and judge in the fashion of any other Roman magistrate; so the fiction went. Personally he never so much as flaunted his *maiestas* in public as Antonius had in Alexandria. However, the propaganda campaign that surrounded his success did flaunt his power and success in a patriotic manner, embedding the greatness of Octavian into the public psyche without the obvious pomp of monarchy. Following his rise to sole ruler of the Roman state, the sickly image of Octavian was transformed into the idealized

image of Augustus; firm, pious, and victorious on the battlefield, the marble of the Senate and before the gods. As *pontifex maximus*, he served as the spokesman of the gods and after death a God himself. As *imperator*, he alone commanded the army, and as *princeps senatus*, he took his seat as leader of the Senate. This modest representation of the Roman Emperor as a man clad in sandals and the *toga picta*, albeit divinely favored by the ancient state gods, in partnership with the Senate, set the social standard of all future emperors for the next two centuries.

If Augustus inaugurated a Golden Age, then the reign of Petrus Sebastus Justinianus was a complete reversal. The absolute, ruling might of autocracy replaced the restrained *principate*. The Western provinces, ranging from Britain to North Africa, no longer looked to the Roman Emperor for command and order but to the German chieftains that overran them. Western Europe existed outside of the Roman Empire for the first time in half a millennium. The territory of *Romania*, reduced by two-thirds, straddled only the old Hellenistic lands of the Eastern Mediterranean. The Emperor no longer resided in the city of Rome but in his impregnable seaside fortress of Constantinople where the Christian faith dominated matters of both religion and state.

During the five hundred years separating these two Emperors, the concept of *diarchy* with the Roman Senate and moderate imperial presentation died a slow death. Justinian, in the manner of Diocletian, was an unabashed autocrat, and his image was otherworldly. Even now, in the Church of *San Vitale* in Ravenna, his gaze pierces the viewer, looking not toward the flesh, but to the soul behind it. Dripping with jewelry,

silk, and gold he is the culmination of the Roman Emperor of Late Antiquity. The toga and laurels, those old standards associated with *imperium* in polytheistic Rome, represented only a sliver of the cultural diversity within the Empire. The orb and scepter proved more appropriate as symbols of absolute power. A recluse by position, the imperial persona was shrouded in mystery and awe, his appearances limited, his powers nearly unlimited, and his cult well prepared. Though not divine himself, Justinian took the throne in the manner of Constantine and Theodosius before him as the divinely appointed representative of the Christian Godhead. The true *imperator* of the world was the *Christos*; the emperor, his mere servant. Yet, before the eyes of the world the Roman Emperor of the Middle Ages still stood supreme on Earth. His territorial dominion may have diminished, but his prestige as Yahweh's anointed and the true custodian of the *Orbis Romanis*, greater than any usurper king, cemented his image as *kosmocrator*, whether reality reflected it or not.

To look at the statue of Augustus in the garden at *ad Gallinas* and the mosaic of Justinian inside the church of *San Vitale*, both are representative of the reigning Roman Emperor in and around the years of their production. The viewer may remark at the shocking difference between the two. To read about the transformation of the *principate* into an oriental autocracy is one thing, but to actually see the presentation of each Emperor contrasted side by side displays the shocking changes the *Imperator Romanorum* underwent. The purpose of this study is to observe this transformation primarily from the artistic and historical viewpoints, while also giving credence to religious and cultural phenomena. I selected Augustus and Justinian as case studies

because each figure represents the greatest possible separation in presentation from the other. It is a matter of simplicity versus elaboration, and restraint versus unbridled power. I will observe and analyze selected works of art made in their image, isolate common features, and ultimately try to determine why the need for change was necessary. I have always been curious as to why the image of the Roman Emperor began as a Republican magistrate, slowly transformed into that of a “Military Monarch” and, eventually, into a jewel encrusted Eastern Lord claiming Roman nationality, yet bearing the appearance of the “Great Kings” of Persia. What cultural trends, cosmetic, political, and religious changes over the five hundred years between Augustus and Justinian set the *principate* in this direction? Why does the artistic naturalism of Greco-Roman antiquity seem to vanish as the “Middle Ages” advance, replacing said naturalism with Byzantine iconism? Furthermore, does that ancient pagan influence truly vanish in Early Byzantine style? Where did the toga go? What is the significance of the peacock crown that Justinian sports, or the mountain of jewels adorned by his Empress? Why is the Roman Emperor, of all people, sporting a crown that was more typically associated with Persian finery and Hellenistic pomp? What happened during those five centuries that changed the Emperor so much?

## CHAPTER 2

### AUGUSTUS

#### The Carrer of Augustus

To those individuals schooled in antiquity, it may be said that the achievements of Augustus outshine those of Alexander. True, Alexander was one of the greatest individuals of classical antiquity. His conquest of Persia in less than a decade remains to this day the single greatest military endeavor in history. To win an Empire stretching from the Strymon to the Hydaspes is no small feat and has scarcely been repeated in a single lifetime. Yet, as is so often the case in history, his empire did not outlive him. Hellas remained split into a dozen states and leagues, a stormy sea of chaos following his death. Throughout his adult life, Alexander could not conquer his passions, costing the young Macedonian his closets friends and eventually his life. Had he lived to be an old man perhaps he would have become the greatest leader to ever sit on a throne, but he did not. Barely thirty years old, he left his world-empire without a designated ruler. The military anarchy that followed splintered the empire so thoroughly that the possibility of reunification was as distant as the Hydaspes River itself. Concerning Alexander, Plutarch tells us that Augustus once commented: "I am surprised the king (Alexander) did not realize that a far harder task than winning an empire, is putting it into order once you have won it".<sup>1</sup> By nature Alexander was a conqueror. Augustus was an organizer, who turned the undisciplined husk of the Roman Republic into something truly representative of the greatness of Rome.

The Roman Republic threatened to die a death similar to Alexander's Empire. In the wake of the reforms of the Gracchi, the Roman Republic destroyed itself. Sulla and Marius, Crassus, Pompey, Catiline, Caesar, Marcus Antonius all vied to make themselves *princeps* of a patch worked republican empire. Gaius Julius Caesar had the best chance of uniting the Republic under one ruler, but anti-monarchical sentiment stood in his way, as well as more than a dozen *patrician* knives. When Caesar was removed from the political playing field, no one in Rome would have believed that his eighteen year old nephew Octavian, a boy only recently adopted by the *dictator*, would succeed where both Caesar and Alexander had failed. The Senate marched the headstrong young Caesar against the fugitive Marcus Antonius. Following the battle of Mutina, Octavian claimed victory for the consuls who died fighting Antonius. After all, he was the sole officer to survive the battle. Violent and impulsive, the young Octavian threatened and extorted the Senate into granting him the power of consul barely a year after the death of his adopted father. Was it the divine favor of a Caesar?

Octavian was beloved by the army and the people, who rallied to his name. It did not take him long to realize that with Antonius removed from the political scene, the Republic would return to business as usual. The Senate could not suffice another Caesar. Octavian realized he had played right into their hands. Therefore, he sought Antonius out. The two made their peace at Bononia and together with Caesar's old colleague Marcus Lepidus, established a new *triumvirate* legalized by the Senate and the Roman people. The people of Rome endowed the *triumvirs* with the authority to make and conduct wars

and conduct the affairs of the state with the extraordinary powers of the consuls, side stepping both the Senate and the magistracies in one swoop.

At Philippi, in Macedonia, in 42 B.C.E. the *triumviri* displayed their new found powers with a crushing defeat of Caesar's murderers, who had fled Rome and established themselves in the eastern provinces. With the deaths of the last of the senatorial resistance the state was truly under the control of a few men, with the Senate cleansed and behaving as a subservient organ of state.<sup>2</sup> In the years following Philippi, the victors divided all Roman territory between themselves. Antonius took the Roman East, Octavian received the rugged West, and Lepidus was saddled in Africa, destined to become an historical footnote. Sextus Pompey, ever the romantic outlaw fighting in memory of his father, claimed Sicily for himself, but once his support in the eastern provinces vanished, it was only a matter of time until his resistance came toppling down.

Antonius retired to the East to prepare for war against the Parthians. During this absence Octavian sought to further assert himself in Italy and the resulting Perusian War, initiated by Antonius' family, ended in a new treaty of allegiance between Antonius and Octavian, pushing a strained relationship further when marriage entered into the question. Open war had been narrowly avoided at Brundisium between Octavian and Antonius, when the opposing armies refused to engage, forcing the *triumvirs* to terms. Their positions within the empire were renewed and shortly after affairs were settled. From his center in Alexandria, Antonius became more and more obsessed with the queen of Egypt, though technically married to Octavia, sister of Octavian. As Octavian continued to

solidify his power in the western provinces, Antonius withdrew further into the web of Cleopatra. He divorced Octavia, fathered two children by Cleopatra, recognized her son by Julius Caesar, and in his victory speech in Alexandria in 34 B.C.E., (in actuality an epitaph to a minor victory against Armenia) he divided the Eastern Empire and appointed members of Cleopatra's family as provincial heads. According to his will, he wished to have his remains interred in Alexandria. This last piece of information was revealed to the Senate at the request of Augustus, into whose hands Antonius' will conveniently entered. In a stroke Antonius lost the Roman people to Octavian's magnificent propaganda and building campaigns. Further, the thought of an Eastern monarch laying claim to Italy as Caesar's son, as well as the disrespect of Octavia, were just a few of many reasons that finally stirred the Republic to war. Many of Antonius' own supporters joined Octavian out of disgust for the Egyptian queen. At the blockade of Actium in 31 B.C.E., one of the most important confrontations in the history of Europe played itself out, within view of Apollo's temple in Acarnania. Antonius and Cleopatra were routed at sea by the generalship of Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa.<sup>3</sup> No longer merely a child with an army, Octavian alone possessed the mind and rallying power to "revive" the Republic and provide the stability absent from Rome for nearly a century. The people tired of war, and the mechanisms of government were in desperate way. The Republican style of government, no matter how sentimental to the ruling class, could not properly function in a state as vast as the one presided over by Octavian. The magistrates were too few, the armies too many. Territories were detached and communication progressed slowly. The state lacked natural borders, and the sundry peoples under the Roman yolk felt little towards the state but antipathy. This unique situation needed a revolution, and

fortunately for Rome Octavian was prepared. He brought to the Roman machine the success that Alexander failed to bring to his own. Possibly the greatest key to his success was that young. Octavian, only in his thirties, lived to rule what he had won, unlike the Macedonian.

In the years 27, 23, and 19 B.C.E, the Senate granted Octavian overwhelming consular, proconsular, and tribunal authority.<sup>4</sup> The duties of *censor* (merged with consulate) were bestowed upon him in 29 B.C.E and a long overdue, strictly political, purging of the Senate followed.<sup>5</sup> In 27 B.C.E., the Senate was called to order. Ever the wily politician, Octavian claimed that his time as “guardian of the Republic” was at an end, and as soon as possible he would return the power of the state to the Senate and People of Rome. Begging him to remain, the Senate not only granted him the aforementioned consular power but also the title of *Augustus*.<sup>6</sup> His position within the state became known as the *princeps*. At this point Octavian ceased to exist. Though he preferred the title of Romulus, such a connection to monarchy did not reflect the program of state that Augustus proposed.<sup>7</sup> As *princeps*, Augustus showed the sensitivity his uncle failed to. True, Uncle Julius wanted to put the past behind him and build a better Rome, but such kind heartedness only resulted in his murder. The newly christened Augustus sought to rule the Empire with the help of the Senate, not as the Hellenistic autocrat so feared. Augustus first order of business concerned the re-division of the provincial territories. The provinces were divided between the public, senatorial provinces, and the boarder, troublesome province governed by the *princeps*. He cut the military from sixty legions to a peacetime number of twenty-eight; they showed loyalty to the son of Caesar

and his family alone.<sup>8</sup> As *imperator* of the victorious Romans, Augustus associated the use of that word with the Roman head of state, which we pronounce today as Emperor. The triumphal procession, that much sought after apple of the general's eye, was henceforth reserved only for the Emperor and his family.<sup>9</sup> Only in the province of Africa did the senate retain command of an army.<sup>10</sup>

Augustus used his fabulous wealth to authorize the beautification of the city, and provided jobs for the landless poor. Soon the city was draped in marble replacing the hazardous wooden temples and tenement. The Emperor boasted of restoring at least eighty temples in one year. As *princeps*, given overreaching *auctoritas*, Octavian held the Senate floor, convened the sessions to order, and made suggestions to the assembled body.<sup>11</sup> In many ways the Republican fiction that Augustus held to seemed to function. The magistrates continued to be elected, but as something of meaningless prestige. The assemblies continued to meet, and the office of *praefectus civitas* was resurrected to oversee the management of the city.

From former consuls and praetors, Augustus appointed senatorial commissions to oversee every possible administrative need: the aqueducts, the grain supply, minding the forum, watching the prisons. Committees oversaw the repair and construction of roads and transportation. Augustus established the pony express and the grain continued to flow.<sup>12</sup> In every way conceivable, Augustus improved the Republican system. As theoretical monarch he oversaw numerous organs of government. His greatest task was the establishment of a professional civil service, something the Republic never knew.

Under a republican constitution, in the early days, the magistrates were numerous enough to manage a small Italian republic. However, by the first century B.C.E. Rome controlled most of the known world. The administration of the emperor needed more help than annually elected officials.

The free lands of the Eastern Mediterranean remained free. Augustus respected the ancient web of Eastern politics, seeking both peace and alliance with Judea, Galatia, and Cappadocia. Within a century they were all peaceably absorbed into the Empire. They were all dealt with fairly, and to his great success Augustus peacefully returned the eagle standards lost by Marcus Crassus to the Parthians thirty years earlier. Peace and prosperity reigned, the likes of which the Roman state had never known. The poets and artists of the regime declared the period a new Golden Age. Under his adopted sons Drusus and Tiberius, the Roman frontier pushed to the Danube including such modern countries as Austria, Hungary, and Switzerland.<sup>13</sup> Drusus carried the banner of Rome as far as the Elbe into central Europe. The good name of Rome once again stood for leadership and respect. The Emperor and the Senate oversaw the lands, but local governments were free to administer their own affairs with minimal interference. The armies protected the borders and the people were free to live their lives, whether wealthy or poor, in relative peace. For the next two centuries, years the Mediterranean and Western Europe benefited from “Roman Peace,” all made possible by the deeds of Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus, *Imperator Romanorum*.

## The Romano-Hellenic Artistic Tradition

The adjective that best describes the Romano-Hellenic tradition is *realistic*. Though both styles are steeped in realism, Hellenic and Roman artistic traditions are quite distinct from each other. The cultural identity of the two cultures lay at the root of their respective styles. At the core of the Hellenic artistic soul lay abstraction, analysis, and the universal type. For example, an Athenian victory over the Persians was rarely depicted as such. For often, it was portrayed as the Athenians over the Amazons in ancient Homeric fashion. In the second century B.C.E, the Hellenistic center of Pergamon joined Mithradates, king of Pontus, in a great rebellion against Rome. The artistic representation of this momentous occasion was not direct, but abstract. Hercules, the patron of Pontus, shakes hands with Mithradates bearing a club and a dead Eagle, the body of the Roman state.<sup>14</sup>

The first identifiable Greek sculpture appears in the historical record around the seventh century B.C.E. The seventh century was a very active century for the Hellenes. Political revolution, overpopulation, and land hunger forced an ever growing population of wandering Hellenes to settle across the Mediterranean. Among these potential homes was Egypt; ancient and rich, full of a variety of ethnicities and traders. Many Hellenes found homes and land after serving the kings of the Twenty-Sixth dynasty in wars both foreign and civil.<sup>15</sup> Pharaoh Amasis II proved so pleased with his Hellenic sailors and soldiers that he granted them their own town out of gratitude: Naucratis. Along with the port town of Daphnae, the Hellenes flourished in Egypt.<sup>16</sup> Many of the Ionian states established trade in Egypt, and Naucratis quickly became a full blown Hellenic trading

*emporium*. Egyptian grain, trinkets, mirrors, and columns passed into Greece. In Egypt the Hellenes first encountered architecture on the grandest scale. Hellenic philosophy stems from Egyptian, and it was surely in Egypt that the Archaic Hellenes first encountered the Egyptian style of sculpture in its natural, if not rigid, form of realism. Thus far, as know from archaeology, the ancient Hellenes satisfied themselves with wooden figures constructed in the shape of gods. Hellenic sculpture quickly followed the Egyptian model and moved into the realm of solid metal or rock. Cast into marvels of sculpture, these structures have endured the centuries.<sup>17</sup>

The Greeks of the Anatolia and the mainland began producing marble statues during the middle seventh century B.C.E. Unlike the Western Mediterranean, the "East" was rich in marble of all varieties so it was never terribly difficult to come by, unlike in Italy.<sup>18</sup> The human form stood in the usually rigid Egyptian position with one foot forward, the body and facial features designed absolutely symmetrically, the same geometric patterns of the body mirroring each other. This "Kouros" style of sculpture continued until the beginning of the fifth century. Gradually, the "Kouros" style became more and more lifelike until its perfection by Aristodikos.<sup>19</sup>

Gradually the Kouros artist shook off the traditions of the past and began to throw variation into the mix by switching the foot stepping forward, by tightening the body, and reaching more anatomically accuracy. This set the stage for the fifth century revolution in sculpture. Also at this time bronze techniques reached perfection, swiftly becoming easier and more popular to work than the marble. The lightning bearing Zeus of Euboea and the Discobolus of Myron were ultimately more stable than their marble

counterparts, but not quite perfect. Polycleitos, the bronze master of Argos, fully and finally stimulated the art of Hellenic bronze production to perfection.<sup>20</sup>

The Hellenes spoke through their art in allegory and abstraction, and during the era of the city-state this sculpture was at the service of the state. The sculptures of Pericles and Demosthenes, the great civil servants of Athens, appear as cool exteriors unaffected by the hardships of the world, idealized yet individual. The Hellenes strove for perfection; like Plato the Hellenic artist sought the personification of the perfect man. Polycleitos' work embodied this idea. His *Doryphoros* mastered the genre of the "standing man". His *contraposto*, with the weight on one leg, head tilted, truly evoked the image of absolute reality and set the standard for free standing statuary for the next millennium.<sup>21</sup> Polycleitos great tome on bronze casting, *The Canon*, established time honored techniques on how to create the perfect bronze figure. This is what the Hellenic artists had set out to do. Their mission was to create a *man*, no matter how abstract, and a perfect one at that. The idea of the perfect man haunted the Hellenes. The subject of these sculptures, mainly presented in the nude, clung to certain types. Hellenic sculpture as we know it abounds with the idealized athlete, great statesmen, Homeric heroes, and great poets. Rarely did early Hellenic sculptors concern themselves with the average farmer or a less distinguished subject. When women were displayed in the round they were confined and clothed. For all of their forward thinking, the Hellenes kept their women hidden. However, as is always the case in times of sexual repression, certain artists did present female sculpture in very racy gowns, skirting the unspoken rule of female

repression. The day was fast approaching when the nude woman of the Hellenistic era would take her place next to the man in beauty.

The sculptures of Phidias made the Athenian Acropolis the heart of Attica, and his Olympian Zeus the personified heart of Hellas. His style dominated the Hellenic world following the wars between the Sparta and Athens. Sculpture and sanctuary changed Delphi from a sacred fissure into a beautiful site of pilgrimage. The methods and forms of sculpture established during the classical era dominated Hellas for another two centuries until its transformation during the Hellenistic Era of the Macedonian monarchies.

The *poleis* system of government, long the guardian of favoritism and individual autonomy, ground itself to dust by way of endless warfare, leaving itself too weak to stand against the growing power of the northern *ethnoi*. As the *poleis* declined, so did its view of art as a fundamentally civil institution. These *ethnoi* lacked the natural animosity and class strife that riddled classical Hellas, and were loosely “united” beneath a king. The Macedonians consolidated under Phillip II and Alexander III, and once they pacified all of Hellas, the Macedonians carried the banner of Hellas to distant India and everywhere between. The Macedonian kings and the *diadochi* took with them the artists of old Hellas and together with the slow infiltration of native ways the art of Hellas took on a new shape. Lycippus and his “melting effect” used in the portraits of Alexander heralded the arrival of a new take on Hellenic art in the early fourth century. During the Hellenistic era that followed the Macedonian ascendancy, old Hellenic art reached its

zenith. Artists perfected naturalism. No longer solely the realm of the *aristoi* of society the real world became the subject of art. Men and women of any age, animals, objects in motion, they all stepped into the limelight of artistic achievement. Statues of women appeared in the nude, their emotion slyly displayed. Highly specialized artists portrayed such immortal concepts as peace, war, or love in the guise of human beings.

The beginning of this new era witnessed a creative explosion that slowly declined, as did independent Hellas.<sup>22</sup> Epic sculptures of gods and monsters adorned Alexandria, Ephesus, and the other great cities of the Greek speaking eastern Mediterranean, much like the centers of nineteenth century Europe, vying for the right to be called *pulcherimus*. The greatest sculpture in the history of the world stood on Rhodes; the Colossus of Helios. Standing one hundred twenty feet tall with a skin of hammered bronze, this Hellenistic personification of the Sun stood only for fifty years, yet the technical skill needed to create such a work of art should give the talent and vision of the Hellenistic artists all the credit needed.<sup>23</sup> The Tyche of Antioch served as its Seleucid rival at their grand capital of Antioch.<sup>24</sup> The Pergamese Altar of Zeus and The Dying Gaul, the Victory of Samothrace, or the world famous Aphrodite of Melos, the Hellenistic era witnessed the creation of the most detailed and vivid sculpture of antiquity, which would proceed to seduce Rome and draw it into the Hellenistic sphere. The Hellenistic style survived well into the Roman Imperial period, before finally transforming at the hands of the Church.

The old Roman artistic tradition never concerned itself much with abstract concepts and personifications of lofty ideals. During the Republic the Romans held to no universal types in their art. Lifelike representation did nicely. The Roman tradition of ancestor worship encouraged absolute naturalism. Steeped in tradition, piety, gravity, and the spirit of public service, Roman art reflected the soul of the Republic. Aristocratic families created death masks in the image of the deceased to be later used in great familial processions or funerals. These masks were kept in the family shrine. The deceased protected the family, and the family drew from his strength. Great men and soldiers received statues of praise for their accomplishments. If a statue was not made to resemble he who did the deed, what point was there to make a statue in his likeness? Roman art also dealt with religious and political propaganda. The Roman portrayal of history differed from the Greeks too. The literal Roman mind never felt the need to display hard won victories as anything but. A Roman victory over the Samnites was displayed as such, not over a mythical foe.<sup>25</sup>

For much of its history the city of Rome did not sponsor artists. To the rustic Roman farmer such a profession was beyond ridiculous, hardly work for a real man. Therefore, the Romans hired Hellenic artists for this purpose, and native Italian artists learned new styles from them. Pre-Hellenic statuary of the gods did in fact exist in Italy in the form of wooden figures as well as clay and bronze molds. Yet, the position of Rome itself prepared it for artistic greatness. By way of its geography the Romans drew heavily from both Hellenic and Etruscan influences. At first it was the Etruscan influence from nearby Veii that held sway over Rome, but after the Romans threw off the Etruscan “yolk” their own burgeoning Latin style began to appear.<sup>26</sup> The figure bearing

the toga or weapon, the face as the memorial mask, all stemmed from their Etruscan forbearers.

Contact with the Hellenes became more common. With the conquests of Magna Graecia during the third century B.C.E., the Romans came into direct contact with classical Hellenic sculpture. The process of Hellenization was gradual in Rome and never totally complete, but with the acquisition of Hellenic artists the prudish Republic began to make public and private monuments of its citizenry. Anyone with means could commission one, which meant that those sculptures usually went to the patricians and even then, usually after death. Statues of victorious consuls were common, commemoration being the other major need for sculpture.

Roman statuary represented well the cultural identity of the “good Republic”: direct and precise with little need for that “oh so Greek” abstraction. Even the most unpleasant of details, garish as they might be, blistered sculptures, as can be seen in the bust of Lucius Caecilius Jucundus. Anyone who has seen the bust understands that absolutely no idealism pervades such a work. His scowl is frozen in time for the ages to observe the original purpose of Roman art, commemoration. Yet, as the Roman aristocracy fell more and more under the sway of Hellenic *mores*, the art of the Roman Republic changed to reflect it. The victorious Roman general took the appearance of the image of the Hellenistic king. Polycleitos “spear bearer” served as the model for the imperial ruler cult, capturing the victory statuary of the late Republic and recasting in the image of the idealized ruler. As the Republic fell to pieces, Caesar, Antonius, and Octavian all displayed themselves in the manner of Hellenistic lords. Caesar himself

inaugurated the practice of placing his living face on the coinage, surrounding himself also with a number of other Hellenistic practices.<sup>27</sup>

Such trends would not last, however. The moral reforms of Augustus pursued a return to the ways of the old Romans, strong in humility and *pietas*. Further, the image of young Octavian as a Hellenistic king would sit no better with the Romans of his time than they had with his adopted father Julius Caesar, and he knew it. As world ruler Octavian needed a universal image to display his power to the Empire without offending the sensibilities of the Senatorial class. If the style of the Romans until this point in time had been of a natural realism, it is with the death of the Republic and the beginning of the Empire that the influence of the Greek interpretation of the ruler begins to show on the grandest scale. The statuary of Augustus is the first step towards the ideal Roman ruler, so much so that, with the exception of hair style, the images of Augustus, Tiberius and Gaius Caligula are essentially the same. Women of the imperial house were often associated with a matron goddess.<sup>28</sup> Beginning with Augustus, the Emperors displayed themselves in the cloaks of the priests and sometimes as Jupiter himself. Individualism in imperial sculpture returned during the Flavian, Antonine, and Severan dynasties culminating in the “pathetic” style of the third century C.E., producing some of the most anatomically beautiful and perplexing, aspects of classical art.<sup>29</sup> The bust of Phillip *Arabensis* speaks for itself.

During the second century C.E. the Roman imperial achievement stood unopposed in the Western world thanks to a succession of wise emperors. The splendor of this golden age found expression on magnificent triumphal columns spanning

hundreds of feet, which told the tales of victorious Emperors over hordes of barbarians in minute detail. In their own columns Marcus Aurelius and Trajan appear as the central figures, displaying generosity on one hand, condemning foes on the other. Following the near breakdown of the Roman state, the classical style so embraced by the Mediterranean for a millennium started to change. When that vale of dust and chaos lifted during the period of the Tetrarchy period, the first signs of the Middle Ages appear. The gradual deterioration of the Augustan style worked side by side with outside factors to create what we now call “Byzantine.” In truth, the process found its beginning in the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, those most classical works of beauty.<sup>30</sup> Hellenic sculpture survived well into the Middle Ages in a diminished form, until that fear of images finally forced the fifteen hundred year practice of sculpture and art into an early grave.

What did art mean to the ancient viewer? What was the purpose of it all? Until the Hellenistic period sculpture was mostly religious or propagandist in the Romano-Hellenic world, but not always. The Minoans used art as decoration and through them so did the Mycenaean Hellenes. The Romans certainly used wall painting to liven up living quarters, but normally achieved the representation of leaders through sculpture. To the Hellenes, sculpture was more than just a block of marble or bronze shaped like a man; it was the man. It stood for a man over his grave. It stood for a God, making up for their absence on distant Olympus. To strike the image of the Emperor was viewed as a direct assault against the Emperor himself.<sup>31</sup> Simply put, the public connected to the ruler or the God through the use of sculpture. It was essential to everyday life. The Emperor held the lofty office of priest as well as secular ruler. To the Cappadocian farmer in distant

Anatolia, the Greek tradesman, or the ferryman in Britain the image of the Roman Emperor in the local agora or forum was the equivalent as having the Emperor in their presence.

As Kjellberg and Saflund state in their work *Greek and Roman Art*, two separate streams of art at the end of the Roman Republic became one in the Roman Imperial Style.<sup>32</sup> Roman directness blended with the elegance of Eastern Hellenism to produce flowing, believable idealism of the universal ruler. The Hellenistic trappings that young Octavian initially surrounded himself with matured, becoming something new: an idealized, universal Roman type.

### Pre-Augustan Sculpture

Before Augustus, there was merely Octavian, and before his representation as savior of the state, Octavian was portrayed both as he was and as he wasn't. His original busts did not show the eventual ruler of the world, but a boy. One of his earliest busts that still survives displays not a strong man, but a child. Only the head and neck remain of this statue, and even then the nose is missing and the face is scarred by a number of gashes. His head is tilted to one side in a ponderous manner along the same lines of the "melting" Alexander pose, which is surely intentional. He is thin, frail, and slightly skeletal.<sup>33</sup> Whatever lay in his future as an idealized vision of a semi-divine monarch, this image betrays the idealized Augustus, and bothers to portray the young man for what he actually was: a young man. Such images didn't last however, and before long, as military triumphs began to pile up, Octavian intentionally took on the attributes of a

Hellenistic monarch, victorious, larger-than-life, and sometimes nude. Beginning in 43 B.C.E., the Senate dedicated columns to Octavian, which began to rise around the city in the Hellenistic manner. The finest example of this new Hellenistic motif was a column built in his honor in 36 B.C.E. following victory over Sextus Pompey, on which Octavian was displayed in magnificent Hellenistic fashion and not in Roman military dress. Like his late republican forbearers, he appears victorious, usually holding a spear, draped in the Hellenistic *chlamys*.<sup>34</sup> Pompey and his ilk were also known to portray themselves in this un-Roman light. These images of the young Caesar adorned the city on monuments as well as on the coinage. Yet, with the conclusion of the civil wars and the transformation of violent Octavian into peaceful Augustus, the public portrayal of the *divi filius* steered away from the violent figure he once was. The Empire stood on the cusp of a new golden age. Augustus' program of reforms delivered nicely, and his image followed suite.

### The Image of Augustus

The massive propaganda campaign that followed Actium and the defeat of Antonius was beforehand unknown to the Romans. The image of Octavian, and then Augustus, displayed throughout the city and empire presented a man who did not exist. Sickly and frail, Octavian never physically fit the bill as ruler of such an empire. However, very quickly Octavian was overshadowed by the idea of Augustus and the *princeps*. His image became a necessary instrument to draw loyalty from the sundry peoples of the Empire. Octavian transformed into Augustus, the idealized victor, favored by the gods. In this idealized image of Augustus, Hellenic influence ring true in the

perfect form of man, the perfect man, but his attire is utterly Roman. He became a myth, greater than all men, but also a man favored by Apollo and the old gods, sure not to offend the Roman population and traditions with kingly pomp. Hence, the many faces and many forms of Augustus in sculpture. At once he is a demi-god, a priest, a servant of the state, and a conqueror. Such a narrow path required great political skill, and he walked it marvelously.

The image of Augustus as magistrate in the Louvre boldly displays this dual persona. Plainly dressed in the senatorial *toga praetexta* he gazes forward, grasping a scroll in his left hand. Here his features are idealized, but otherwise there seems to be an enforced willingness to regard the Emperor as “just another one of the boys”, that is, as among the greatest of the senators. There are no distinguishing characteristics of kingship or of his actual power. Here is the highly cultivated *primus inter pares*, first among equals. Obviously Augustus avoided the golden crown, gilded throne, and acts of deification of his uncle Julius that greatly offended the nobility.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, this policy of “the first among equals” the “head of the senate and focal point of the army”, was held to strongly, serving as an example for future *princeps*. To be king, doesn’t mean a man has to *behave* as a king.

More than ten years after his ascension to sole power, we see that Augustus has already abandoned his original program of art, deeming it too heroic, too idealized, and even though draped in Roman pageantry, too Hellenistic. He strove to avoid the same god-like stature that the Hellenistic monarchs so enjoyed. By the middle of his

*principate* we can see that Augustus has abandoned the heroic art of *Prima Porta* in favor of his image as the pious, hooded priest no longer seeking glory but the blessing of the gods. One portrait of the *princeps*, dated roughly 17 B.C.E., displays Augustus as leaner than before, slightly less idealized, but idealized none-the-less.<sup>36</sup> The portrait is only a head and neck, but it is very similar to the Augustus as *pontifex maximus*, who again favored piety to military greatness.

It was necessary for Augustus to be both a man and more than a man at the same time. The confusion surrounding the divinity was a complex issue, one that was not completely worked out until the Christian Emperors settled the issue. In his employ Augustus possessed the finest array of panegyrists that any ruler could possibly hope for. His old friend Maecenas, along with the Latin greats Virgil and Horace, transformed the rather sinister image of Octavian into that of Augustus: divinely favored by Apollo and the Roman gods since birth, alluded to during the time of Aeneas, whose birth may be compared to Alexander the Great and whose coming would bring about that long wished for peace on Earth.<sup>37</sup> Augustus “restored” the old traditions and reinvigorated the Republic with a firm, guiding hand. Such propaganda worked marvelously, finding its greatest manifestation in the art of the ruler. This growing imperial artwork produced in a style new to the Romans. It was neither Hellenistic god-king propaganda nor complete Persian autocratic material. It was Augustan.

## The *Prima Porta* Statue of Augustus

Just off of the ninth milestone along the *Via Flaminia*, a dozen kilometers or so north of Rome, lies the small town of *Prima Porta*. During the first century C.E. what we now call *Prima Porta* was rather a villa, owned by the ruling Julio-Claudian family. In the first century it was known to the region as *ad Gallinas* that is literally “the Henhouse”.<sup>38</sup> The *via Tiberina*, a branch of the *via Flaminia*, led into a hollow where the villa stood. The villa was centered on a complex of three or four buildings that also included its own hanging garden and a series of highly decorated underground chambers strong in the themes of Dionysus and Diana.<sup>39</sup> It was the country keepsake of the Claudian house, used by generations of Claudians until it entered the imperial house hold, upon Augustus’ marriage to Livia in the year 38 B.C.E.<sup>40</sup> Its ancient name of *ad Gallinas* is surely drawn from the presence of the sacred chickens known to the Etruscan and Latin peoples of the region. A number of temples dotted the land around the villa and Mount Albanus, sacred to Diana, dominated the villa’s view.<sup>41</sup> The villa largely dropped out of history following the decline of the Julio-Claudians, though Pliny mentioned it in passing, but the historical record does not speak of a place known as *Prima Porta* again until C.E. 1225. If the Renaissance resurrected Roman antiquity to the Western mind, the ensuing Enlightenment rediscovered it literally. The archeologists and scholars of the eighteenth century discovered the locality of the villa. At the site of *Prima Porta*, in 1863, the remains of the Claudian villa owned by the empress Livia Drusilla were finally excavated. After initial work, the quiet life returned to the site until 1923, when a more thorough study of the villa was conducted. The Second World War damaged the site, and during the Cold War excavation work stopped and started until finally, in 1992, the

entirety of the villa was brought to surface.<sup>42</sup> A laurel grove made the site famous, for it was at this villa that the Julio-Claudian Emperors cut and fashioned their laurel crowns. The grove came into being as a sign from the gods, so the story goes, when an eagle of Jupiter dropped a laurel branch into the lap of Livia, while she was still a child. From the branch the grove sprang, living as long as the Julian dynasty. When Nero died, so did the grove, or at least that is what Suetonius tells us. Pliny insists instead that the grove was still living in his own time.<sup>43</sup> Another version states that as an adult, an eagle dropped a fowl into her carriage, which eventually gave birth to a brood of chicks, from which sacred fowl sprang. All story telling aside, the most priceless discovery of the site was a fully intact marble statue of the Emperor Augustus, discovered when excavation first began on the *villa* in 1863.

The image is engaging to say the least. It stood upon a *fauces reticulatum*, a brick podium encased in marble for aesthetics sake.<sup>44</sup> At just over seven feet tall and made of marble, even today it towers over the Augustus of reality who measured a mere five feet, seven inches.<sup>45</sup> Upon entering the villa grounds, the sources state that it was impossible to miss the statue. The alert, clean-shaven image of the Emperor raises his left hand in the *adulocutio* gesture of peace while beginning to step forward in a partial *contraposto* stance. His features are lean and crisp. His hair is cropped short in the “Augustan” style. The expression draped across his face is less grim than it is rigid. Here is a man of determination. He is clothed in the traditional, propagandist garments of the victorious general, the Roman *cuirass*. His left arm reaches out, index finger pointing forward, but the rest of his hand is drawn in towards the palm. His right arm is tucked in,

elbow to hip, and partly obscured by a robe that covers his waist and loins before tapering upward to also cover his forearm and elbow. A narrow open space between the statue's right wrist and the robe likely made room for a staff of some kind to rest. Finally, the figure's bare feet hint at the heroic nature of the figure. Aside from the raised hand and the Roman clothing, this figure is a near copy of Polycleitos' *contraposto* classic, the *Doryphoros*: one leg bent, the rest of the body mostly symmetrical, all in the Hellenistic fashion of heroic physical perfection.<sup>46</sup>

The statue was discovered in a subterranean chamber on the villa grounds, and surely would have been destroyed over the centuries if not for this fact. Augustus constructed such chambers for protection from lightning, oddly enough. While on campaign in Cantabria in Spain in 25 B.C.E., Augustus was very nearly struck by lightning, and though dedicating a new temple to Jupiter *Fulgator*, Lord of the Lightning, he never felt safe around storms for the rest of his life. When under duress, he fled to such bunkers.<sup>47</sup> We know that Augustus displayed his great respect for lightning in certain statues such as one discovered in Herculaneum of Augustus made in the image of Jupiter.

There are generally four types of imperial sculpture: the victorious general, the mounted ruler, the togate, and the figure in the nude. The *Prima Porta* Augustus is very obviously a representation of the victorious general type. The original *Doryphoros* of Polycleitos was produced in the nude, and many such spear-bearers produced in the image of Hellenistic kings during the Hellenistic period were also displayed in the nude. Rome on the other hand, in the midst of Augustus' imperial and cultural reforms, might

have balked at the idea of this puritanical head of government displaying himself in the nude, though other nudes were on display in the city. Therefore, the *Prima Porta* statue is clothed in traditional military dress. At this stage of his career, Augustus was more than willing to allow his sculptures the majesty of the Hellenistic king, only remade in the Roman image. They were not nude, nor was the ruler made out to be a god. He dropped the outright Hellenistic display of his earlier years for a more restrained approach which, in a matter of time, he would also dispose of for a more pious, truly Roman style.

The body of the *cuirass* is the focus of the entire work, cut in low relief, portraying an idealized version of Augustus recovering the legionary standards lost by Marcus Licinius Crassus against the Parthians in 53 B.C.E. In the year 20 B.C.E. the standards returned to Roman hands. Augustus assembled the eastern armies in Syria as a show of force but ultimately recovered the standards by means of diplomacy with the Parthian king Phraates. Though a triumph might be expected, one is depicted in Augustus' triple arch, Dio Cassius mentions only that Augustus modestly entered Rome on a horse with the legionary standards in tow.<sup>48</sup> The standards found a special home in the round temple of Mars the Avenger, positioned on the Capitoline Hill, not far from two new temples dedicated to the lord patron of Rome, Jupiter Optimus Maximus.<sup>49</sup> To commemorate this event, the *Prima Porta* marble may have come into existence as early as 19 B.C.E, and maybe as late as CE 14. Such a magnificent achievement was commemorated again and again, in frescoes and poetry, and, as we shall see, several series of coins. Maecenas and his team of poets made sure to emphasize the magnitude of

this paper victory, and Virgil references it as a future vision of Aeneas in the eighth Aeneid.<sup>50</sup>

The *Prima Porta* marble is not the most modest display of Augustus' power, to say the least. It displays his greatness as *imperator*. Two figures dominate the center of the *cuirass*. The right-center is occupied by a Parthian man dressed in a long shirt and, wearing a pair of trousers. His arms are extended, holding the legionary standard, and his heavily bearded face gazes upon the eagle atop the standard, mesmerized. In that moment, he acknowledges the superiority of Rome. The left-center is occupied by a Roman in traditional military dress, helmet and all. He calmly stands with his hands extended, patiently expecting the return of the standard. He is probably just a stock figure, but again, depending on the date of choice the figure could be Tiberius, as a few scholars have argued. A dog hovers by his knees. What does the dog represent? Perhaps it represents the more vicious side of the Roman state, that is, if the soldier's collected patience is not obeyed. However, in a Zoroastrian context dogs were known to gore the bodies of the recently deceased before inhumation. Did the Romans do their metaphysical homework on the Zoroastrian Parthians and insert eastern religious propaganda into this breastplate?<sup>51</sup> I would say not, but the image is certainly aimed at the possibility of both. The most obvious meaning is probably that of the Roman She-wolf who raised Romulus and Remus. Other than the eagle, the wolf is certainly the most visibly appealing representation of the Roman state. Therefore, the Roman general, whoever he might be, stands strong with the wolf, nurturer of the city, from which he draws his strength.

All around this dramatic center scene the heavens show their approval. Beneath the center scene the *Aurea Copia*, the great mother earth goddess lounges in flowing robes along with her horn of plenty. She gazes up at the Roman soldier. Centered directly upon the pectoral muscles of the breastplate is the sky-god arms spread, stretching a robe over his neck, head, and shoulders. Originally identified as the Sky God Caelus, Jane Clark Reader points to the God's identity as either Saturn or Jupiter and possibly a synchronized version of both of them. She points to the importance of Saturn to the original "golden age" of Rome as foretold in the Aeneid Who better to preside over the new inauguration of the new golden age than Saturn? The sun god Sol hovers to the Saturn's right, the moon goddess Luna, to his left. Sol appears ready to stream across the breastplate drawn in his horse drawn chariot. Luna is largely obscured by the image of the Goddess of the morning, wings fully spread, bearing her *amphora* of morning dew in celebration of this glorious new dawn.<sup>52</sup>

Placed symmetrically over the oblique muscles on the cuirass is Apollo, to the viewer's right, and Diana, to the viewers left. Apollo rides his sacred beast, the griffen, and Diana is presented riding a mighty stag. Together they witness the return of the standards and bestow their heavenly approval. Flanking the action in the center are groups of women who appear to be weeping. On the right of the scene, the personification of conquered Gaul with a boar's tail cowers, while on the left side of the scene those as of yet unconquered foes loom.<sup>53</sup> Jas Elsner, in his work *Art and the Roman viewer*, associates them with the conquered lands of Spain and Gaul, the provinces in which Augustus toured during his recent absence from Rome, and who suffered from the Emperor's victories in those lands. The women might also represent the

overwhelming joy of Roman women on the return of Jupiter's sacred standards.<sup>54</sup> The epaulets of the *cuirass*, the flaps that bind the front of the breast plate to the back, each bear a sphinx, further stressing the young Emperors special relationship with the divine. Augustus used the sphinx as his personal seal, which as Paul Zanker has addressed was viewed as a character of good fortune ever since Actium.<sup>55</sup> An unfinished Victoria on the back of statues of this type gives us a good sign that wherever stationed at the villa, it was against a wall or an atrium.<sup>56</sup>

In antiquity, marble sculptures were always connected to a base support strut to keep them from falling over. Often times the artists carved the support strut into a variety of shapes and forms to liven the piece. The *Prima Porta* statue is no different. The support was cut into the shape of a child riding a dolphin that plunges into the marble base. What is to be made of this? The presence of a dolphin may be a reference to Apollo. When Apollo left his home on Delos to head to Delphi, it was a dolphin that led the young God's ship to its destination.<sup>57</sup> As we have seen, Augustus heavily emphasized his special relationship with Apollo following his victory at Actium, and his home even had a corridor connecting it to a special temple of Apollo. The goddess Venus, from whom the *Julii* gens claimed descent, was also said at her birth to have been accompanied by dolphins. Such marvelous propaganda rarely presents itself: after the sea battle of Actium, Octavian was also born, or more properly, reborn, from the sea.

So who is the child riding the dolphin? It bares a powerful resemblance to Eros, the god of love. Venus is the mother of the Eros, if that is in fact who the child is. To

further muddle the “God association,” Hellenistic sculptures of Diana often employed a dolphin as the support in marbles, and Eros is the step-sibling of Aeneas according to Virgil.<sup>58</sup> If this statue is in fact a replica of a previously existing bronze, as so many marbles were, then we may be certain that there was no dolphin support used in a bronze of the same statue. Louise Holland argues the date of the statue's display at Prima Porta as the same year as the birth of Augustus' oldest grandson Gaius, thus making the child riding the dolphin a member of his family and the *princeps* of the future. Holland also makes the argument that the child shares the facial feature of young Gaius.<sup>59</sup> By associating the child with Apollo and Venus, Augustus' allows his family not only the favored house among the aristocracy but also favored among the gods by way of kinship with Venus, Apollo, and Diana.

There has been a certain degree of dispute over the statue's bare feet. Unlike most other statues of Roman statesmen, the Augustus of *Prima Porta* is completely barefoot. It is common knowledge concerning antique sculpture that if a figure is barefoot, he or she is either a god outright or somehow associated with a divinity. The lack of sandals in the *Prima Porta* Augustus not only begs the questions of whether Augustus is portrayed as a man or a god but also when exactly the statue was placed at Livia's villa. Louise Holland points to the likelihood of the *Prima Porta* marble as a replica being a “throwback” to early Italian sculpture, which readily displayed the barefoot Roman.<sup>60</sup> Holland also states that the lack of sandals be viewed as a nod to Augustus' divine descent from Venus, making him a demi-god of sorts, a reality the Senate and People voted him after his death in 14 C.E. Is, then, the *Prima Porta*

Augustus a posthumous statue erected in Livia's personal villa to remind her of her dead husband or an image of the deified Augustus directly following the Parthian campaign?

Ultimately, the laurels are religious symbols. If we are to believe the origin story of the laurel grove at the Emperor's villa as preordained by the eagle of Jupiter, then it must be a religious image. We can not forget that the Hellenic "Cycle" of games were holy competitions, laurel going to the winner, and during the Roman Republic the priests surrounded their homes with laurel plants. Laurels also served as protection against lightning, and were associated with Apollo, whom Augustus adopted as his benefactor. The title *Augustus* itself is a religious handle, further stressing the indivisibility of the body politic and the state religious cult. Only the High Priests of Rome were allowed to display laurels outside of their houses, that is, until the Senate granted Augustus the honor later in his life. Even then the laurels grown for these offices were transported from the *ad Gallinas* villa.<sup>61</sup>

So what are the religious implications of the *Prima Porta* Augustus? How did the people of first century Rome accept the *princeps*, as a man, a God, or both? Let us review the evidence. I believe that many students in their formative years are taught that the Romans and Hellenes were largely agnostic and paid only lip service to gods who played little part in their lives. They were too "stepped in philosophy" to give themselves over to serious religious contemplation. On the same token, the "Middle Ages" was full of religious superstition and literal interpretation. I grew up believing these very assumptions, and neither are true. The Romans were every bit as superstitious as any

other people at this point in history. Though not totally given over to Hellenistic deification, a degree of godliness was assigned to very successful individuals in the Roman world. Those Roman territories of the Hellenistic world looked upon Augustus as a God, just as they did the proconsuls and the Ptolemies before them.<sup>62</sup> But how did Italy, with its Republican traditions and paper humility, as well as Octavian himself, view the Emperors relationship with the divine? Paul Zanker put forth the idea that in imperial political propaganda, the idea developed that for the golden age of Augustus to begin, Crassus' standards had to be lost, so that they may be recovered by the divinely favored Emperor who would inaugurate the Roman peace. By way of his piety and relationship with his divine ancestors, the gods granted Augustus the victory over the Parthians, and no one else. Thanks to his association with the divine, Augustus succeeded in recovering the standards through of diplomacy with no need for war. He is blessed by his divine ancestry, though not a God himself. His coming on Earth was foretold by Aeneas a thousand years before his time, and his mere presence heralds the coming of great change. Myth and reality were not necessarily separated in antiquity like they are now, so the *cuirass* serves as a wonderful presentation of state operated propaganda that displays a historical event, draped in religious imagery, probably produced near the end of his life, if not after.

Why towards the end of his life? First and foremost, and very publicly, Augustus denied personal divine honors from the state during his lifetime. Shrines commonly arose throughout the Empire to Augustus, but the Emperor publicly stated that they must also be connected to the cult of *Roma* herself. After 12 B.C.E., Augustus allowed his *genius*,

his great spirit, to be associated with the ancient *lares* for the protection of all of Rome. Yet, his image was a religious image as much as a symbol of the ruler. This image was very much the precursor to the Byzantine icon. To strike the image of the ruler was to strike the ruler.<sup>63</sup> In state propaganda Augustus was favored by the gods, which led easily to his elevation to full Godhood, which he hoped for upon his death.<sup>64</sup> Ultimately Augustus is a conundrum. He administered the temporal world, which prepared his way to take a great place in the hereafter. The Emperor at first carried over the “victor” style of the Hellenistic kings but in a Roman nature. Augustus dropped the “Hellenism” of Octavian altogether once he grew up and saw what was at stake: the traditional heart of Rome.

#### Augustus on the *Ara Pacis*

In the year 16 B.C.E, Augustus set out, with his adopted sons Drusus and Tiberius, to Gaul, citing disturbances in the northwestern regions of the Empire as a reason for northern expansion. From Gaul, the *princeps* dispatched the brothers to the Alpine lands north of Italy to develop a far defensible frontier along the Danube. By 14 B.C.E, this goal was accomplished. Augustus remained in Gaul for a time to monitor their progress before entering Spain, settling troops as he went.<sup>65</sup> Upon his return to Rome in 13 B.C.E., he found himself in possession of a unique honor and in good company. The city atmosphere must have been particularly charged, as Marcus Agrippa also returned to the city from his extended stay in the Eastern provinces. Tiberius was voted consul for the year, alongside the doomed, would be German conqueror, Publius Quinctilius Varrus. Together with the Senate, they offered Augustus a personal altar within the *curia* itself.

Augustus knew his limits and declined. However, when presented again with the possibility of a modestly sized temple complex elsewhere in the city, the Emperor relented and accepted the honor. The construction of the Temple of Augustan Peace, the *Ara Pacis Augustae*, began that very year. The small temple sat robustly on the *Campus Martius*, the Field of Mars, very close to the river Tiber, south of the Augustan Mausoleum, and east of an elaborate astrological grid system. This temple served and still serves as the ultimate artistic expression of the late Augustan Golden Age.<sup>66</sup>

The little temple's position close to the Tiber proved problematic. Within a matter of years, it became obvious that its position close to the Tiber would one day destroy it. The Tiber flooded regularly, and its silt slowly encroached upon the *Ara Pacis*, coupled with the seemingly never ending growth of the city in the first, second, and third centuries of the Common Era, spelling ruin for the little temple. Centuries of negligence following the eclipse of imperial power in Italy allowed further flooding of the river to gradually bury the complex. Not until the sixteenth century, C.E. 1536 to be precise, did the Temple of Peace raise interest again. When the palace of the *Via di Lucina* broke ground, pieces of the temple were exposed with it. In C.E. 1566, nine more pieces of the Temple were discovered.<sup>67</sup> No serious excavations followed these early discovers, and it wasn't until the nineteenth century that anyone happened across the *Ara Pacis* again. Attempts to excavate the temple stumbled due to its proximity to the aforementioned palace of the *Via di Lucina* and the fear that more digging might cause the palace to collapse. Mussolini took to restoring the monument district for nationalist purposes in the

1930s and commissioned a protective wall around the temple as a safe guard against further wear. By 1938 the excavation was complete.<sup>68</sup>

The *Ara Pacis* comes essentially in two pieces, an outer temple wall, and the altar within. Concerning this study, it is this outer wall, or *saeptum*, that serves as the canvass of imperial art and one of the major representations of Augustus, in fact, the only representation of Augustus portrayed with his public.<sup>69</sup> The walls of the temples, as far as imperial temples are concerned, are very modest. Many scholars over the last half century have pointed out that the *Ara Pacis* closely mirrors the size and shape of the ancient Athenian temple to the twelve gods of Olympus, as well as the Alter of Pity, themselves small, unassuming temples.<sup>70</sup> The Emperor refused a grand temple to his success, as it opposed his public temperament. It also would have shown as a grand Hellenistic monument of power and divinity, something great uncle Julius might have tried had he lived longer as *dictator*. The *saeptum* was constructed entirely of marble, wrapping some thirty-eight feet around the interior altar, and thirty-four feet at its widest.<sup>71</sup> The temple still has only one entrance, along with western wall. An entrance ramp of eight shallow steps leads to the interior of the temple and to the alter itself, positioned on a shallow *dais* of four steps. Upon this altar a sacrifice would be made to Pax in thanks of the peace she granted her servant Augustus and for continued good fortune upon the state.<sup>72</sup>

Inside the temple the *saeptum* wall is made in the image of a rural wooden fence, complete with garlands, vines, collecting bowls, and bull skulls, symbolizing the country

sacrifice. These images were intentionally made in the likeness of countryside fences, drawing on old Roman themes.<sup>73</sup> Fruit from all seasons bloom from the vines, calling on themes of Dionysius and Liber, which we will discuss shortly. The theme of fertility from peace is overpowering.

Outside, the *saeptum* displays two processions, moving south to north, proceeding single file to a sacrifice. Everyone present on the frieze was present on the temple's day of consecration in 13 B.C.E. Beneath the processions, vines and acanthus trees display the Augustan theme of fertility, complete with blossoming flowers and animals caring for their young, as well as swans, the bird of Venus. Debate has raged for sometime over the meaning of this vegetation motif. First of all, the vine motif was very popular at Pergamon in Ionia, but following the second century B.C.E. the Pergamese abandoned it. At that time though, Italy picked up the motif where it became very popular.<sup>74</sup> Secondly, the idea that the vines represent Dionysus and Liber, blessing the Augustan peace with plenty, is a convincing one. These divinities had fallen afoul of the Roman state in the first century B.C.E., their standards raised by both Mithradates of Pontus and by Marcus Antonius, playing along with the Ptolemaic pretension of being the *Neos Dionysus*.<sup>75</sup> However, when the final stage of the civil war started in 32 B.C.E., events did not play out as Antonius had hoped. By way of *evacotio*, Augustus summoned Dionysus away from his home in Macedonian Egypt.<sup>76</sup> From Egypt, Dionysus returned to rustic Italy, where he had been taboo since 186 B.C.E., when his festival was banned in Italy.<sup>77</sup> Archaic statues of Dionysus began to dot Italy again, bearded and manly, not like his sumptuous, childlike "non-Roman" representation in Egypt.<sup>78</sup> Augustus obviously drew

off of Dionysus' powers of regeneration as propaganda, but also his nature as conqueror of the East, and a lover of peace, to which Augustus could also lay claim.<sup>79</sup> Finally the eastern and western sides of the outer wall display a series of isolated rectangular panels filled with Augustan era propaganda. Mother *Pax* sits with children and animals as well as the personifications of the elements. They all gather around her, enjoying the benefits of the Augustan peace. Opposite of *Pax*, on the eastern wall, the goddess *Roma* prepares for battle to defend the Augustan peace. Another panel presents Aeneas as *pontifex maximus*, preparing to sacrifice a pig, rich with allegory concerning the founding of Rome from the Aeneid, and his association with Augustus as the second founder of *Roma*.<sup>80</sup>

The temple's northern wall displays a stream of religious officials and the contemporary state religious colleges, accompanied by ranks of lictors. They move from south to north as if prepared to actually enter the temple. The most important priesthoods of the state are also presented in the procession, all of which Augustus held chief membership as *pontifex maximus*. This included the *flaminaes*, identified by their cloaks and pointy hats, the college of the *pontifices*, as well as the college of *augures* present, and, perhaps, even the *quindecimviri*, the guardians of the Sibylline books and the future of Rome.<sup>81</sup> The southern wall displays the march of the Julio-Claudian family, with Augustus, *pontifex maximus* at the time of the temple's completion, stationed on the western end. For our purposes, we will discuss the Julio-Claudian procession on the temple and more specifically panels 3 and 4 of the southern wall.<sup>82</sup> The first impression that the procession makes is the idealized naturalism. It is not as rough as Late

Republican sculpture. Just as the questions of the vines mentioned above, the origin of this “Augustan” style has been the source of much debate. The conventional wisdom for decades concerning the origin of the Augustan style is that Italian Hellenes were employed to cut the *Ara Pacis* friezes due to the great antiquity and perfected style behind Hellenic sculptures.<sup>83</sup> The similarities of the *Ara Pacis* frieze with the Panathenaic procession of the Parthenon are striking but they are not identical, and such similarities have forced many to the conclusion that Hellenic artists produced the *Ara Pacis* too. This should not be dismissed by any means, but we should not diminish the Italian nature of the frieze. After all, during the reign of the Seleucid monarch Antiochus IV Epiphanes, we know that he recruited the Roman sculptor Marcus Cossutius to complete the Temple of Olympian Zeus at Athens, so it is important to understand that Italian artists were by no means pushovers.<sup>84</sup> After centuries of living with the Greek states of Magna Graecia in southern Italy, the peoples of central Italy absorbed a great deal of Hellenic methodology and technique, and by the first century C.E. reached parity with Hellenistic artists.

Some of the more recent historiography of the *Ara Pacis* over the last fifty years has been tainted by fascist Italy’s glorification of the monument.<sup>85</sup> The idea developed among European scholars that the ancient Italians couldn’t have possibly been able to work the stone themselves and needed “Greek masters” to do it for them. The “Augustan fusion” of Hellenic and Roman art spoken of by Roman art historians may be the matter of Roman artists experimenting with Hellenic methods. The attention to detail on the bodies is very Hellenistic, and there is evidence to support the use of the Greek scrapper

and rasp. Other art historians have pointed to the manner of low relief that the *Ara Pacis* friezes appear in as un-Hellenic, i.e. Roman. Also, different parts of the *Ara Pacis* figures are more uneven than others. Certain figures are generalized, while others are specialized and recognizable from contemporary busts. This suggests teams of sculptors with varying degrees of skill, perhaps one set for the less important figures in the religious colleges and one for the more important imperial family. Finally, along with the low relief, a style little used by the Hellenes, Italian carvers and sculptors were still used to producing their work out of varieties of rock harder than marble, and to make those works, were still using the round chisel and drill.<sup>86</sup> Using them on marble would have been overkill. If this is the case, would imperfections on the *Ara Pacis* surface not be more prevalent? This is true, and a number of revisionists in Late Antiquity and the modern era (until the 1930s) couldn't keep their hands off of the *Ara Pacis*, retooling it, adding to it here and there, even using acidic solutions to smooth the surfaces and make it less rigid.<sup>87</sup> Third century work on the eyes of the procession members has been noted. Certain aspects of Augustus' face have been reworked, as well as his sideburns. Of all the figures on the procession that have been destroyed, it appears Augustus garnered the most attention for reconstruction. The formation of crystals and the action of water ruined parts of his face. Even in Late Antiquity, his importance on the monument as the first Roman Emperor was greatly stressed.<sup>88</sup>

Ultimately, I feel sure enough to say that native Italians and Italicized Greeks probably worked together on the *Ara Pacis* sculptures using Italian methods influenced by Greek methods, employing both realism and generalist representation. The Roman

artist was only recently familiar with working in marble, the Carraran variety, and Hellenization would gradually merge with the Roman style.<sup>89</sup> From travertine to marble, the Roman artist gradually learned to work as the Hellene worked, but it would not be until further down the line that this would occur.<sup>90</sup> The *Ara Pacis* was Italian with a great amount of Greek idealism and methods used, but Italian none the less.

From beginning to end, we see people represented as just that, people. They are not the “permanent displays” quite like later Byzantine art but behave and move like real people. They turn and speak with one another, gossip and mind their children much as any group of people involved in such an event. The detail is incredible. Individual eyebrow hair, eyes with pupils, irises, and tear ducts, the slight smile on Agrippa’s face, and even the individual rods of the *fasces* of each *lictors*, it is a testament to the great Classical artists. One woman, perhaps Octavia, silences a group of gossipers, and the children appear bored stiff. The children are ever the important players in the imperial procession. In them, the viewer is shown the future, not only in terms of fertility propaganda, but in the long-term reach of the Julio-Claudian imperial family. The *principate* would remain throughout the years, with the children as proof of its succession. It is in the imperial procession that the real focus lies. The family line is the center of attention, not so much that the *princeps*, who hovers near the western end of the imperial procession. The figure of the Southern procession that is identified as Augustus is in sorry condition. Half of him is missing altogether and the remaining half is badly damaged.<sup>91</sup> His head is preserved well enough, even though large parts of his face (i.e. nose and mouth) are missing. His laurel crown covers most of his hair, the remainder of

which is covered by the hood of his toga. He is taller than everyone else around him, and his brow is furrowed.<sup>92</sup> The right side of his body remains intact, but his left half is lost. His right arm appears to be thrusting something forward to one man in a group of three. It appears to be a box of some kind. J. M. C. Toynbee identifies the man as a *camillus* or religious servant, and the box as an *acerra*, an incense box.<sup>93</sup> The men must be part of a priestly college, with Augustus along as an instrumental part of the religious procession.

Again, there is no overwhelming marker or indicator that this man is the most powerful man in the world, and surely Augustus intended it to be this way. Certainly his family was exalted, but there was no intention for them to behave as royalty. Great Roman families rose and fell throughout the history of the Roman, and Augustus intended his to be the next, and greatest, in this chain. As *princeps*, Augustus secured his role as the head of the Senate and the state. Through his family and attendants he intended to over see this imperial machine but not to dominate, and by his simple act of participation in this religious ritual, we can discern the public temperament of the *princeps*: as a *leader* and *participant* in the imperial administration, not a *ruler* or *overlord*. The only marker that places any importance upon him is that the procession seems to cluster up around him and his slightly greater height than those around him. Augustus seems an afterthought in the temple built in his honor. Here again is Augustus' insistence on *primus ad pares*, first among equals. The artists almost anonymously insert him into the procession, suggesting he is no grander than anyone else in it. Within sixty years of his death, the position of *princeps* would hold an unrivaled place in society. The vestigial practice of referring to the Emperor as *princeps* gradually gave way to the

Emperor as *imperator*, and the grandeur surrounding the position developed into an outright autocracy that, by the time of Constantine, any Hellenistic prince would be proud of.

A curious structure stood before the *Ara Pacis* and partially stands today. Known as the *Horologium*, the structure was really an obelisk taken from Heliopolis in Egypt, associated with an elaborate astrological system.<sup>94</sup> It stood just to the north of the Temple of Peace upon a cement surface engraved with bronze trenches to mark the movement of the sun throughout the year. In actuality it functioned as a giant sundial. The cement was even marked by the signs of the Zodiac to better record the sun's movement. The reason for all of this, aside from being a giant calendar, was state propaganda. On the day of Augustus' birth, September 23<sup>rd</sup>, the shadow of the obelisk pointed directly to the western doorway of the *Ara Pacis*. This event should be interpreted as Apollo showing approval to his most pious subject, the Emperor Augustus.<sup>95</sup> The *Horologium* quickly fell into disuse. The "as of yet" imprecise measure of time, even while employing the Julian calendar, led to slight alterations in the shadow of the obelisk. Before long, its shadow fell on the wrong day and missed the birthday of Augustus altogether.

### Augustus as *Pontifex Maximus*

In the year 36 B.C.E., Marcus Aemilius Lepidus felt quite sure of his position in the world. At the behest of his colleague Octavian he joined in a pincher movement operation that met with enormous success against Sextus Pompey in Sicily. Since 42 B.C.E. Sicily served as a hotbed of Republican resistance, spearheaded by the vibrant son

of Gaius Pompey Magnus. His armada terrorized triumviral affairs in and around Italy and choked the fatherland of its grain from Africa and Egypt. The treaty of Misenum in 39 B.C.E. largely “defanged” him, but his continued menace so close to Italy forced Octavian to finally address the problem. After three failed expeditions, two of which being outright defeats, Octavian succeeded in wresting Sicily from Sextus, who fled to Antony in the East and ultimately his own death. This victory was made possible because of Lepidus’ invasion of Sicily from the Carthage, while Octavian did the same from the Italy. Sextus’ doomed army was caught in the middle.

However, with all his recent success Lepidus did not intend to merely quit Sicily. After all, it was he who captured all of Sicily, aside for the northeastern corner. Why not take the rest? Baffled, Octavian managed to convince Lepidus’ army to abandon their commander and join him, which the troops seemed more than willingly to do. Lepidus was disgraced but not harmed physically. He returned to Rome, dismissed from the *triumvirate*, and appointed to the position of *pontifex maximus*, the head of the Roman state religion and priestly colleges.<sup>96</sup> He held this position quietly until his death in 13 B.C.E., at which point Augustus willingly accepted it.<sup>97</sup> From 13 B.C.E. forward the *Imperator Romanorum* acted as chief priest of the state until Gratian in the late fourth century abandoned the title, citing that it conflicted with his Christianity.<sup>98</sup> Ironically enough the Christian Emperors continued to behave as the High Priest of the Orthodox Christianity of the state, only without the title. The Popes of the Middle Ages eventually resurrected the title of *pontifex maximus* to add to their authority within the city, and bear it still.

The position of *pontifex maximus* further strengthened Octavian's claim to divine favor as the most pious man in the Rome, but this can not deny the humanity behind his sculptures as priest. Beginning around 20 B.C.E., Augustus insisted that his image be portrayed primarily as the robed or sacrificing priest, a stance that is also mirrored in his coinage.<sup>99</sup> His portrayal as a Roman conqueror in the heroic Hellenistic style no longer seemed appropriate. Why this sudden change in behavior?

That the portrayal of the mature Augustus as the pious father of the country contrasted with the violent, turbulent, vengeful young Octavian could not be more evident. But then again, that is the point. As Republic passed to Empire and peace, so to Octavian became Augustus. The memory of proscription and marching soldiers into the *Curia* was worth forgetting, and Augustus' propaganda campaign was worth its weight in gold. So, it seems Augustus wanted to further distance himself from military control in the eyes of the public. Instead, piety before the gods should be the focus of his regime. After all, that is how Rome became the master of the world. Piety before the gods resulted in divine favor. The end result might be the same, the supremacy of Rome, but the presentation is what mattered to the image of Augustus. The pious Augustus proved very popular. Everyone copied the Emperor. Some copied him in morals, others by cosmetic means. As father of the fatherland, Augustus held a higher stature in society than ever before and served not only as the guiding hand but as the guiding spirit in Rome. It is this way that Augustus attached his fatherly spirit to the cult of the *Lares*, and through the *Lares* became the first living man in Rome to have a cult of himself

established, but it was no divine Hellenistic cult. The *Lares* were the ancient spirits of the crossroads. Augustus ordered that every district in Rome possess a temple to the *Lares* and his genius as good luck. The aristocracy quickly copied his example of religious patronage. For example, in later years we hear of the knights taking over management of the *Lupercalia*.<sup>100</sup>

The *togate* Augustus, also known as the *via Labicana* Augustus, is a pious spectacle. Composed of marble, the elaborate folds and wrinkles of his toga appear tangible and capture shadow as if real cloth. Time has been hard on the statue, taking with it the figures exposed arms. One leg is exposed only as an imprint of the toga, and his sandaled feet protrude from beneath the toga. If not for the face and head, we would never know to think of this figure as the Roman Emperor, and there are two reasons for that. First of all, sculpture was a high dollar industry in the city of Rome. If carefully observed, a thin horizontal line can be seen just below Augustus' jaw line in this sculpture. This was a common feature of *togate* sculpture. The rest of the body was sculptured separately and kept as stock in statue warehouses. Whenever a sculpture company received an order, the head and veil were later added onto the stock body.<sup>101</sup> Secondly, and most importantly, here again the Emperor attempts to live the concept of *primus inter pares*. Augustus may have been the most important and powerful man in the Western world, but his statues hardly reflect this fact. They merely broadcast his piety and position as the God's holy spokesman, as countless others had served under the Republic His plain, traditional dress and simple humility before the gods reflects his favored propaganda as a mere servant of the state and the gods.

### The *Gemma Augustae*

The Kunsthistorisches Museum of Austria holds a beautiful, yet curious, piece of Roman propaganda. Known as the *Gemma Augustae*, it has passed among the royal houses of Western Europe over the centuries before settling permanently in Vienna. Depending on the perspective, different authors date this piece at the extreme ends of Augustus' last twenty five years (10 BCE- C.E.14), but the content of the work remains the same, imperial succession propaganda. The *Gemma Augustae* is a marvelously cut jewel, its cameo cut into a nine inch piece of onyx. The figures of the cameo are stark white, and for the greatest artistic contrast, the rest of the onyx is cut much further down, exposing the blue background.<sup>102</sup>

The skill required for this piece is astounding. Not only are all the characters anatomically correct, they are all properly proportioned and recognizable. The *Gemma* is divided into two halves, top and bottom, each portraying a separate set of events. The top half portrays what may be called "The succession of Tiberius", full of divine allegory and metaphor.<sup>103</sup> The top center scene is dominated by two great figures. Roma, the goddess of Rome, sits dressed in flowing robes, helmed, with spear in hand. She gazes longingly at the central character of the work, Augustus. However, he is not displayed as modestly as the other work of Augustus we have seen. He is unabashedly portrayed as Jupiter Optimus Maximus. Bare-chested and covered only in a silk robe draped across his lap, he bares the *lituus* in one hand and staff in the other. The dress, his hands, even the way which he sits in his seat are all copied from past representations of Zeus in the Hellenistic world. This image of the seated Zeus appeared on the reverse of Hellenistic coinage,

most notably on those of Alexander the Great.<sup>104</sup> For any further evidence to prove this we need look no further than the eagle placed beneath Augustus. The eagle, the bestial image of Jupiter, is also associated with the act of *apotheosis*, the act of becoming a god after death. There is nothing restrained about this work of art, which begs the question to exactly where and to whom this cameo was originally displayed.

Augustus sits in the curial chair of authority and gazes passed Roma. Between Augustus and Roma, a disk hangs in the air. The image contained within the disk appears to be that of Capricorn, though bearing slight modifications between the Capricorn images of then and now. What does this represent? The disk itself is probably the sun, coming to show its approval of Augustus' and Tiberius' regimes as one passes to the other. We need look no further than the anthropomorphic representations of the Ocean, Earth, and Civilization to verify the disk's identity. The Capricorn within the disk may serve more than one purpose. Augustus was conceived during Capricorn, a fact that Lily Ross Taylor states he was quite proud of, which connected him as well to the western sea, perhaps earlier in his career a symbolical challenge to Sextus Pompey.<sup>105</sup> Perhaps its inclusion in the *Gemma* is Capricorn's way, as well as Sol's, of seeing their favorite mortal son pass into godhood.

The goddess *Oikumene* is seen behind Augustus, either placing or removing the civic crown. Lord Neptune stands behind Augustus, also gazing ahead at the coming of Tiberius. Gaia also looks in the direction of Tiberius, her clinched fist under chin. Children fitter around her, and the horn of plenty rests in her lap.<sup>106</sup> What does this

represent? If *Oikumene* holds the crown above Augustus, Neptune respects him, and Gaia sits behind him, we may infer that the gods who initially crowned Augustus are assuming him into godhood and calling forth his successor Tiberius. The eagle under the chair tips the scale in the direction of this cameo being produced sometime between C.E. 12 to around the time of Augustus' death. At the far edge of the scene a man steps down from a chariot drawn by a horse but also accompanied by the goddess Victoria. The man is Tiberius, dressed in a flowing robe, bearing a staff of his own coming forth to accept the civic crown and the office of *princeps*.<sup>107</sup>

A rather nondescript Roman man stands between Roma and Tiberius' chariot, certainly a youth in *contraposto*, clad in traditional Roman military dress with the *chlamys* draped around his neck. This figure must be of some importance to appear in this imperial propaganda. Who is he? Again, it depends on the dating of the *Gemma*. If it is from earlier in Augustus' reign, then perhaps it is one of his grandchildren. However, if the *Gemma* dates from later in his reign as I think it does, then we have two choices: Germanicus, the nephew of Tiberius, or Agrippa Postumus, Augustus' biological grandson. In C.E. 13, Augustus adopted Tiberius as his son and heir, who then turned immediately and adopted Germanicus as *his* son. I believe that we are looking at a young Germanicus, destined one day to become Emperor himself.<sup>108</sup>

The scene on the bottom half of the *Gemma Augustae* is more traditionally Roman victory propaganda, steering away from the celestial coronation. The left corner of the scene depicts three Roman soldiers in military dress, raising a victory monument. One man, perhaps a centurion distinguished by his helmet, grips the ropes, pulling the

column while his two cohorts lift the monument from the other side. The centurion's cloak blows in the wind. The monument is decorated with the armor of fallen enemies, and is capped with a shield bearing the mark of a scorpion. What is to be made of this? What does the scorpion represent? We should recall that Tiberius, born in November, according to the zodiac, was a Scorpio.<sup>109</sup> The hoisted monument must be a monument to Tiberius' victories in the north along the Rhine in C.E. 10-11. Beneath the Roman soldiers a shirtless, bearded man sits with his hands bound behind his back, and a woman sporting a dress sits with her head in her hands. They certainly represent the defeated German population.<sup>110</sup>

The right corner of the cameo is a bit more dubious. A woman stands with her back to the viewer and carries a pair of *pilum*, the traditional Roman war-spear. She glances at a man wearing a *chiton* and a brimmed hat, probably the smaller of the Thracian variety. Two figures stand before the man in question. The Thracian man clutches a robed woman by her hair, while a bearded man wearing trousers beseeches the spear bearing woman. What does this mean? We may notice the similarities between the barbarian figures in the left and right corners of the *Gemma Augustae*. Each side has a bearded man only wearing trousers, and each side has a woman in despair. One pair is already conquered and one is on the verge of being over taken. If the left scene represents victories of Tiberius, then the right scene likely references impending victory in the north against other tribes of barbarians at the hands of Germanicus.

Therefore, to gather all of the evidence we can, this cameo is naked succession propaganda. By displaying Augustus as Zeus, the *Gemma* portrays the Emperor at the center of a group of gods that best represent his accomplishments: his conquest of Sextus Pompey and the sea, his rule over civilization, and by way of his social programs returns fertility and plenty to the world. By the time of production, Augustus had either taken his place among the gods or was very near to the moment. The gods gaze upon the victorious Tiberius, accompanied by Victory, as the new *Imperator Romanorum*.

So who exactly viewed this succession propaganda? It fits nowhere into Augustus' modesty and propaganda as we have seen thus far. There are two options. First, it might have been reserved for the inner circle or elite of early first century C.E. Rome, perhaps family members or family clients, those who knew the reality behind Augustus' power and his coming *apotheosis*. Second, we must to recall that as successor to the Hellenistic kingdoms, Augustus took over the role as the favored of both Apollo and Dionysus. The Ptolemaic and Seleucid kings were viewed by their subjects as gods themselves, and as ruler of their former lands, Augustus took over this role too. Perhaps this imagery of Augustus as Zeus was meant to be seen by the great families of the East who were more accustomed to the idea of the "divine monarch", as they had been with the proconsuls in the late Republic. In this case, Augustus merely carried on a tradition that had been in existence since the Romans first stepped across the Bosphorus into Asia.

## Coinage

The Roman state did not master the art of coinage until the very end of the Republic. Comparing Classical Greek coins with Roman Republican coins shows a stark contrast between master artwork versus clear amateurism, but not quite as glaring as later Byzantine coinage. The Roman economy slowly came around to the concept of coinage. Early in the Republic, the barter system gradually gave way to the *aes rude*, a large chunk of bronze used for exchange. Later, the *aes signatum* bore the image of a beast of some kind.<sup>111</sup> Greater skill eventually raised the quality of the artistic representations as the Republic progressed and grew in size. The earliest Republican coinage we have usually depicts images of the state.<sup>112</sup>

In the year 289 B.C.E, the Senate called for the creation of a board of three men, the *tresviri monetales*, to oversee the production of new money and the mint in general.<sup>113</sup> At first the *aes* system of currency continued, but as the Roman state expanded and captured more territory, especially in the Hellenic Greek speaking south of Italy, coinage began to catch on in Rome. The currency of the Hellenistic world and international trade was silver, and if the Roman government expected to play a part in international economics, it needed its own silver coin.<sup>114</sup> Thus the *nummus* came into existence, most likely created by south Italian craftsmen for the Romans around the year 269 B.C.E. Since silver served as the currency of international trade, it did not really have an impact on the lives of the average Italian farmer. Bronze currency continued, if only in a revised form, the *aes grave*, no longer large bronze bars, but as smaller bronze pieces. Bronze in general suffered through Hannibal's invasion of Italy. The state needed as much of the

metal as possible to produce weapons, and much of the rest found itself in Carthaginian hands.<sup>115</sup>

Following the Second Punic War and victories in Macedonia, Rome refilled its coffers, and between 211 and 187 B.C.E. the state minted its greatest coinage yet, the *denarius*.<sup>116</sup> With the advent of the *denarius* silver finally overtook bronze as the primary metal of exchanged used by the Romans. The *denarius* (the equivalent of 10 *asses*) along with its lesser, part silver, part brass cousin, the *sesterce*, dominated the Roman economy for the next five hundred years. Gold remained a rarity. We first hear of gold coinage during the war against Hannibal, but not as a regular fixture in the Roman economy until the *dictators* Sulla and Caesar introduced the *aureus*.<sup>117</sup> As the Republic ground to a halt, the *tresviri monetales* gradually lost ground to the aforementioned *imperators*, whose images adorned the money issued throughout the Empire.

During the late Republic the imagery on Roman coinage changed to glorify the living head of state, a method first employed by Julius Caesar.<sup>118</sup> Marcus Antonius and Octavian both presented themselves on issued coinage, which was within their *imperium* as joint rulers of the state. The *triumviri* maintained control of silver and gold production (*aureus* and *denarius*, *sesterces*), but the Senate remained in control of the bronze coinage and marked it with the “SC” or “Senatus Consultum”. Marcus Antonius even went so far as to include the image of his wife Octavia, a first in Roman coinage, and later allowed Eastern Roman mints to produce coinage of himself on the obverse, with

his consort Cleopatra VII Philopater on the reverse.<sup>119</sup> After Actium, Octavian allowed these practices to continue and enter into the Roman consciences. Just as earlier in the Republic, pro-Roman imagery abounded on Augustan era coinage. In the late first century B.C.E. it did not merely signify the state; it signified the head of state also. The Emperor and the state were inseparable. Furthermore, as we will see in coming descriptions, the artistry of the coin imagery improved considerably, though certain figures remain indiscernible without explanation. Coinage of the Augustan era was more in tune with the aesthetical beauty of the post Alexander era but always true to its Roman self.

Actium served as a fine divider between early and late Augustan coinage. As mentioned earlier, young Octavian did not so much as flinch at the prospect of portraying himself as a Hellenistic king early on in his career as *triumvir*.<sup>120</sup> With civil war looming and Marcus Antonius primed for battle, Octavian resorted to slandering Antonius' sexuality and associating him with foreign gods. Antony did in fact present himself as a modern version of Dionysus in the Ptolemaic fashion and even sailed to battle in Actium adorned as the god.<sup>121</sup> Octavian assailed this practice, blasting Antonius as having lost his "Romaness" and being overtaken by the ways of the East. Never mind the fact that Octavian practiced his own "God association", even appearing at a party in Rome dressed as Apollo.<sup>122</sup>

Early Roman coinage displayed images of the gods, and Octavian did not shrink from this pastime. Before Actium, he characteristically used the greatest of the state

gods: his ancestor Venus, Mercury, Mars the Avenger, Neptune (who sided with Octavian after the failure of Sextus Pompey), and Jupiter Fulgator. An image of Octavian's profile is always present on the obverse, while the reverse is reserved for any number of images, but usually the profile of a god.<sup>123</sup> Before Actium, the obverse coin face often carried a few inscriptions for instance, *divus filius*, identification as Caesar's son, and also acknowledgement as a member of the triumvirate. On a certain few coins Octavian sports the laurel crown of victory. These coins, known as the *laurate*, stood in contrast with the future *radiate* of the third century Roman Emperors who would dispose of the laurel crown in favor of the radiate solar crown of Apollo.<sup>124</sup>

In his book *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, Paul Zanker presents a series of silver *denarii* from just before Actium, representing Octavian and the three goddesses Pax, Venus, and Victoria. Never before has the representation of a Roman figure appeared so clear and pristine. One series (a three coin set) presents Octavian's head and neck on the obverse with no accompanying inscription. The reverse, though, portrays a perfect, yet miniature, full body rendering of the aforementioned goddesses. *Pax* stands in her robe, wearing a crown, *cornucopia* in one hand, a palm in the other. Venus leans against a column, spear under her arm, holding the helmet of a fallen foe. She is nude, except for a robe draped across her waist, with her back to the viewer. Finally, Victoria balances atop a globe, wings spread above a flowing robe. In her right hand she extends the laurel crown of victory. The only inscription on this series appears on the coins reverse positioned around the goddesses, "CAESAR DIVIF". A second series of *denarii* employs the same theme but reverses the display. The head, neck, and

shoulder profiles of the goddesses are displayed on the obverse, with a full-bodied miniature of Octavian on the reverse. Again the obverse bears no inscription, but items sacred to each Goddess accompany each mural (The *cornucopia* and palm of *Pax*, the wings and globe of *Victoria*). Each reverse presents Octavian as an embodiment of each goddess's virtue. The Octavian of *Pax* raises his palm in mid-step, clad in traditional Roman military dress. Though he carries a spear, his use of *adlocutio* hand and peaceful display embodies the Goddess of peace. The Octavian of *Venus*, again clad in traditional Roman military dress, stands ready, spear in one hand, leading troops into battle. The Octavian of *Victoria* stands victorious, one foot on the globe, clutching his spear in triumph.<sup>125</sup> Apart from this series, the method of using Octavian's obverse profile with a variety of reverse images becomes the standard imagery for imperial currency. Highly stylized reverses before Actium include Octavian as a herm with lightning erupting from the columns base, and the *triumvir* seated on the curial seat holding *Victoria*, a clear reference to Jupiter support by copying the statue of Zeus at Olympia, obviously citing Octavian's relationship with the king of the gods.<sup>126</sup> Future *denarii* manufacture followed a similar pattern, but the reverse was produced accordingly to its situation. Victory *denarii* over Sextus Pompey all bear the legend "*IMPCAESAR*", "Imperator Caesar", and portray a column of Octavian's victory spoils, his triumphal arch and the new Senate house, all marked by the phrase *IMPCAESAR*.

The numismatic representation of Octavian as Augustus progressed through discernable phases beginning in 31 B.C.E. until his death in C.E. 14. These images were spread all over the great variety of Mediterranean coinage, be it Roman coinage or non-

Roman coinage. They involve a large cast of relatives and gods, and the overarching message is always the same. Peace and prosperity has returned to the Roman state through Augustus, who piously serves the gods, who shares a close relationship with them, yet is not a god himself. The coinage issued from 32-27 B.C.E. is quite jubilant in its display bearing the legends “CAESAR DIVI F” and “IMP CAESAR”, proudly display the conquest of Asia and Egypt, and the end of the Civil Wars. In nearly all of the post-Actium Augustan coinage, the bust of Augustus’ head and neck dominates the obverse. His obverse profile is usually alone, sometimes crowned in laurels, and usually accompanied with some kind of legend denoting who he is as well as propaganda about his position and stately powers. Many of the images that adorn the reverse of early Augustan coinage reflect his recent success, displayed in the form of conquered ships, the Temple of Victoria, a victory arch, and an Alter of Victory surrounded by snakes.. The most intriguing of these is a shackled crocodile bearing the inscription “AEGYPTA CAPTA” Following this explosion of this coinage; Augustus suspended the production of coinage within the city of Rome itself while he was away in the western provinces. Enough Republican sentiment remained within the city that the *princeps* feared for his position were he to leave the gold and silver currency in the hands of the Senate. Augustus remained absent from the city in Gaul and Spain from 27-24 B.C.E., and then again from 22 B.C.E. to 19 B.C.E. on official business to Sicily, Greece, Anatolia, and later Syria, to force the settlement with the Parthians and return the lost standards to Rome.<sup>127</sup> When the mints reopened in the city upon Augustus return from the Eastern provinces, the open markets flooded with a second wave of “victory” coinage. To propagate his Parthian success, the newly minted coins (20-15 B.C.E.) displayed obverse

images of prostrate Parthians and other victorious Roman motifs surrounded by oak wreaths. Chief among the imagery is Mars Ultor, either clutching the recaptured standards (seen in ancient Italian display) or displaying them in his temple, where the standards remained after their return to Roman hands.<sup>128</sup> Augustus is nowhere to be seen, but it is understood that Augustus delivered the standards to Mars.

Over the years 15 – 6 B.C.E., perhaps feeling his own mortality after a lifetime of illness, Augustus openly associated himself with the members of his very extended family on his coinage, both Julian and Claudian. Augustus' best friend and effective co-regent Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa appears on the coinage at this time. One rather poorly made reverse presents both Augustus and Agrippa in their dual roles of seated consuls and co-emperors. We know of at least one *denarius* that proudly displays the bust of Agrippa with no image of Augustus to accompany it, with Agrippa adorned in an unusual civic crown decorated in ship *rostras*. By the time of the minting of this coin he shared the same powers as Augustus. On another *denarius*, Gaius, grandson and young heir of Augustus, and his brother younger brother Lucius are depicted wearing togas, bearing weapons, shields, and religious tools. Profile coins appear of Augustus with both Gaius and Lucius Caesar supported by the laurel wreath. Their mother Julia also appears on coinage, and just as her father sometimes takes on the attributes of Jupiter, she does the same as Diana.<sup>129</sup>

The Claudians are not forgotten either. Drusus and Tiberius Nero, Livia's children, also appear on coinage during the last twenty years of Augustus' rule. These

coins are rather poorly produced, but the point is clear. On the obverse of one coin, Augustus sits in his curial seat high upon a *dais* to imply his *maiestas* while accepting an audience. He leans forward to accept a palm of peace each from his conquering generals, after campaigning along the Rhine and Danube, adding Pannonia, Rhaetia, and Noricum to the Empire, and pushing the borders of the state to Germany, where they would remain for 500 years.<sup>130</sup> Later, after his brother's death in 9 B.C.E., Tiberius appears on a *denarius* obverse riding a *quadriga* of four horses of his own, just as Augustus did earlier in life.

By 11 B.C.E the imperial mint at Lugdunum had superseded Rome as the premier mint of the western empire, and the mint of Rome briefly went out of business.<sup>131</sup> The dominant western mint in the Empire resided then at Lugdunum. The importance of the future city of Lyon can not be dismissed, not only as the capital of Gaul, but also as a bulwark against the Germans, and a center of *Romaness*. It served as a symbol of unity for all Gaul. Augustus even issued coins carrying the image of the Altar to Roma at Lugdunum, and it was not alone. Minor mints dotted the western empire not just in Spain and Gaul, but also in Carthage. Augustus centered major imperial mints in the eastern empire also, at Pergamon, Ephesus, and Antioch. Minor mints also peppered Greece. The Roman system of currency did not as of yet completely dominate the east, where the chief means of exchange was the *cistophori*, equivalent to three *denarii*. The production of coin imagery in the provinces ultimately fell upon the proconsuls or imperial legates.<sup>132</sup> These coins also lent themselves to Augustan propaganda. Almost all of them bear images of Augustus on the obverse, while the reverse again display a wide variety of

images, including wreathed images of Venus, Pax, victory prowls, and the legend SC (Senatus Consultum).<sup>133</sup>

After Actium, Octavian displayed the images of his reconstructed Senate house, a nudge towards his reconstruction program.<sup>134</sup> The obverse facial profile begins to be accompanied by the laurel crown and the inscription “CAESAR AVGVSTVS”. Images of Octavian’s house, following his assumption of “Augustus” in 27 B.C.E., flanked by laurel trees bearing the inscription CAESAR AVGVSTVS, attest to his holiness and relationship with the gods. Laurels play a larger role in imperial coinage after 27 B.C.E. One *aureus* presents a laurel crown held in the talons of Jupiter’s eagle, with additional laurel wreaths rising behind it. A Spanish *aureus* presents a shield bearing the inscription SPQR-CLV surrounded by a laurel wreath. The inscription that encompasses the imagery reads OB CIVIS SERVATOS, which roughly translates as “On account of the servants of the state” or “In return for service to the state”. The wreath, sacred to both Jupiter and Apollo, again stresses Augustus’ divine association with the gods.<sup>135</sup> Definitely by 13 B.C.E., the full length miniature image of Augustus veiled as the chief priest increased in production. The priestly instruments of augury also appear on coins.<sup>136</sup> This act reinforces the earlier argument that Augustus might have seen his victorious *imperator* statues as a little too self-glorifying, and once his position was secure he fell back onto the role of piousness, reflected in his new hooded image.

What does all of this mean? Even before Actium we see the process that Augustus Octavian would later embrace. Even though he publicly claimed to be the son

of a God, Octavian knew that he was not a God himself. He certainly enjoyed an elevated place in society, because of his adoption, but he needed more than a name of a dead man. As his power and reputation separated itself from its starting point of *divi filius*, we see Octavian attach himself with the traditional state gods of Rome in direct opposition of Antonius and his favoritism of Dionysus and the foreign Egyptian cult. Octavian ruled Rome and conquered Sextus, and thus enjoyed the support of Jupiter, Roma, and Neptune. As Caesar's heir he knew Venus and by repeated conquest, Victoria. I believe it is quite clear. Augustus, who never viewed himself as a god outright, certainly had no qualms of displaying his connection and *favoritism* of the state gods on Roman currency or any other medium. Only after death, by order of the Senate, and executed by Tiberius, was he finally and formally made a god. Until that day he very modestly and attentively wielded ultimate power in a manner that all statesmen could learn from: Respect, duty, and temperance.

## CHAPTER 3

### JUSTINIAN

#### The Carrer of Justinian

The golden world that Augustus cultivated experienced a slow decay. At its peak, during the second century C.E., the Roman Empire stood unopposed as the greatest power on earth and the richest state west of China. Yet, even then the cracks were becoming apparent. Since the middle second century C.E. pressure on the German front demanded the presence of the lion's share of the military. Vandals, *Alamanni*, Franks, *Quadi*, *Marcomanni*, and Goths pressured the northern fronts and on occasion broke through to ravage Roman territory. The third century also witnessed the resurrection of the Persian Empire as the Arsacid Parthians, ruined by seemingly endless Roman plunder and campaigns of glory, lost all strength and succumbed to Ardashir, satrap of Fars and newly crowned "King of Iran and all of non Iran". A strong national movement followed, determined to restore the former borders enjoyed under great Darius and Xerxes. Thus even greater numbers of troops rushed to the East to meet the Persian threat, lingering there until the seventh century. Therefore, from the third century forward the Roman Empire lay in a difficult position. Pressured on two fronts, the Empire wearily faced this new reality.

Change simmered with the Empire as well. Eastern cults took root in its ancient core. Christianity spread rapidly in the cities of the Empire, gradually moving west. Old Latin religion and *mos maiorum* eroded before more satisfying Hellenistic and Eastern rites. The battle for monotheism took no prisoners, and there were many contestants. The

old values and discipline that allowed Rome to conquer the world relaxed. Diocletian may have formally destroyed the *diarchy* of Augustus, a process long in the making, but in actuality it fell somewhere in the chaos of the third century. The Roman Empire that emerged from the “Crisis of the Third Century” wore a different skin than before. The Emperors gradually began to dress, rule, and behave in the manner of the distant Kings of the East. The Senate, as well as Roman culture in general, took a back seat to an Imperial favored blend of Orientalism and Hellenism. The focus of the Empire slowly moved to the Balkans in response to the eastern and northeastern threats along the Danube and its proximity to Asia. With the eventual favoritism of Christianity by Constantine and the barring of anything *but* by Theodosius, the Roman Empire finally transformed into something other than Roman. Centered in the Hellenistic East at the new Roman capital of Constantinople, the Roman Empire submitted to Hellenism and the influences of the “East”; Greek in language and mind, Eastern in presentation, yet remaining Roman in its legal attitude and administrative core. After centuries of gradual metamorphosis the Empire of the Romans finally departed the city of Rome and Western Europe, taking Constantinople and Asia as the new core of the Empire. Welcome to “Byzantium”.

By the end of the fifth century C.E. the Empire of Augustus finally succumbed to the chaos of its age. German tribes swarmed over the western third of the Empire. Only the long Hellenized eastern provinces remained within its borders. From an uneasy foundation, following the death of Theodosius in C.E. 395, this “Eastern Roman Empire” passed to Anastasius in the year C.E. 491 who strengthened its position in prestige and gold. In C.E. 518 the Emperor Justin rose to the throne, formerly of the *excubitores*

imperial guard.<sup>137</sup> An illiterate Illyrian peasant, he almost instantly appointed his nephew Petrus, or Peter, to the position of co-emperor. He schooled Petrus in the finery of government and established him in the *Scholae* palace guard. The appointment of Petrus turned out to be the most important decision of the sixth century. Upon his assumption of the imperial *diadem* Petrus took the name of his uncle to whom he owed everything, Justinian. Brilliant and driven, Justinian managed the Romano-Hellenic world for the next sixty years. No sphere escaped his touch. Victory and truce with Persia quieted the eastern front following Justinian's great victory over the Persians at the Mesopotamian fortress of Dara in C.E. 530. The *Nike* revolt of Constantinople in C.E. 532 directly challenged his authority at home. Only through the bravery of his wife, the Empress Theodora and the fine generalship of his *magister militum*, Belisarius Thrax, was order restored. Justinian never flinched again.<sup>138</sup> From Constantinople he mobilized his armies. The *Orbis Romanis*, divided for some fifty years, could not continue to exist in its current state. The word on everyone's lips was *Renavatio*.

The Vandals received their punishment first. The settled life of Carthage clearly dampened their warrior spirit, and by Justinian's time they had forgotten how to fight. Against the might of Rome their kingdom fell in less than a year of fighting. Their king Gelimer, routed twice, preferred a good bath to fighting with the desert Moors and quickly capitulated.<sup>139</sup> North Africa returned to the Roman *Ecumene*, followed by the most sacred of missions, the recovery of Italy. The Roman Empire without Rome simply could not be. The Italian kingdom of the Ostrogoths, not even a century old, remained a "provisional" government at that, ruling in the name of the Roman Emperor. Deeply

segregated along social and religious lines, it lay ripe for reconquest. All it needed was a nudge. A dispute in the matter of succession did nicely. From the north and the south the Roman reconquest advanced and during the years of C.E. 536-540 under the watch of Belisarius, Italy returned to Roman rule. Belisarius celebrated this triumph in Constantinople. However, unlike the Vandals, though, the Goths remembered how to fight. Reeling from a combination of plague, failure in leadership, and serious underestimation of the enemy, the campaign in Italy faltered. The Goths took advantage of the absence of Belisarius, rallying around their dynamic young king Totila, and recovered much of what they so recently lost. Justinian found himself mired in something of a Roman Vietnam. The Romans needed another dozen years and an army of serious numbers, led by Belisarius rival Narses, to completely drive the Ostrogoths from Italy.<sup>140</sup> Further victories in southern Spain over the Visigoths hinted at a return of Roman rule in that country as well, but it never came to pass. Plague and war crippled the army. Too many posts existed and not enough soldiers to fill them. Religious differences continued to divide the Empire along social and ethnic lines. The much desired restoration of the Augustan Empire would never be realized.

Justinian did more than supervise the Roman reconquest of the West. As Augustus before him he was a patron of the arts, probably the greatest of the so-called “Byzantine Empire”. Wealthy and ambitious, he left his mark on the city of Constantine. He ordered the churches of the Holy Peace and of the Holy Apostles rebuilt in splendor. Following the *Nike* revolt he ordered the Church of the Holy Wisdom rebuilt on such a magnificent scale that it remained the largest dome in the world for hundreds of years.

The church itself still dominates the sky line of Constantinople.<sup>141</sup> Statues to the glory of Justinian dotted the city, most magnificently on the Column of Justinian just outside the Holy Wisdom. Additions to the great palace of Constantine, mosaics, ivory diptychs, the erecting of triumphal monuments and gardens finally brought the city into the true position of the capital of the Roman Empire.

In the realm of law Justinian spearheaded, without a doubt, the greatest legal compilation in the history of western civilization. Sifting through the veritable swamp of Roman legal history Justinian established a twenty-one man commission headed by his legal *Quaestor* Tribonian to streamline the mass of Roman law and to cull and revise everything that did not sit with the Christian Imperial values. Fifteen hundred books and more than five hundred years of Roman law were thus condensed to fifty books, called simply the *Digest*. Within two years of its inception the *Corpus Juris Civilis*, the great legal code, was complete, Justinian's greatest gift to the world. To transmit this law to student around the Empire, Justinian commissioned the *Institutes*, which served as the main legal text for all students and carried with it the power of the law.<sup>142</sup> In its revised form the *Corpus Juris Civilis* has passed down to us today and serves as the basis for every law code in the West, save for England.

In many ways Justinian marks the beginning of the death of antiquity. Another century was required for its complete death and the birth of the Middle Ages, but Justinian, an obedient Christian of the Orthodox strain, did not suffer the religion of the ancient pagan world. His deputies smoked out pagans at home and in society, formally

shut down ancient cults and saw to the forced conversion of thousands of pagans on pain of death.<sup>143</sup> Athens received its death blow with the closing of Plato's Academy in C.E. 529, the head masters of the institute fleeing to Persia and the waiting arms of King Khosroes.<sup>144</sup> Whether it limped along for a series of decades afterwards is up for dispute, but this kind of blow severely damaged intellectual pagan Hellenism. Pagans remained, but fewer and fewer of them "went public". Yet, they still remained in the country, those last Hellenes, antiquity's last flicker in the dark of Christian bigotry.

The threat from the Church proved as daunting as any from a foreign enemy. The presence of Arian Germans in the West served as an excellent excuse for invasion and reconquest in Africa and Italy. The Emperor might therefore answer the cries of those Roman Orthodox citizens "persecuted" under German domination. The Monophysites of Egypt and the East also proved problematic. In this theological game of musical chairs the Emperor could not show favor to one group without upsetting another. For instance, the Monophysites must be disgraced to gain the Pope's blessing for the reconquest of Italy. During the controversy of the "Three Chapters" Justinian tried appeasing both the Pope in Rome and the Monophysites in the Egypt by persecuting the Nestorians, a long defeated sect of Christians largely absent within the Empire. This failed also; the Pope citing the fact that anything that benefited the Monophysites opposed good Christian Orthodoxy. At its most heated, Justinian abducted Pope Vigilius and brought him to Constantinople. Justinian further humiliated two more Popes, setting a precedent for future Roman Emperors that they, and not the bishops of Rome, served as church head.

<sup>145</sup> The Christian Emperors may have given up the title of *pontifex maximus* but they retained the power of chief priest of the state.

In many ways Justinian was the Augustus of his time. As patron of the arts he endowed Constantinople with the same measure of beauty that Augustus bestowed on Rome. From the beauty of his ivories and mosaics to his church buildings and secular structures, Justinian made Constantinople the undisputed capital of the Roman world. As *imperator* he pushed out from strength to reclaim those territories lost a century before, reuniting the *Orbis Romanis*. He did well as a master statesman and codifier of the law. Yet, his failings are more obvious than those of Augustus. Under Augustus, Rome possessed no rival in the world other than perhaps Han China. During the golden age of the first century only glory stood before Empire. *Pax Romana* witnessed the peak of European civilization until the eighteenth century. Justinian, however, was pressured on all sides from Persians and Barbarians, possibly from within by his generals, and from an increasingly complex web of church politics, the likes Augustus possessed no analogue. However, Justinian remains the Augustus of his age. The generations of Constantinople looked to him as the conqueror, the theologian, and the builder, the man who made Constantinople truly great, setting the bar for all Emperors to come. Augustus and Justinian, the greatest of the Roman Emperors, together they shaped their states and their perception for centuries to come. Few matched them. None surpassed them.

## The Byzantine Artistic Tradition

Nothing springs from a vacuum. If Greek sculpture originally developed from the Egyptian example, and the Roman style from Greek and Etruscan, then what is the origin of Byzantine art? Obviously, it first arose from the Hellenic-Roman style, which dominated the Mediterranean, but what else? Where did its ethereal non-Hellenic qualities come from if not from Europe? In observing sixth century mosaic art, the viewer notices a certain continuity with that of classical antiquity, but what else served as an influence? The missing component is Christianity.

The outward physical beauty of Hellenic art opposed the Christian world view. The soul, not the body, lay at the heart of all things. Physical beauty ultimately amounts to nothing; it is attractive for a time, but in the end a dead shell. Many of these communities in the “East” concentrated on internal reflection and the shunning of the physical world. As the Roman state absorbed the Eastern Mediterranean, the artistic conception of these seemingly misanthropic savior cults affected the traditional pagan art of the region.

The early church was not entirely sure what to do with art. Many Christian communities surrounded themselves in the values of the Stoics and the Laws of Moses. There really wasn't a need for art and many of the early church fathers outright banned it.<sup>146</sup> Clement of Alexandria came forward, after a time, and deemed certain things acceptable for identification as followers of Christ, thus opening the door for future imagery. The Lamb, always popular, became a well known Christian symbol, as did the peacock drinking from a spring, representing the purest soul.<sup>147</sup> As the religion spread,

decoration grew in use from rude figure drawings to beautiful works of art. Many other works remained small scale and minimalist, taking a cue from eastern Jewish art. However, the art progressed in different ways all over the Empire. For example, the mosaics and paintings adorning the walls of the baptistery of Dara in northern Mesopotamia possess a certain Pompeian feature to them.<sup>148</sup>

One of the key differences between the style that *was* and the style *to be* is what David Talbot Rice refers to as “frontality”.<sup>149</sup> The Byzantine mosaic figure is rarely seen from the sides or from behind. When viewed from any other direction than directly forward the figure appears awkward and ungainly. It lacks the natural fluidity of Hellenism, proportional accuracy was less important than the message of the work. This “frontality” overtook Mesopotamia by the first century B.C.E, lavishly employed in the palace of Antiochus, king of Commagene, centered at Nimrud Dagh in northern Mesopotamia.<sup>150</sup> As the centuries passed this style of rigid, mystic art dominated Syria and much of Mesopotamia. Authority figures developed into forbidding mosaic images whose gaze never faltered. The style finally settled in Antioch, the seat of Roman Asia, and from there gradually grew in popular use. During the madness of the third century the defense of Syria largely fell under the benevolent rule of the Palmyran King Odenathus and later his wife, Queen Zenobia. As a trading power, Palmyra not only exported this style but incorporated it into state relief, just as Antiochus before them.

As the third century closed and order returned to the Roman world, the art of antiquity never fully returned. The gradual breakdown of the old Romano-Hellenic

society in the outer regions of the Empire allowed other themes to infiltrate. Evolution, as a rule, always diverges from the original source. By the end of the second century the Empire ceased to be ruled outright by Italy or displaced Italians. Until the end of its life the ruling class of the Late Roman Empire represented more the overall population than the Italian aristocracy. Emperors might be Phoenician, Macedonian, or Arab. So too did this new style of art represent the artistic traditions of the Empire as a whole. Diocletian employed it just as surely the Christians. That thinly veiled Greek rationalism and Roman pragmatism began its slow retreat to its source in the eastern Mediterranean. Regional strength, with a German injection, shook old Roman values. The city of Rome declined in importance just as the *idea* of Rome grew larger.

Following the third century, the Roman Emperor needed to be more than a constitutional monarch; he must appear as a god. Beginning with the Emperor Galienus, a permanent movement towards literal godhood and the presentation of the Emperor as a Hellenistic-Roman prince becomes apparent in imperial art. Aurelian, Diocletian, and Constantine took hold of the image of the divine monarch and developed the concept further. They walked with their patron god. Christianity did not reject this concept but instead baptized it. The columnar art and the Missorium of Theodosius both display a hulking emperor, larger than all around him, frontally displayed, beseeched by all, the most important figure in the frame. Under the Christian Emperors of Constantinople the iconography and *cultus* of the Emperor remained, if only the divinity behind it changed.

By the fourth century C.E. Christianity found imperial favor with the family of Constantine, no longer a tiny cult, and took up residence in larger constructs. The

basilica grew as the public building best suited for the Christians, and monumental art followed in its footsteps. Floor mosaics of stone adorned the paths of these great churches and beautiful mosaics adorned church walls, providing the featured biblical characters a display best suited for their stature.<sup>151</sup> The mosaics style remained so consistent that a novice might be forgiven for mistaking a second century mosaic for a sixth century mosaic, or vice versa. The Byzantine style intended to draw an emotional reaction from the viewer, reflecting the Christian maxim that it is the idea behind the art that matters most, not the artist or flaws in the art. Such an attitude robbed the artist of his importance as an individual and another piece of old Hellas vanished with him. Statuary in the round decreased in production, though still produced. Christianity had little use for such displays of outward beauty. That is not to say that free standing statuary stopped being produced at all, it certainly was, as is best seen in the sculptures of Valentinian II and the *Chlamydati* senators, but the its time was at an end. The statue of Dogmatius may look realistic enough, but his rectangular head and his fixed stare mark him as a transitional figure.<sup>152</sup> The figures of Diocletian's Tetrarch Emperors show no differentiation and, indeed, were not intended too. The statue of Marcian at Barletta is stiff and typical of the fifth century Emperor. In fact, sculptures like the Tetrarch Emperors and Marcian's statue point the way towards the future of imperial art.

Marble quarries fell into disuse. Ivory replaced marble as the medium of choice, and the minor arts took on a prominence greater than before. Imperial and consular diptychs, records made in ivory of the annual office, flourished in the fifth and sixth centuries. The consular *diptychs* still show an amazing amount of detail, but something is missing, be it naturalism or proper anatomical proportion, due to the growing eastern

reluctance to record images.<sup>153</sup> Pagan art survived deep into “Byzantium”, though absorbed by the Christians. Biblical characters replace pagan figures in familiar scenarios. Thus, King David slays the Nemean Lion instead of Hercules.<sup>154</sup> The great temples of old became victims to Christian scavengers and were either targeted for outright destruction or harvested for raw material and reuse in Christian basilicas. The greatest ancient temples remained, like the Parthenon, but as converted churches.<sup>155</sup>

Byzantine art found its greatest home in Constantinople.<sup>156</sup> The ideas of Athens and Rome mingled with Eastern styles to become the focal point for what we call “Byzantium”. Always the greatest patron of the arts, the Imperial family pumped money into artistic development. The greatest artists of the Empire thus found their home in the new capital. The ever-present, highly educated civil service also influenced what went into artistic construction.<sup>157</sup> The heavenly figures of Christ *Pantokrator*, his saints and Apostles dominated ecclesiastical Byzantine art. Light hearted Hellenistic art did have its place in larger society, however. Constantinople was filled with mosaics of men boating, riding horses, and other non official motifs. After all, art can’t always be gloomy, reverent, and official.

At first glance the figure art of the Late Empire may bear little resemblance to the glory of Hellenic art and classical sculpture, but there are certain similarities. Many secular mosaics continued to be influenced or outright dominated by classical style. The *Christos* is often portrayed as the good Sheppard or as a Roman soldier. He is beardless with long hair, frontally displayed, bearing the *nimbus*.<sup>158</sup> One mosaic in particular presents Christ as Helios riding across the sky.<sup>159</sup>

Being the inheritor of Roman Art, can we describe the Byzantine style as an expressly European style? I do not see how it could possibly be. As we have discussed, the style can trace its heritage to two continents and a half dozen cultures. A similar stoic, yet mystical, style pervades much of the Eastern Roman Empire, stretching from Egypt to Constantinople. We must not be too quick to think of the Byzantine style as uniform. It varied from region to region, both in quality and distribution and remained the dominant style of a large portion of the Mediterranean even after the coming of Islam.

By the end of the fifth century C.E. we can discern the nucleus of the Early Byzantine Style. Early Byzantine art seems stuck with one foot in antiquity and one foot on something composite and new. Mosaic frontality dominates painted and mosaic art, naturalistic statuary is less apparent, and the church is the greatest canvas in the Empire. The Christian self-perception placed more emphasis on the interior than the dreary exterior, and the church interiors never failed to dazzle their congregations. Secular art remains stepped in the traditions of old, and monumental imperial architecture continues to display the wealth and greatness of the Empire to the world. The Christian Emperor bears the cross and the goddess Victoria at the same time. Victory monuments in the old Roman fashion continue to express the cult of the Emperor. By the era of Justinian domed churches dominate a Constantinople full of nationalities, race tracks, baths, and pagan statues. As a microcosm of the Empire it is best to think of Constantinople as a conundrum: the old pagan world remains, but it is more Christian every day.

## The Column of Justinian

A little detective work is necessary when trying to uncover the date surrounding the Equestrian column of Justinian. The best sources concerning the column of Justinian are the primary sources of Justinian's court historian Procopius written in the sixth century C.E. and the fourteenth century "Byzantine" historian Nicephorus Gregoras, writing in the time of Andronicus II.<sup>160</sup> Both men place the column at the center of the *Augustaion*, a forum founded by Constantine in honor of his mother Helena, centered just outside of the Hagia Sophia. Many other statues joined that of Helena as the centuries passed, including one of Theodosius the Great.<sup>161</sup> According to Brian Croke, Justinian's column began construction following Roman victories against the Persians in the year C.E. 543. However, with the outbreak of plague in Constantinople in C.E. 542, and no major victories to speak of, the date is in dispute. It should be noted that some 60,000 to 300,000 people died in the capital in C.E. 542 C.E. If C.E. 543 is the target date for construction, then who was alive and willing to hoist the statue atop the column?<sup>162</sup> Instead, it seems more reasonable that the column was raised following the Roman victory over the Persians at Dara in C.E. 530, or two years later during the conclusion of the Eternal Peace with Persia in C.E. 532. During those years the state coffers brimmed, plague was nowhere to be seen, and Justinian could afford to dote on himself. It is within the realm of possibility that both triumphs were commemorated in the same year, C.E. 532.

A visitor to Constantinople approaching the column for the first time would see seven marble steps at the column's base, with the largest at the bottom, the smallest at the

top. Procopius adds, “People gathered there could sit upon them like seats”. A large, square, brick base placed on top of the marble steps served as the base support of the great column. Made of baked brick and held together by mortar, it proved fire resistant for hundreds of years. Like so many Roman and Hellenistic structures, the rude brick was disguised and beautified by a marble sheath engraved in bronze ornaments. On top of the base another four steps of marble ensure a firm foundation for its payload above. <sup>163</sup>

The bronze column stood seventy meters high. <sup>164</sup> Very few other structures in the city of Constantine matched it in height. The shaft’s unblemished copper skin belonged to a special variety of copper known as the “Temesian”, worth its weight in silver. <sup>165</sup> Procopius mentions the column as “monolithic”, literally one single cut block of bronze. Nicephorus Gregoras tells us otherwise. By the fourteenth century C.E., the combination of weathering, earthquakes, fire, and invasion reduced many structures of Justinian’s age to the realm of memory, but a few survived. Nicephorus reports that by his day weathering had removed large parts of the column’s bronze epidermis, exposing the brick beneath. He also reports that mixed in with the endo-skeletal brick work is the occasional “white layer of stone”, separating the layers of brick with a narrow band of white stone, reminiscent in geology of a layer of chalk intruding into an otherwise homogenous bed of limestone. Nicephorus likens it to the “segments of a reed stalk”. <sup>166</sup> Such an observation is important to the dating of the column. Byzantine Historian Cyril Mango points to these “white stripes” in the sub-structure of the column as indicative to many large structures in Constantinople during the age of Justinian. No ornamentation or sprawling tales of victory are mentioned on the column, suggesting a shift in imperial mentality since the time of Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, or even Arcadius. The glory of

victory is no longer the Emperor's sole possession, but Christ's. Yet, the old concept of the "Unconquered Augustus" still loomed large in the Roman psyche, and though no longer a divinity of his own, the Emperor continued to hold a great preeminence in society that.

A basket shaped platform of marble perched on top of the column. Nicephorus describes it as nine layers in depth, wide enough to hold its load, but narrow enough to remain artistically pleasing. Mounted on this platform, Procopius mentions a great bronze horse, described by both historians as having its hind limbs planted, fore hoof held aloft as if moving forward. Disturbed by the wind the beast's mane blows, tousled by the eastern breeze, the direction of Rome's greatest threat. Upon its head a bridle is fastened, but the Emperor rides without the use of his reins. According to Nicephorus "the flanks of the beast swell," bit in mouth, preparing either to break into a determined flight or to slam its hoof in opposition to Persia, warning that the "East" belongs to its rider, the Roman Emperor.<sup>167</sup>

Procopius gives the greatest description of the figure. The figure seated upon the horse gazes into the distance. Clad in an ancient cloak, the seated Emperor radiates the image of Homeric power. Further dressed in ankle boots without greaves, the Emperor rides his steed without a saddle. With one hand the Emperor holds a globe, the *globus cruciger*, capped with a cross. His other hand is raised forward, fingers spread, to the "East," halting the advance of the Persians and other foes from Asia. He bears no weapons and no protection against potential foes; only by his majesty does the Emperor withhold them. Perched on the figure's head is a curiously un-Roman imperial peacock

diadem.<sup>168</sup> The figure stood high above the roads and gates of the city for hundreds of years, regarded as legendary by the kings of Medieval Europe.<sup>169</sup> According to a Russian chronicle from the Paleologan period, the column was later accompanied by lesser statues of barbarian kings, three in total, in submission and showing reverence to the Emperor. Procopius makes no reference of these, and neither does Gregoras; perhaps the barbarian statues are more recent additions to a very old work, akin to the Renaissance figures of Romulus and Remus suckling from the ancient Etruscan *lupa*.

According to both primary accounts the horse is incredibly life-like. In an age when realism is vanishing from the scene at a rapid pace, we read reports of this style of natural beauty. Looking back to the start of this study I stated that the greatest earmark of Greek and Roman art is its realism. The evolution of classical art was a gradual, natural process, and in the sixth century C.E. the classical styles of the Mediterranean still held great influence over the Roman *Ecumene* even while a new Christian interpretation arrived onto the scene. Imperial and Christian imagery appear trapped in a slow dance, one step ahead of the other, but not for long. Within a few centuries the two styles finally merged into high Byzantine art.

If the column itself is dedicated to Justinian, the question that must be asked is if the statue on top actually is Justinian. Our earliest primary sources point to the rider as Justinian, but other writers over the centuries have interpreted the rider as Theodosius or Heraclius. There has been a good deal of recent scholarship concerning the identity of the rider. Is the tradition of the rider as Justinian just that, tradition? In 1877 the Budapest

University Library acquired from the Sultan of Constantinople a fifteenth century illustration by the artist Nimphirius, dictated by the journeyman Cyriac of Ancona.<sup>170</sup> The drawing depicts a mounted portrait of a Roman Emperor. When European historians and antiquarians learned of this drawing they jumped to the conclusion that the illustration depicted the lost mounted statue of Justinian. Many of the mannerisms of the Budapest illustration mirror those of Procopius description of Justinian's statue, but many descriptions mentioned by Nicephorus Gregoras are absent from the Budapest illustration. According to Gregoras, the wind catches the cloak of the rider that is decorated with images of the world and God's Kingdom.<sup>171</sup> The Horse seems surprised, with its head turned to the side, its brittle no longer apparent. The Budapest illustration demonstrates none of these.

Written above and around the Budapest illustration is a phrase in Latin: *Fon Gloriae Theo Dosi Pereniis*. What is to be made of this? Does it mean what it says: "(From the) Fountain, the Eternal Glory of Theodosius?" Is this an illustration of Theodosius the Great instead? Similar writing appears also on his victory obelisk in the Hippodrome of Constantinople in C.E. 390, bidding Theodosius to reign forever. What does *Fon* represent? Phyllis Williams Lehmann postulates that *Fon* actually represents a mangled rendition of the Latin abbreviation for Constantinople, *Con*. Such abbreviations were often placed on coins to denote the location of the press that created them. Is the Budapest illustration a rendition of a, now lost, medallion of Theodosius?<sup>172</sup> If this image is of Theodosius, could then the figure on top of the column be Theodosius as well? Certain writers even state that the letters on the Budapest illustration actually appear on the statue itself. However, Nicephorus Gregoras, inspecting the statue up close

on a spiraling renovation staircase, makes no report of the Latin words actually appearing on the horse and rider.<sup>173</sup>

Regardless of the rider's identity, what should we make of the Emperor's dress? Why is he clad in the *cuirass* and skirt of a Bronze Age hero? Here too Procopius comes to our aid. He refers to the Emperor's dress as "clad like Achilles, for that is how they call the costume he wears."<sup>174</sup> Was such a style common place for the ruler in the sixth century? The story of the Achilles costume goes back further than Procopius though, almost one hundred years.

In C.E. 475 the incumbent Emperor, Zeno the Isaurian, was run out of Constantinople by his brother-in-law Basiliscus, who promptly set himself up as Emperor. A foolish young man named Armatus accompanied Basiliscus to the throne. Armatus concerned himself mostly with high living and spending his days in the baths and saloons of the capital. He managed even to seduce the Empress. Such a seduction brought with it the high ranks of *magister militum* and consul even in C.E. 476. On race days he dressed in attire known to the people to represent "Achilles", a guise called the *schema*, and pranced around outside the racetrack in Constantinople with his gang of cronies. The crowd took to calling him "Pyrrhus" either as a massive inside joke or because of the scarlet color of his cheeks.<sup>175</sup>

Why the Achilles costume? What could be gained by associating oneself with such an ancient figure? Glanville Downey presents a few valuable examples. First of all we must consider the Greek concept of the warrior. The Hellenic world revered the warrior prowess of Achilles, and even Alexander the Great claimed descent from this

great national hero. To the Hellenistic mind Achilles represented all the greatness of the soldier in society: leadership, strength, skill, and popularity. By the sixth century the *schema* of Achilles was well known to the people of Constantinople and donned by the Emperor on particular victorious occasions for these very reasons. The fact that Armatus was seen as a laughing stock by the mob of Constantinople is probably because they saw this man, a known egomaniac and lout, who rose to power solely because of his close association to the imperial family, parading around in imperial garb as if *he* were the Emperor.<sup>176</sup> If worn by Justinian, however, the *schema* fit properly on a man who reflected the conquering ideals of Achilles. Through Achilles, the Emperor might even symbolically claim relations with Alexander, if not directly by blood, then through the warrior ideals that Alexander and Achilles shared. Even if it is indeed a reused statue of Theodosius, the conquering ideal suited both Emperors fine: Theodosius against the Goths, but even more proudly donned by Justinian, whose reconquest of the Western Empire proved the stuff of legend.

Such a costume harkened back to earlier days of greatness for both Hellas and Rome, a feeling that Justinian hoped to capture. His program of *reconquista occidentalis* or *renavatio* found an excellent embodiment in the image of Achilles. Justinian strove to resurrect the ancient empire of Augustus, both territorially and ideologically, and what way to better display that idea than that of victorious Achilles? Such an ancient display of power could be interpreted in modern day America if George W. Bush chose to display a fictional *equestrian* monument of himself in the image of George Washington. By associating himself with the ancient father of our country, President Bush could then call on certain legitimacy for his regime as well as likening Washington's greatness with

his own. By donning the powdered wig and garments of the 1770s, President Bush might conjure from the viewer the feeling of infinite horizons felt by many Americans following the revolution. Justinian strove for this end. The greatness of Rome could be revived and he would be the Emperor to do it. His image should beam that same message.

Or it could simply have been because Justinian was senselessly vain, like young Armatus? Justinian rarely suffered the opinion of others outside of his wife and direct circle and meddled too often in theological speculation. His legal reforms left him in charge of all imperial matters, satisfying his hunger for power and consolidating all legal power in his person. Indeed, he canceled the extremely old office of Roman consul, citing that it burdened the aristocracy and was a drain on society, thereby eliminating the ancient means of recording the year.<sup>177</sup>

James Allen Evans casts further light on this vanity. He brings us back to the *Augustaion*. According to Evans a silver equestrian statue of Theodosius the Great also stood on a bronze coated column in the *Augustaion*. Evans states that in honor of his victory at Dara in 530 C.E., Justinian removed this silver statue and installed one of his own on top of the column of Theodosius. Another account, according to George Majeska, is that Justinian simply removed the head of the figure on top of the Theodosian column, replacing it with a head of his own likeness and headdress. Relatives of the former imperial house of Theodosius still remained in the city and it is *at least* conceivable that Justinian, as paranoid and jealous of his power as we know him to be, would do such a thing. Coming from peasant stock and objecting the veneration of Theodosius, an

Emperor who not only failed to hold the Roman world together but set it up to fail, could Justinian have committed so tasteless an act as decapitating a famous Emperor's statue?

So what can be made of all this evidence? Is Justinian the rider on top of the column? Does the Budapest rider represent the long lost equestrian statue of Justinian? The evidence is strongly in favor of the Budapest rider hailing from the Theodosian house. A golden medallion probably accompanied a victory column erected by Theodosius over Maximus Magnus in 388 C.E. or later by Arcadius honoring his father Theodosius.<sup>178</sup> Bronze coins exist bearing very similar portraits of Theodosius to that on the Budapest illustration. The helmet Procopius speaks of, the *toupha* as seen on Justinian's Victory Medallion, dates back to the fourth century at least, and is well known in imperial representation, even worn by Theodosius himself on one of his coins.<sup>179</sup> But over the century and a half that separated the two Emperors, the *toupha* changed from a simple *diadem* into a helmet but retained its use as a celebratory image. The peacock *diadem* displayed in the Budapest illustration therefore may have been reserved for a particular event, perhaps Theodosius' own celebration in 388 C.E.

Some of the statue's descriptions do not line up with the Budapest illustration, but many do, especially the *schema* of Achilles. It is difficult at times for historians to draw a line in the sand, but after reviewing the material it stands to reason that parts of both are correct. The Empire in the sixth century was far richer than it had been for some time and erecting a new column in the center of town certainly seems likely. After all, Nicephorus Gregoras' identification of the "white brick" with the column's internal structure as hailing from the age of Justinian helps us point to this period. Removing and

decapitating a statue of a beloved Emperor, especially one so important to the spread of Christianity, and to install an image of his own not only seems un-Roman, but senselessly disrespectful. It is not outside the realm of possibility for the ruler who required senators to kiss his feet on entry and bow to his prostitute wife, but let us remember Occam's razor.<sup>180</sup> Why pull down the statue of a beloved Emperor and sully your own name when simply building a taller and more elaborate one nearby would do the job? The primary sources make no mention of deliberate statue mutilation, only that a Column of Theodosius once stood in the *Forum Tauri* in Constantinople that it fell during an earthquake in C.E. 480, and was later rebuilt as the Column of Anastasius.<sup>181</sup> The fate of Theodosius' column in the *Augustaion* remains a mystery. Therefore, we are left with three options: 1) The column belongs wholly to Justinian 2) Justinian replaced the head and *diadem* of the Theodosian column, or 3) Justinian claimed credit wholesale for a statue that actually belonged to Theodosius. My analysis is that Justinian, unwilling to share *his* glory with the image of a former Emperor, probably erected his own column not long after the conclusion of peace with the Persians either following the Dara Victory of C.E. 530 or the Eternal Peace of C.E. 532. The Column was probably accompanied with its own victory medallion for further commemoration of Dara, as we shall see in the next section.<sup>182</sup>

Surely some form of identification accompanied the Column of Justinian to denote the Emperor's identity, and the sources are split over whether the words *Fon Gloriae Theo Dosi Pereniis* were present on the statue or not. The statue followed the basic design of the antiquarian motif, like the Budapest illustration, harkening back to the glorious heroic ages of the past and imbued with the person of the Emperor. This allows

for the confusion with the image of Theodosius on the Budapest illustration; it is the same type of propaganda, just not meant to be the same person. This style of Equestrian statue was popular in imperial propaganda. The only great difference in the two statues appears to be the crown worn. The account of *Armatus* demonstrates that the *schema* was of popular use among Late Roman Emperors. Therefore, the Budapest illustration is most likely from a medallion of Theodosius commemorating his own vanished column or his column in the *Tauri* forum. The confusion that has long surrounded the identity of the rider is understandable.

Whether or not it is a direct representation of Justinian or of a Theodosian, regardless of who it is, the column gives us a fine glimpse of the idealized Roman Emperor of Late Antiquity. Perpetually victorious, his regalia reflects his ties to the glory of antiquity, his plumes, whatever the crown may be, proudly display the fact that he is more than just Roman Emperor but the purest soul in the land.<sup>183</sup> His will must be obeyed, the “East” will head his word and as *kosmocrator* the world is literally in the palm of his hand.

The column of Justinian stood for nearly a thousand years, even outlasting the empire. Nicephorus Gregoras tells us that time and poverty reduced the column to a patchwork of exposed brick and weakened supports, the statue eventually being bound to its horse by a great chain.<sup>184</sup> According to the Frankish traveler Robert of Clari, present during the European sack of Constantinople in the thirteenth century, storks took to nesting on the figure aloft the column.<sup>185</sup> If anything, the column of Justinian serves as a perfect analogy of the decline of the empire: initially beautiful and shining before

succumbing to poverty and ruin. Once the Ottoman Turks completed their conquest of the Roman state, the Sultans of Constantinople briefly allowed the column to remain as a sign of respect for their Greek subjects, as they also allowed much of the remaining beauty of the city to stand. The record tells of the statue standing as late as 1490 C.E.<sup>186</sup> However, such a symbol of Christian and Imperial power could not be allowed to stand forever in such a mighty Muslim empire. The Hellenes believed the destruction of the monument would signal the end of the empire. Therefore, the Ottoman Sultan declared the great statue pulled down in an effort to prevent future bloodshed in a possible national revolt. The French journeyman Pierre Gilles writing during his stay in new “Istanbul” in the sixteenth century observed the statue’s dismembered remains. He mentions the statue’s nose alone measured nine inches in length and claims the same height and thickness for the horse’s hooves.<sup>187</sup> What was left was literally used for cannon fodder.

### The Victory Medallion of Justinian

Currently residing in the British Museum in London, the Victory Medallion of Justinian is one of the few tangible examples of the imperial image of Justinian. Discovered in Cappadocia in the eighteenth century it gradually made its way to Paris and the Louvre in the early nineteenth century. Tragically, the original holotype was destroyed in 1831, though by a double stroke of luck, a replica of the medallion survives and is thankfully still with us.<sup>188</sup> The dating of this piece is difficult, but the best dates point to C.E. 532 or 534. If the Column of Justinian was erected in C.E. 532, then the Victory Medallion of Justinian may have accompanied it as an easily transportable

commemoration of his success against the Persian in 530. Medallions of this kind were frequently distributed among the upper-class by the Emperor and though not terribly abundant, served as fine imperial propaganda.<sup>189</sup> C.E. 534 is another candidate for a Victory Medallion, celebrating the fall of Vandal Carthage and the reincorporation of North Africa and its rich grain lands into the Roman Empire. In thanks, Justinian allowed Belisarius a triumphal procession, similar in manner to those great parades of the old Roman *imperator* from the Republican days. Belisarius' triumph found its depicted expression on the entrance to the imperial palace, the *Chalke*, which is lost to us.<sup>190</sup> Because of this monument, historians have asked the question of whether or not it is Belisarius displayed on the medallion. No Emperor before or after allowed anyone of stature within the Empire to enjoy a triumph. All the while though, Belisarius never overstepped his bounds. He knew very well that the greater glory of victory belonged to the Emperor. In fact, reaching as far back as to the time of Augustus, the Emperors possessed a monopoly on the triumphal honor.<sup>191</sup> Thus we see Justinian walking with Victory on the reverse side of the medallion and not Belisarius.

The reverse of the medallion presents a well-crafted representation of the Emperor. His horse steps forward, three feet on the ground, one hoof raised, head hung forward with its tail hung low. Victory walks before the beast, glancing over her shoulder. The horse, as is often the case with the Emperors of the "East," is decorated with garters, an elaborate bridle, and necklaces. Justinian sits atop the beast with no stirrups and again appears to have neither of his hands on the reins of the horse. The one hand exposed to the viewer holds a spear, a clear sign of the cult of the victorious Augustus. The *schema* of Achilles is present, as well as the *chlamys*, which swells as

though caught by the wind.<sup>192</sup> In fact, many of the descriptions missing in the Budapest illustration but mentioned by Nicephorus Gregoras are present on the medallion.

However, there are noticeable differences from both the Budapest illustration and the descriptions of Procopius and Gregoras. The horse shows no interest in charging ahead. Justinian no longer raises his hand to the “East,” instead he bares a spear, unmentioned in any description of the column. His crown in the medallion is of great interest though. The peacock *diadem* of the Budapest illustration is not present. Instead, the aforementioned helmet *toupha* is portrayed in all of its extravagance. The image of the coin displays a narrow, likely jeweled, band that runs along the helmet’s base, exactly where a narrow *diadem* would rest. One great ruby sits in the middle of this band between the eyes. Atop this band is a pattern of semicircles with tiny spires protruding from them. The rest of the helmet is smooth, save for a low, “mohawk” like stripe that runs from the front of the helmet to the back of the head. This brings us to the most visually impressive, if not outrageously gaudy, aspect of the *toupha*.<sup>193</sup> From the back of the helmet rises a plume of peacock feathers, radiating out, quite differently from the feathered *diadem* of the Budapest illustration, again raising the possibility that the subject of that illustration is not Justinian.

The obverse side of the coin portrays essentially a close-up of Justinian’s face. His chest is covered by the *chlamys*, again flapping in the wind. The *toupha* is shown in greater clarity as Justinian gazes into the distance, holding his spear closer to his face than the on the reverse. His head is surrounded by the *nimbus* halo, the mark of the Sun god co-opted by Christianity, as a sign of those men deemed most holy before God.

Tracing the circumference of the medallion's rim are phrases and abbreviations in Latin. The obverse Latin reads: "DNIUSTINAINVSPPAVG". According to John Barker this garbled Latin stands for *Domini noster Justinianus perpetus Augustus* or "Our Lord Justinian, the eternal Emperor". Surrounding the rider on the reverse is "SALVSETGLORIAROMANORUM" which reads: "The Salvation and Glory of the Romans".<sup>194</sup> The bottom of the medallion reads "CONOB", making reference to the fact that the medallion was forged in Constantinople and made of gold.<sup>195</sup> It cannot be expected that Justinian, or any other Emperor for that matter, assumed such a costume on a daily basis. Common sense suggests that the Emperor wore the Achilles *schema* only on special occasions or in victorious monuments. After all, what is the purpose of victory medallion without proper victory attire? What then did Justinian wear during typical court appearances? Thankfully a possible answer lies still to this day in Italy, preserved in the former imperial capital of Ravenna.

#### The Mosaic of Justinian at the Basilica of *San Vitale*

Located in northwestern Italy, the city of Ravenna served as the imperial capital of the Western Roman Empire for its last seventy years of existence. The Emperor Honorius, that mentally challenged son of mighty Theodosius, fled the former western capital of Milan in the face of the Gothic entry into Italy, taking refuge in Ravenna. Situated on an estuary flowing into the Adriatic, swamps and bogs protected ancient Ravenna, making it the ideal location for a coward such as Honorius to hide, while the Goths marched through Italy. For the following sixty-six years the functional capital of the Western Empire remained in Ravenna, though for a time Honorius' nephew and heir

Valentinian III kept his personal residence at Rome.<sup>196</sup> When Roman dominion over Italy ended, Ravenna remained the capital of Italy, serving as the home of the usurper Odovacer.<sup>197</sup> In C.E. 493 Theodoric the Amal, king of the Ostrogoths, invaded Italy, defeated Odovacer, and *theoretically* restored Roman control to Italy, all at the behest of the Roman Emperor Zeno in far away Constantinople.<sup>198</sup> Theodoric himself never wore a crown while king of Italy, out of respect for the Roman Emperor.<sup>199</sup> As king of the Ostrogoths in Italy, Theodoric also resided in Ravenna, which benefited mightily from his rule. Many of his monuments, including his mausoleum, still stand today.

Theodoric's kingdom declined almost immediately after his death in C.E. 518. It did not take long for Justinian to find his way back into Italy, bit by bit regaining the ancestral heartland of the Roman Empire. By C.E. 540 Ravenna paid homage to the Emperor, regaining its pivotal position of imperial seat.<sup>200</sup> Though most of Italy fell to the Lombards directly following Justinian's death in C.E. 565, Rome and Ravenna remained within the Imperial borders, connected by a narrow corridor of land known as the Exarchate of Ravenna, destined to become the Papal States. The Exarchate functioned nearly independently of Constantinople, and the Exarch himself answered solely to the Emperor.<sup>201</sup> It is in Ravenna that, even to this day, the clearest color rendition of Justinian is found. Regally portrayed as the master of the world, the Emperor and his court procession are immortally portrayed in the Basilica of *San Vitale*.

The Church of *San Vitale* remains one of the greatest churches in Ravenna. Conveniently enough it is a *martyrarium*, named after the Christian martyr Vitalis of Milan to whom churches rose in Italy and Dalmatia.<sup>202</sup> Production on the church began in

the year C.E. 527 by the bishop of Ravenna, a man named Ecclesius, while the city was still firmly in Gothic possession. Within ten years of its foundation, Belisarius and his army captured Rome, and following the capture of Ravenna the church required a further eight years of construction before its completion.<sup>203</sup> By the time of the Roman reconquest *San Vitale* was in the hands of the bishop Victor, who proved more than willing to submit to the *Imperator Romanorum*.<sup>204</sup> This octagonal church is a wonder of Late Roman and Early Byzantine décor and artwork, but that is for another paper. Our interest within the basilica is rather specific.

During those final eight years of construction, a Gothic counter-attack nearly forced the Roman armies out of Italy. This disputed ownership of Italy found its ultimate expression on these panels in apse the church. All things considered, the mosaic representations of Justinian and Theodora inside the church of *San Vitale* may be our only true representation of the dress and appearance of the imperial couple outside of the realm of victory propaganda. The impressions are striking, even shocking to the classical imagination. Would the uninitiated viewer even recognize the image of Justinian as the *Imperator Romanorum*?

High on the apse wall, the mosaic panels of Justinian and his imperial consort Theodora gaze across the altar towards one other. For expediency's sake, we will only discuss the panel pertaining to the Emperor. Twelve figures stand before a backdrop of gold, trimmed in pearls and precious stones, gazing ahead in the frontal style. The ground beneath their feet seems marginal, as is often seen in Byzantine art. The feet are not flat, but angled, and appear to be floating in free space. Some of the finest artists from

Constantinople traveled to Ravenna to create this marvel, and the husband and wife duo of Irina and Warren Treadgold point out that two teams likely worked in concert to complete the mosaic. Glass takes the place of stone in the production of the exposed face and hands of the characters. Stone cubes were seldom used to produce facial mosaics.<sup>205</sup> Justinian dominates the center of the mosaic. Three soldiers stand directly to his left, along the edge of the mosaic. A second set of three soldiers stand behind them.

Together they bare spears, shields covered in the *Chi-Ro*, and wear multicolored garments. Yet, as varied as their dress is, the soldiers are the same in expression, hair style and face. They are soldiers, nothing more, with few distinguishing characteristics. Their proximity to the Emperor leads one to associate them with the *Scholae* or the *Excubitores*, the two most famous bodyguard units of the *Imperator Romanorum*, and for some two centuries the paramount body of the Emperor's *comitatus*. During the Middle Ages these units would become permanently attached to the Emperor, forming the highly mobile *Tagmata*, stationed in and around Constantinople, literally described as the army "in his presence".<sup>206</sup> These soldiers as presented are not Roman. Their blonde hair and fair skin suggest a Germanic origin. Their appearance alongside the Emperor, instead of the traditional Roman soldiery, allows for an intriguing bit of propaganda, properly cowed Germans serve the Roman Emperor, all other Germans should do the same.<sup>207</sup>

Moving passed the *Scholae* guards, eyes sweeping to the right, we encounter two men dressed as court officials. The man closest to the Emperor is bearded with a prominent mustache, the man further from the Emperor, clean shaven. Their hairstyles are nearly identical, as are their officials costumes, with only a few notable exceptions.

The two men are dressed in the long Greek cloak of antiquity, the *chlamys*. The cloaks are solid white, likely made of silk, except for a broad purple rectangle that dominates the center of the cloak. Their arms are either tucked behind their cloaks or hidden by the other figures in the mosaic. Situated at the right clavicle are large *fibulae* that binds the *chlamys* to their tunics. Positioned next to these broaches are small rectangular geometric patterns of purple and white.

These broaches differ in pattern and certainly represent badges of rank within the Emperor's *consistorium*. The rank and identification of the members of the imperial retinue followed the same pattern as the military, and as Glanville Downey points out, joining the Emperor's court became popularly known as "taking the belt", an allusion to the military practice copied by the civil service.<sup>208</sup> Finally their feet are bound in white and black slippers, positioned at an angle over the ground. Who are these men? Only one man on the mosaic is actually named, and it is not even the Emperor, but the archbishop of Ravenna, Maximian.<sup>209</sup> Speculation and the historical record can service us, but nothing is definitive. Otto von Simon calls them the *dux armis* and the *praefectus legibus*.<sup>210</sup> It is most likely that the bearded man is Belisarius and thus the *dux armis*, leader of the army. As the second man of the Empire for so long and the conqueror of Gothic Italy, it stands to reason that in this imperial mosaic he should stand not even a foot away from his master. Who else could it possibly be if not Belisarius? Procopius mentions in his work "On Buildings" that upon the reconquest of both Africa and Italy, Belisarius returned to Constantinople and participated in a great triumph in the year C.E. 540. Procopius tells of the procession led by Belisarius himself, followed by his war booty and captive barbarian kings. Once the victorious general reached the Imperial

couple and the Senate he dedicated his gains and his captives to his masters, both earthly and heavenly. After such a portrayal in Constantinople lionizing the general's ability, can there be any doubt that the bearded figure is Belisarius? Yet in C. E. 548, the year of the basilica's completion, we know Belisarius to be effectively under house arrest in Constantinople, suspected for the second time of coveting the throne for himself.<sup>211</sup> There is no evidence to support such a claim. However, as a paranoid, insecure man, Justinian took no chances, urged on by his wife, and forced the general out of the public eye. A cleverly staged imperial marriage between the imperial house and Belisarius' house did some good to restore Belisarius to the Emperor's favor. Theodora sought to keep them apart, and only after her death did the relationship between the general and emperor recover. As for the second official in the mosaic, it is difficult to say. Again, von Simson refers to the man as the *legal prefect*, but that does us little good in identification. It could be Narses the eunuch, Germanus the Emperor's cousin and trusted general, or a number of other valued court officials. The Treadgolts suggest a youth named Anastasius, the imperial grandson through one of Theodora's daughters before her marriage to the Emperor.<sup>212</sup> It is a compelling argument, as they note that in the mosaic of Theodora one of her attendants is the daughter of Belisarius and Antonia, a girl named Joannina. Not only would it be necessary to include such a union as a symbol of dynastic continuation and imperial succession, but Belisarius and Antonia would certainly benefit from such a boost, as both recently spent time in the imperial "dog house".<sup>213</sup> Therefore, both Belisarius and Antonia were depicted in the panels, each with the sovereign of their respective sex, their names restored.

Once passed the imperial officials we come to gaze upon the central image of the mosaic, the Emperor himself. He floats above uncertain ground, bearing the golden harvest basket of the Eucharist. The basket is the only object about his person that one might appear remotely “common”. Truly his image is closer to that of the Persian King than that of the ancient *Imperator*. A long sleeved tunic clings to his body. Overtop of his tunic he is covered in the solid purple *chlamys*, purple being of course, since ancient times, the jewel of the Phoenicians and the emblem of the rulers in the Mediterranean. By the time of Justinian the use of the color purple was restricted to the use of the Emperor alone, and following the arrival of silk worm eggs from Nestorian Christian monks hailing from China, the *chlamys* was no longer spun in wool, but in silk.<sup>214</sup> The *chlamys* and undergarments are held together by a jewel laden broche made in the image of a flower, with pearls dangling from golden *pendilic* cords.<sup>215</sup> The *chlamys* of Justinian’s successor Justin II carried on it the symbols of his uncle’s victory, jewels taken from the Gothic Kings.<sup>216</sup>

Beneath his cloak Justinian displays perhaps the most odious form of autocratic pomp at his disposal, jeweled slippers. The tradition, as most Byzantine attire goes, is decidedly un-Roman. Jeweled or otherwise dyed shoes adorned the Eastern magnates and potentates of antiquity, and with the coming of Diocletian these slippers became a habit of the Roman Emperors too.<sup>217</sup> The shoes were made of “Parthian” leather. Sabine MacCormack states that the custom of placing the imperial boot upon a conquered leader was another reason for glorious presentation. If the “blood of kings” should stain the foot of Christ’s vice-regent, that foot should reflect the splendor of Christ.<sup>218</sup>

Finally, we come to the face and head of Justinian. Following the “Crisis of the Third Century”, the more honest representation of the Roman Emperor as an individual gave way to the representation of the Roman Emperor as an archetype: less an authentic image of the Emperor, and more of a mold to be filled bearing only the slightest trace of the man himself. Justinian’s portrait blends the two styles. In primary material Justinian is described as unexceptional in both stature and height, dark headed, and smoothed faced always bearing “a faint smile”.<sup>219</sup> Hailing from Illyrian stock, this description should seem typical of that hardy frontier stock. The man who looks forward from the mosaic mixes the details given to us by Procopius. The slight smile is present and his hair seems slightly tussled beneath an enormous crown.

The most commanding elements of the Justinian portrait are his eyes. Much as his Christian predecessors Constantine and Theodosius, the fixed stare of the Emperor promises a glimpse into the viewer’s soul, and perhaps the world beyond. In the commissioning of the work Justinian clearly displayed little interest in the superficial nature of classical art, favoring the frontal style to show that he holds not only temporal authority over his realm and the viewers of his image, but through Christ watches over their very souls. As his Italian victories appeared to be crashing down around him, what better way to reinforce his worldwide authority than with such propaganda?

Justinian’s crown is unlike any other portrayed in Byzantine art. Observing the numismatic evidence from other Roman Emperors of Late Antiquity, the imperial diadem of Justinian is completely different. The *diadems* worn by the Emperors Aurelian, Probus, and Diocletian in the third century were heavy set rings of metal which sat on the

brow of the ruler as a support for long metallic blades fastened to the ring crown.<sup>220</sup>

Imagine the Statue of Liberty. The proper term for the crown is the *radiate*, first seen on the coinage of Nero. Aurelian favored the ever-present lord of the sun, *Sol Invictus*, whose radiate crown resembled the rays of the sun. Many Emperors following Aurelian, even Constantine donned this crown as a symbol of piety to the Sun and its universal authority.

Another *diadem* worn by Constantine, Constantine's successors, and the Theodosian line is the bejeweled equivalent of the old Hellenic *diadem*, a simple ribbon tied around the ruler's brow in the guise of a crown.<sup>221</sup> Often time it was made out of pearls. Justinian wears neither in the mosaic. His crown does not touch his brow and sits squarely on top of his head. At first glance this might appear to be the first appearance of what will evolve into the more typical Byzantine imperial "skull cap". Justinian's crown is separated into three levels. The lowest level, the brim of the crown, is studded with pearls. The middle and highest levels of the crown are full of red, green, and white jewels. Curiously though, on each side of the crown, two sets of *pendilia*, pearls attached to cords connected to the crown dangle just above the Emperor's shoulders.<sup>222</sup>

The Treadgolds demonstrate that around the year C.E. 1100 renovations of the church's interior led to a reduction in the size of Justinian's crown as well as the hair styles of the clergy members by his side.<sup>223</sup> If this is true then it might explain why the crown sits so strangely on his head. The original crown may have been the peacock feathered *toupha* helmet of his Victory Medallion. Finally, Justinian's face and head are

surrounded by the solar halo called the *nimbus*. Long the image of association with the Sun god, the church associated it with the *Christos* and Christianity found itself another pagan symbol to incorporate into its own iconography.<sup>224</sup> The *nimbus* adorned the most pious until the very end of the Empire.

Proceeding across the panel, now on the Emperor's left, we meet his retinue of holy men. Directly to the Emperor's left stands, or more appropriately "floats", a man in a white cloak, on whom the only decoration is the same *fibula* broach worn by Justinian's officials, suggesting that he is also an official, though grouped in with the holy men. His shaggy hair and scraggly appearance betrays the Byzantine stereotype and hints at a certain naturalism of how the man actually appeared. His lack of feet, and the fact that he seems shoved into the scene, strongly suggests that he was added later in a second phase of addition to the mosaic. To strengthen the argument, his face is not composed of the glass used for the skin tone of the other figures but by stone. Who is this man? The Treadgolts identify him as John, the nephew of Vitilian, an important resident of Ravenna during the mosaic's construction and a valued member of Justinian's court. After all, not just anyone could stand next to the Emperor in an official portrait.<sup>225</sup>

Beside John, we come to the only figure on the mosaic who is actually named. He is Maximianus, better known as Maximian, the first archbishop of Ravenna and the man who consecrated *San Vitale*. Justinian appointed Maximian for this task from the imperial capital itself, but to the Italians he surely appeared as an outsider.<sup>226</sup> He is dressed in a white robe, trimmed in black, and further covered by a golden cloak and white scarf. One hand is hidden beneath his clothing, while his right hand holds a golden

cross encrusted in jewels. His “Byzantine” feet barely protrude from beneath his robe. His head is curious though. It seems too small for his body and is far narrower than the heads of the other figures. The tile used to produce the skin of his face is different from that of his hand. The Treadgolds point out that, like the image of John, Maximian’s face is also composed of stone instead of glass. What does this mean? Why is the head different from the body?

As completion of the church neared, the bishop Victor died, in C.E. 545. When Maximian was then elevated to the position of archbishop it seemed only fitting to cement his power in the Italian capital by removing the face of Victor from the panel and replacing it with his own. To further drive home the point, he inserted his own name over the head of his mosaic, hence the narrowness of his head; there had to be room for the name!<sup>227</sup> Given the quality of the work and its proximity to John, the Treadgolds stress that the images of both Maximian and John were composed at the same time. The original featured only eleven figures, not twelve, with the image of John totally absent, and Victor in the place of Maximian.<sup>228</sup> As odious as it might be to remove the portrait of a dead bishop from the wall of his own church, politics are politics and to be a bishop in the early centuries of Christianity was as much about shoring up your political position as tending to one’s flock.

The final two figures of the mosaic are the deacons. They possess very few differences in detail, save that one is slightly heavier than the other. They are both tonsured and sport white robes, again trimmed in black. Their feet and shoes are the same as everyone in the panel except for Justinian. The deacon beside Maximian holds a

bejeweled copy of the Gospel, the other, ceremonial incense. There is nothing truly unique about these last two figures and the Imperial mosaic ends with them in a rather anticlimactic manner.

Many theories abound about the meaning and dating of the Justinian mosaic. Is Justinian Christ and his associates the Apostles, as Henry Maguire suggests? Does Maximian's proximity to the Emperor (the archbishop steps forward and is closer to the Emperor than anyone else) mean that the mosaic is really an allegory for the power of the church?<sup>229</sup> Surely the meaning behind the mosaic is of imperial prestige and power in newly conquered territory, lending legitimacy to the Emperor's claim to dominion over Italy. The original mosaic probably took its final shape then during the year C.E. 545-546, as the bishop Victor died in C.E. 545. Maximian, quick to shore up his power after being briefly exiled from the city because of the Three Chapter controversy, replaced Victor's face with his own by its year of consecration, C.E. 548.<sup>230</sup> As the Emperor never traveled to Italy, it is doubtful that the mosaics were engineered to please him, since he never saw them. Surely, then, the panels were meant to cow the population of the imperial city and the whole of Italy. The commanding gaze of the Emperor standing before his retinue of high clergy, soldiers, the conqueror of Gothic Italy and his grandson, the perpetuator of the imperial house, must have been a tall order for any sixth century viewer. The power of Empire and Christ joined together in the body of the Emperor. Furthermore, understanding the cult of the Emperor, the presence of Justinian's image in Ravenna meant that the Emperor was literally in Ravenna. With his retinue at his disposal how could anyone resist the coming of the *Imperator Romanorum* in his divinely anointed quest to retake the heart of the Roman Empire?

Outside of the Basilica of *San Vitale* there is one other mosaic representation of Justinian in Italy. It lies within the Basilica of *San Apollinare Nuovo*. Unlike *San Vitale* though, the Basilica of *San Apollinare Nuovo* was originally founded as an Arian church by Theodoric the Great, further serving as his palace personal chapel.<sup>231</sup> Following the Roman reconquest Justinian seized the church and rededicated it as an Orthodox building. The interiors of the church remain amazing, even to this day. The long procession of mosaic figures atop the nave of the church steals the show from a curious sight above the entrance. Situated above the entrance of the church, on a wall of golden tile, is a little known image of Justinian. It is bizarre indeed. Originally accompanied by the archbishop Agnellus, the image resembles the American President George Washington more so than it does the Justinian of *San Vitale*. . Time has been hard on the mosaic bust, and currently only the image of Justinian remains.<sup>232</sup>

The crown is similar to *San Vitale* but with a high dome in the center and the familiar sets of *pendilia* hanging from the crown. Pearls and rubies stud the crown in the same fashion as *San Vitale*. White hair peaks out from beneath the crown. The *nimbus* that surrounds the figures head is heavier and full of small white spheres. The faint smile is present, but all similarities with *San Vitale* end there. The face is much heavier and chubbier than *San Vitale*, the eyes wider. The neck has a double chin and the figure has heavy-set jaws. The purple *chlamys* covers most of the body. The jeweled brooch of the *San Vitale* mosaic returns, as do the three fingers of pearls that hang from it. It is reasonable to believe that the *chlamys* covers the body so much because what is exposed of the body is *not* Roman. The *chlamys* covers up a tan suit instead of the Emperor's

white *dalmatic*. From behind the congregation the figure observed the audience. Above the figure one word is inscribed: "IUSTINIAN".<sup>233</sup> Is it really?

We know that figures were added to the *San Vitale* mosaic at a later date and faces changed to resemble more recent figures. It is possible that this is a representation of Justinian later in life, but the tradition in Late Antiquity of portraying the Emperor as an ideal version of himself must surely have carried over into these mosaics. Would it have done any good in imperial propaganda to show the Emperor has a chubby, older man? The more likely answer is that this image belonged to Theodoric long before the Romans retook the church. This argument is sound, given the revisionist nature of the artists in Ravenna, and the speed with which the imperial clergy came around to Justinian's cause when Belisarius captured Ravenna. Naturally, no image of a foreign ruler could remain anywhere within the Empire with an egomaniac like Justinian on the throne. Therefore, to add insult to injury, the image of Theodoric, I believe, changed into the image of Justinian. Physically, the Goths were rooted out of Italy, but symbolically, the revised image forces Theodoric and the Goths out of public memory. The concept of removing the image of a barbarian king is understood, but to actively remove him from history by absorbing him into the person and image of the Emperor is truly impressive. We know that in other areas of the church imagery of Theodoric was completely removed or painted over.<sup>234</sup> Our earlier discussion of Justinian possibly removing a statue of Theodosius might attempt to return here, but it has no footing. Disgracing the image of a famous Roman Emperor in the city of Emperors is not the same as the assimilation of a Gothic King into Imperial Art. The Goths possessed little dignity. They were usurpers,

and needed to be erased from history for the sake of the Empire. The Romans remained though, and after fourteen years of war, the Italian Goths told no more tales.

### The Barberini Ivory

At the Louvre today resides one of the greatest ivory works of Late Antiquity. Commonly known as the “Barberini Ivory” this ivory masterwork portrays the Emperor again as type. He is the antiquated hero of old Rome, not portrayed as Achilles, but as the classical Roman *Imperator* in full Imperial presentation. This beautiful ivory work comes down to us from seventh century “France” where it resided in the Frankish realm of Austrasia, which dominated interior Gaul. The back of the ivory actually lists the names of the Frankish rulers of that land. The Barberini ivory vanished from history until C.E. 1625, when Cardinal Francesco Barberini, while in Provence, received the ivory as a gift from the learned Nicolas Claude Fabri de Peirsec. In 1899, the ivory returned to France, obtained by the government, taking up its current residence in the Louvre.<sup>235</sup>

From the details of the ivory figures and the workmanship we can be certain that it came from the workshops of Constantinople. There are a total of five panels in the work. Judging by the visible hinge along the edge of the ivory, it may have been further joined with a similar work<sup>236</sup>. If this is the case it might identify this ivory as one half of an imperial diptych, but it has also been argued that it served as an elaborate book cover. Whatever it might have been, the companion work is now lost and its place can only be taken by speculation. The central panel rises off of the ivory considerably, while the four smaller panels that orbit it remain flat. It is undoubtedly the central work that captures the

eye. It is heavy in old pagan themes and imagery, displaying that the old imperial ideology still possessed great strength in the sixth century. The Emperor rides on his medallion covered horse. His dress is not the *schema* of Achilles, but the military uniform of ancient Rome. The *cuirass*, the cloak and *fibula* right down to the sleeves all fit the bill of the Emperor of the second century, Rome at its undisputed height. His crown and hairstyle stand out, though, as belonging to a later century than Trajan. The Emperor looks longingly and distantly as he plunges his spear into the ground beneath him, his horse bucking as he does so. Behind the spear a Persian man, denoted by his hat and use of pants, raises one hand in surrender, and grasps the Emperor's spear, begging for clemency. To the Emperor's left the goddess Victory hovers, palm branch in one hand, her other arm no longer present. Perhaps it clutched another palm branch, or perhaps a civic crown with which to don the Emperor, as is the case in other ivories. Beneath the rearing horse a woman sits, full breasted, bearing fruit in her robe. She touches the Emperor's sandaled foot and glances at him longingly. She must be Gaia, goddess of the Earth, associating her fertility and plenty with the program of Justinian's renewal.

To the Emperor's right stands a man, similarly cloaked in military dress, but with a long scabbard on his side. His hair style is the same as the Emperor's. One foot raised, a smile crosses his stubbled face as he presents the Emperor with a statue of Victory bearing a civic crown. The man passes two columns and a small sack at his feet on his way to present the Emperor. Who is this man? Could he be the Consul of Constantinople? The fact that a sack or small bag is present in the frame suggests that he is the consul, for in other sixth century consular diptychs, the consul clutches a sack in one hand and the *scipio*, the eagle-topped staff, in the other.<sup>237</sup> Unfortunately the panel to the Emperor's left

is lost to us, and only speculation can make up for what was once there. The panel above the Emperor's head contains the only undisputed Christian imagery on the ivory. Two angelic women (are they angels or is it again Victory?) fly towards each other. Their robes flow in the wind. Together they hold an image of the *Christos*, clean shaven with hair like the Emperor and his assistant. One hand presents the viewer with a sign of peace, the other clutches a staff topped by a cross.

Finally, we come to the lower panel. Victory stands at the center glancing up to the Emperor. Behind her a procession of Asians, heavily bearded in typical Persian dress, and animals advance humbly, the men bearing gifts, one a crown, the other a sack of gold. Before her, two shirtless men advance. They are clean shaven and carry ivory in one hand, holding their other hand in submission. A single elephant and tiger walk with them in submission, as well. Since the time of Diocletian the idea of nature, as well as man, submitting before the will of a God-Emperor persisted as popular propaganda, and by the sixth century it remained a very powerful notion.<sup>238</sup>

Who is the Emperor in this work? Scholars primarily argue in favor of Anastasius or Justinian. The style of the work definitely dates it to the sixth century. Its stylistic similarities to the ecclesiastical throne of Maximian in Ravenna and other middle sixth century works are striking. It is also worth noting that the image of the *Christos* begins to appear on imperial imagery at this time also. Previously, official consular diptychs illustrated Christianity by use of the cross or of angels, but never by way of an actual image of Christ. As stated before, the imperial image rises off the panel almost as if it is a statue in the round. The rest of the panel, though, is flat. This is an indicator of

middle sixth century style. The evidence for Anastasius does exist, but is not as extensive. Anastasius did in fact win a peace with Persia in 506 C.E.<sup>239</sup>, and a beautiful ivory of his wife, the Empress Adriane, is known from this period, which might have been attached to the Barberini ivory.<sup>240</sup> The consular diptychs from his earlier years differ slightly from the Barberini ivory but mainly in military dress. The hair is similar and the face is similar, only expounded due to the three dimensional surface of the ivory. However, this evidence cannot make a case solely for Anastasius. This is the Emperor-as-type. It is fortunate for historians that certain characteristics of this work have been isolated as middle sixth century, otherwise it would be impossible to date this ivory based on visual evidence alone.

We are given little to work with other than that it is a pre-iconoclast, late Roman ivory work still rich in pagan imagery. This Emperor is made in the image of Trajan or Constantine, to associate himself with those great Emperors. Outside of his Persian victories and monetary reform, Anastasius did little to warrant comparison with those larger-than-life Emperors. Justinian, on the other hand, restored much of the old Empire, defeated barbarians in distant lands, and restored the name and image of the Roman Emperor as a world ruler. To be crowned by Victoria, to lay low the Persians, and to be praised by a multitude of nations was certainly the desire of all Roman Emperors. Justinian not only accomplished these lofty goals, but set the mark higher for all future Emperors, earning the right to be represented as Constantine, an honor sadly that Zeno, Anastasius, and Justin failed to achieve. Justinian earned his place on the Barberini ivory as conqueror. As for an exact date of the ivory's dedication, there are only two realistic times. The barbarian peoples portrayed on the ivory are all Asian; no western barbarians

are portrayed, thus narrowing our possibilities to before C.E. 533 most likely C.E. 532, following the victory at Dara in C.E. 530 and the Eternal Peace of C.E. 532. Two such accomplishments within three years surely spoke of God's approval and required eternal commemoration. It is my belief that the Column of Justinian and the Barberini ivory were both presented in the same year, probably 532 C.E.

Finally, there is a reference in the Planudean Anthology, a collection of Greek witticisms, of a great bronze statue of Justinian situated in the Hippodrome. It is situated away from bronzes of famous charioteers. Mounted and victorious, it served as a daily reminder of all of his great victories and bore the inscription: "Thy might, Justinian, is set on high. May the champions of Persia and Scythia be prostrate for ever on the ground." Supposedly the loot taken from the victories served as the raw material for this statue.<sup>241</sup> Keeping in mind an engraving from the Christian and Byzantine Museum in Athens, which is the exact image of Justinian from Barberini ivory, only in bronze, we must ask ourselves this question: Was the image of the Emperor from the Barberini ivory part of a wider program of propaganda? If so, it is unfortunate that so much of it is lost.

### Coinage

The three metal currency system of the old Roman Empire died during the economic crisis of the third century. Diocletian ushered in a new system, further augmented by Constantine, which attempted to reproduce the old Empire's three metal system, introducing the gold *solidus*, the silver *siliqua*, and a variety of bronze and silver washed bronze coins. This system largely collapsed during the madness of the fifth

century and the loss of Western Europe. In C.E. 491 Anastasius, an Emperor of great temperance, ascended to the throne in Constantinople and made great strides to improve the sagging state of imperial currency. Anastasius preserved the *solidus* and alongside it introduced lesser gold equivalents such as the *semissis* and the *tremissis* as well as the bronze *follis*, which possessed a sliding scale of value directly proportional to how many *nummia* (units of value) it possessed.<sup>242</sup> The value of each coin found its expression on the reverse of each *follis*. A Greek *Kappa* represented a value of 20 *nummia*, an *Iota* valued 10 *nummia*, and an *Eta* valued 5. The worth of the *follis* became tied to the *solidus* in an attempt to stabilize the value of the coin.<sup>243</sup> The Vandals and Goths used silver as their dominant currency in their own lands, but by the seventh century C.E. the Empire was struck by a silver shortage. By C.E. 498 the standard imperial system incorporated the three gold coins along with the four copper *follis* system, lasting well until the eighth century before requiring another overhaul. Anastasius' financial reforms worked splendidly. The eras of Anastasius, Justin, and Justinian experienced financial prosperity not known in the empire for sometime.<sup>244</sup> The reformed tax system filled the imperial treasury. Without Anastasius' financial reforms, the western wars and "Eternal Peace" with Persia could not have been possible.

During the age of Anastasius the Empire contained only four mints, the capital, Nicomedia, Cyzicus, and Thessalonica. Following Justinian's assumption to the purple and program of *renovatio*, Carthage, Alexandria, Rome, and Ravenna joined the fold, as did certain other eastern cities<sup>245</sup> Silver remained a rarity, and the only feature common to all mints was their general *follis* production. Each copper coin, aside from its

identification letter, bore a short abbreviation of its mint location. Constantinople reserved the sole right to mint gold.<sup>246</sup>

The inherent artistic value of Byzantine coinage is a source of trouble for the student of Classical art and a strange companion to Byzantine art as a whole. If the Romano-Hellenic tradition of mosaic production spilled directly into the Byzantine mosaic art, the same can not be said of Byzantine coinage. The comparison of character designs and representations of Hellenistic coinage to Byzantine coinage is equivalent to comparing High Renaissance painting to grade school scribble. Though the coinage of the Late Roman/ Early Byzantine period is often some of the best archeological evidence we have for dating, when it comes to the identification of Emperors in the aesthetic sense they are often useless.

Coin images of the Emperors changed again and again over the centuries. For the three hundred years following Constantine, the Emperor continued to be portrayed as the conquering *imperator* of old, bearing at least *some* resemblance to the actual man. During the Age of Anastasius, Justin, and Justinian the skill of imperial portraits on money declined, replaced by the Emperor-as-type; personal portraits returned during the reign of the monstrous Emperor Phocas in C.E. 602. Following the Iconoclasm, coin portraits stopped and started with varying degrees of accuracy until the end of the Empire.<sup>247</sup>

The Late Roman world continued to use propaganda on these coins as the centuries before, only in a slightly different manner. As the Christianization of the Empire picked up pace, Christian symbolism took hold on the obverse and reverse coin

faces.<sup>248</sup> During the age of Justinian, Christian imagery on coins took the form of the cross or the *labrum* but also borrowed heavily from the past. Victoria, goddess of Victory, appears frequently on “Early Byzantine” coinage, just as she had for hundreds of years before. The personification of Constantinople also appears on the coinage, but to a lesser extent.<sup>249</sup> Justinian continued the schizophrenic Late Roman method of incorporating both Christian and Pagan imagery, sometimes in the same picture. The cherished medievalist view of a wholly Christian Roman Empire in the sixth century must be a splendid fiction to those who actually believe it.

There are three primary coin portraits of Justinian. They appear on both the *solidus* and *folles*, but sometimes one or the other. The first coin we will speak of is a *solidus* in the vein of Justinian’s victory medallion in the “three-quarters” pose. The obverse is strikingly familiar to the Victory Medallion portrait. The point of view and the look on the face, the presence of the feathered *toupha*, the spear resting on one shoulder, blade passing behind the head are all the same, as is the inscription:

“DNIUSTINAINVSPPAVG”. It bears an uncanny resemblance not only to an earlier *solidus* of Anastasius but a number of fifth century Emperors including Marcian, Basiliscus, and Romulus Augustulus, all in the same pose.<sup>250</sup> It is possible that this portrait of Justinian was issued on the *solidus* at the time as his Victory Medallion. Justinian is shown confident, triumphant, the victorious Augustus in his celebratory regalia. The reverse displays a winged figure, Victory, and the inscription reads “VICTORI AAUGCCA ROMA” or “Victory to Augustus and Rome”. Victory holds in one hand a cross that is also a staff; in the other hand the *globus cruciger*, symbolizing Roman and Christian victory over the entire world.<sup>251</sup> The interesting fact remains that

even in the light of Christian advancement, the old imperial iconography shows no signs of relaxing.

The second coin type bearing the image of Justinian in a much older style. This portrait shares little of the previous detail. The inscription around the Emperor's head again reads "DNIUSTINAINVSPPAVG". The obverse displays Justinian in classicizing display, the profile, long the chosen coin representation of Emperors and Kings of the Mediterranean. There are few obvious details that rise off of the coin and the degeneration in style is sorely evident. Of those few obvious details available we can discern a robe with a *fibula*, a face and hairline, and a jewel studded *diadem* similar to those displayed by earlier Emperors, particularly Constantine.<sup>252</sup> In fact he even resembles the numismatic image of Constantine. Given Justinian's observed habit of classicizing and associating himself with the greatness of the Roman past, this is certainly deliberate.

The third and final image is also the most numerous, appearing on both the *solidus* and the *follis*. It is also the least artistic but may lend an answer to a previous question. Unlike the previous images of the Emperor, which were either in profile or viewed at "three-quarters profile", this final image is seen head on. One glance and it is obvious that the beauty of ancient coinage has "left the building". The facial features are flat and the eyes are huge. There is no neck to connect the face with the robbed upper body which is delineated by a series of dots. A mitten shaped hand holds a cross. The inscription "DNIUSTINAINVSPPAVG" surrounds the imperial helmet. The reverse of the coin depicts Victoria frontally as in the first coin we observed.<sup>253</sup> It is the helmet that

draws the most attention. The coins that present the Emperor in this fashion depicts his crown in the shape of the *toupha*, yet the *pendilia* pearls from his Ravenna mosaic are also present. Could this be a clue to how Justinian's diadem originally looked in the Ravenna mosaic before its twelfth century revision? I believe so. It stands to reason that the imperial *toupha*, present in the Victory Medallion, was also present in his immortal Ravenna image, but for whatever reason was later removed.

## CHAPTER 4

### THEMES IN THE CORRUPTION OF THE PRINCIPATE

#### 1) The Conception and Temperament of the Emperors, and the State of the World:

One primary reason the image of the Emperor changed so greatly from Augustus to Justinian lay in the mentality and temperament of the Emperors, how they saw themselves in the greater scheme of things, and the world in which each lived. Over the first two centuries of the Roman Empire, the Emperors comprised of a cast of individuals largely familiar with the traditions of Italy and the Roman Republic, who were willing to style their increasingly absolute power in that Republican mold. The Emperor served as a general, an executive administrator, the head of the Senate, and the highest judge in the land. By partnership with the Senate, the Emperor directly administrated the frontier provinces, and Egypt was his sole possession. Temperate men like Augustus, Vespasian, Titus, and the Successor Emperors overcame the Caligulas and Neros of the world. Also, these early Emperors ruled at a time of relative quite in European history, with no major migrations to speak of, and therefore administered lightly. The Germans were too scattered to pose a real threat, and Trajan overcame the only other European threat, the Dacians. The often beleaguered Parthians only on rare occasions left their own domain, and were more often viewed as an imperial treasure chest than a serious frontier threat.

The cult of the Emperor continued to develop, but the artistic representation of the Emperors remained modest in Italy and the West, neglecting the Emperor's true power; a practice more readily displayed in the eastern provinces. Modesty and tradition forbade such a practice in Italy. Even Augustus noted that modesty and tradition were the means to employ

new administrative programs; all one need do is dress something new in the clothing of something old. Those who broke with tradition too rapidly found themselves dead, i.e. Caligula and his attempted Hellenistic Monarchy, as well as the premature *dominate* of Domitian. Trajan served as the first non-Italian Emperor, but he sprang from Italian stock in a Spanish Roman colony of Italica. He grew up the hard Roman way and understood the political dance of the city and its traditions. Commodus, on the other hand, like Nero before him, took to luxury in a way that would have shocked his father. Palace living ruined him as surely as it would many Ottoman princes centuries later. His repeat impersonation of Hercules stunned the Senate and laid the groundwork for future, direct God association. His massacre of the Senate also established a new precedent. Septimius Severus, of Phoenician origin, began the gradual break from Italian tradition, persecuting the Senate like never before, making the army more loyal to the Emperor, and adopting certain Eastern practices. The quality and temperament of the Severans different greatly from those who had come before them. Septimius was an efficient ruler, but he never shed his military dominance, even as chief executor of the state. If Augustus initiated the *principate*, then Severus established the era of the *imperator*, where the military nakedly ruled the Empire. The rapid imperial turnover of the third century, cast in the Severan model of *imperator*, allowed for cleavage within the Empire, dividing it in thirds. Too often these generals possessed more ambition than ability. Aurelian reunited the Empire, but at the final death blow of the *princeps*. An Illyrian, not an Italian, he fancied himself a divine avatar destined to reunite the Empire. Surely his power came from the greatest source, not necessarily the gods of old, but the One God, Sol Invictus.<sup>254</sup> From Aurelian until C.E. 1453 the Emperors believed themselves not merely favored by the Gods but walked with them as well. With Aurelian we enter the era of the Helleno-Roman god-king, cast considerably in the image of the Hellenistic princes of old, who were also divinities that walked with their patron God. The

Imperial cult reflected this change. The Imperial presentation changed from an executive with his chief administrators, to a general assisted by his staff, to a god-king surrounded by his sprawling court. Carey and Scullard postulate that the *principate* was destined to follow this progression, but the “Third Century Crisis” sharply accelerated the process.<sup>255</sup> To overcome the difficulties of invasion, disease, civil war, and economic collapse, the Emperor must appear as more than a man. He must stand out distinctly from others in society, his presence shrouded in mystery. No longer a public figure of the Old Italian model, the Augustan maxims of *primus inter pares* vanished before Diocletian’s *deus et dominus*. The artistic representation of the Emperors, which had grown steadily towards Hellenistic era abstraction during the middle third century, gave way before Diocletian’s Tetrarchy and the Emperor as type, interchangeable and idealized. As another Illyrian Emperor, Diocletian and his staff of co-emperor cared little for the Republican concept of shared responsibility within the state. As an internal administrator in the military, Diocles possessed a highly ordered and organized mind, which ended up being his greatest gift to the Empire. Was the Emperor to be stepped in Italian tradition and Republican fiction, or was his job to organize and deliver the state? The Tetrarchs obviously chose the latter, and as the centuries progressed, the chasm widened between the old Italo-centric Empire and the new imperial bureaucratic state administered by a distant God-Emperor. The old bureaucratic organization had failed, and Diocletian replaced it with a more efficient a more effective and greatly expanded court bureaucracy. Further, Diocletian’s programs and formula for succession stressed the office of Emperor over the individual. The individual was divinely chosen to fulfill this role.

The domination of Christianity did little to change the shape and image of the Emperor, nor the administration of the Empire. Constantine carried over all of Diocletian pomp, and by adding to it a certain kind of otherworldliness, transformed the primary object

of imperial veneration from the statue to the religious icon. The court parade functioned as a kind of living panegyric.<sup>256</sup> As Constantine's image beams his authority, he gazes to the heavens and another world and ultimately to the source of his power. With this final movement we can see how the position of the Emperor changed from the republican constitutional monarch to the divine autocrat. It is thanks to the times and temperaments of Augustus, Diocletian, and Constantine that the representation of the Emperor appeared as it did during the age of Justinian.

Key Points: The earliest Emperors were mostly Italians, or of an Old Italian mindsets. Later Emperors were military men from the provinces, unfamiliar with the niceties of Roman politics. They wanted results in the quickest, most effective manner.

2) Hellenization and the Importance of the Eastern Fronts: Since the time of Augustus, the Danube frontier of Eastern Europe was one of the most difficult frontiers to garrison. Stretching from the Alps to the Black Sea, it proved nearly impossible to defend. Still, though, this frontier held for hundreds of years, collapsing from time to time, but always stabilizing. However, even by demanding an overwhelming amount of imperial soldiery, it couldn't keep everyone out. Many of the Empire's greatest problems stemmed from the weak Danubian front of the fourth and fifth centuries, the Goths repeatedly, as well as the Huns. The Balkan Peninsula was one of the major hot-spots of the third century invasions. Each occasion resulted in massive destruction within the Balkans and European Hellas, threatening the desert provinces as well. During the Tetrarchy, Diocletian openly favored the richer, more civilized Eastern provinces, and left the rugged Balkan to his fiery Caesar, Galerius. Centered at Sirmium, Galerius possessed the unenviable task of defending

the Danube, holding his own against the Iranian Sarmatians and other Germanic peoples. Justinian built six hundred new fortifications in the upper and middle Balkans to hopefully solve the problem. Having been born and raised in Illyricum, he well understood the importance of the Danube front to the Eastern Roman Empire.<sup>257</sup> Thus, it is clear that as the centuries progressed, the Roman establishment understood that the Balkans were the land route of invasion to the Hellenistic East as well as a threat to the Eastern Roman Empire's chief supply of soldiers in Europe. When Constantine moved the capital of the Empire to the Balkans, this decision displayed the strategical importance of the region. The richest most productive provinces *must* take first priority. A strong position on the Danube provided greater security to the capital's rear, thus making the great tasking of fending off the Persians from the eastern front that much easier.

What does this have to do with the image of the Roman Emperor? The Balkans and Hellas are not Italy, and therefore never held the ruler to the ancient pretexts of the Roman Republic. Long before Rome entered the region, larger than life kings ruled over great swaths of the Balkans, ranging from Alexander the Great and Philip II to Pyrrhus and Lysimachus. As a functioning cog of the Hellenistic world, the Balkans were exposed to the same kind of god-like hero worship involved in making a Hellenistic autocracy, and even under the Roman Republic and early Empire that perception of the ruler did not diminish. Augustus was worshiped as *Sebastos* and *Basileus*, never as *princeps*. From the East, the Emperors were worshiped as gods. The direct successors of Alexander may have fallen into history; the Roman Emperors remained divine to the eastern Hellenes. A ruler of such magnitude should not have to disguise his power. The Greek speaking peoples of the Balkans did not understand the *principate* and the need for modesty. Without the need of Rome as an imperial capital, Emperors such as Diocletian and Constantine, foreign as they

were to the Italian senatorial class and their ancient customs and rites, ruled the Empire from the Hellenistic Eastern provinces without a shred of imperial modesty. What was the point of hiding ultimate power from a population that was used to its presence? The Hellenistic monarch was absolute head of state. Centered then at Constantinople, the Emperors soaked in the Hellenization of the position. The armies and people of the land flocked to his divine standard. The absolute authority and divinity of the ruler was well known and the cult of the autocrat well displayed since the days of Alexander.

Key Points: The Hellenistic tradition of kingship, the importance of the Eastern Front, the location of the greatest cities, and trade of the Empire located in the East.

3) Non-Italian Influences: Persian, Christian, and German: Aside from individual temperament and overwhelming Hellenistic cultural practices, other outside forces wore down the image of the aristocratic Italian *princeps*. The most obvious would be Persian and Far Eastern influences. The ancient court practices and ceremonies of the Iranian ruling class might have appeared obnoxious to the Greek allies at Byzantium in 478 B.C.E., citing similar behavioral patterns in the Spartan regent Pausanias, but by the fourth century C.E. such practices were well established in the Roman administrative machine. Rung after rung of court officials interrupted access to the Emperor in the manner of the Persian court. Diocletian also imported Persian eunuchs to watch over his personal chambers.<sup>258</sup> Michael Grant mentions that during the period of Constantine, the only difference between the Roman and Persian courts was that the Roman Emperor did not wear “necklaces, ribbons or earrings”. Christian writers lauded Constantine’s

autocratic splendor.<sup>259</sup> Constantine began the non-Roman practice of wearing a *diadem* on a permanent basis.<sup>260</sup> Previously the crown, be it of laurels or jewels, was reserved for victorious moments. Caesar chose to wear one on a permanent basis, but this sign of kingly pomp resulted in his death. Constantine faced no such threat. The permanence of his crown reflected the autocratic dignity of his position. This is a reoccurring theme in classical history; rulers and men of importance, once exposed to the *mores* of the “East,” fall face first into its practices. What was the appeal? Clearly it is about power and recognition. The autocrat can achieve more without the restraints of government, and this is not always a bad thing. As stated above, the Emperors of the third century and beyond were more concerned with getting the job done than debating a point in the Senate. Some of the greatest follies of Roman history came after joint consulate commanders could not agree on what to do. So then, why the elaborate court ceremonial? It is not only to enhance ones sense of importance but to also radiate that importance to all outsiders. During the middle and late Byzantine periods, the ability to project more power than actually at hand was as true a defense as the walls of Constantinople. The coming of Christianity further enforced the ceremonial and court as a reflection of heaven, with the Emperor as God and his hierarchy of attendants mirroring the heavenly hierarchy of angels. The act of *adoration* officially made its way into the Roman ceremonial during the time of Diocletian, though it had been attempted before.<sup>261</sup> *Adoration* was known in the Europe, but only in the worship of the Gods, but was actively used in Iran as a sign of servility to superiors.

A certain few non-Roman, Germanic practices entered into the ceremonial of the later Empire, probably stemming from the increasing number of Germanic soldiers in the military. We hear of the two most important practices during the election of Julian as *Augustus* in Gaul by his soldiers.<sup>262</sup> With no *diadem* to crown him, Julian's troops selected the *torque*, actually a gold chain, crowing Julian with it as a makeshift crown. Furthermore, they hoisted him upon a shield, elevating him upon it in the old Germanic fashion. These practices very quickly found their way into court ritual. The Emperors of the fifth and sixth centuries were first crowned with the *torque* and then again with the actual *diadem*. Once properly outfitted with the *diadem* and *chlamys*, the new Emperor was placed on top of a shield and carried about. This dual coronation allowed the military and the civilian population each a chance to crown the Emperors in their own ways.<sup>263</sup>

The role of Christianity in the presentation of the Roman Emperor should not be diminished either. As frontality came to be the favored style of mural art for eastern Christian communities, so too did it come to represent the Emperor. The magnitude of frontal art overwhelmed the soul. The powerful gaze invoked awe for its viewer in a fashion reminiscent of Diocletian's artistic style. The imperial Christian face overtook Constantine's third century Hellenistic revival. Writing a century after Constantine, John Chrysostom likened the splendor of imperial presentation to the beauty of Christ. The holy nimbus, which the Christians stole from Sol Invictus and sun worship, represented the fourth and fifth century Emperor's own holiness, and the blessing of Christ.<sup>264</sup>

The ancient and confused status of the Emperors divinity was finally resolved by the Christian Emperors. Since Augustus' ascension as sole ruler, the divinity of the Emperors had been something of a problem; was he a God outright, was he divinely sponsored by the Gods, was he the agent of the Gods or one God in particular? Once Christian, the answer became quite clear. The God Yahweh was the master of the universe, and the Emperor was his chosen representative on Earth. This in itself was a practice partially known since Hellenistic times (i.e. Dionysus and the Ptolemies, Apollo and the Seleucids), but the division between man and God in the body of the Roman ruler was finally made clear. The Emperor should reflect the glory of his chosen God in his person and in his actions. Many Christian Emperors therefore took over the title of *philanthropos* from the Hellenistic kings as benefiter of mankind.<sup>265</sup>

After the Tetrarchy and its imperial *mores*, the presentation of the Emperor drifted into the truly bizarre. As we have seen the image of the Emperor served as a conduit to his person, so that he could theoretically be in many of place at once. In the shadow of Byzantium, the process of installing on imperial portrait took on the attributes of a religious procession. The icon of the Emperor would literally be paraded to its destination by a sacred retinue, as if the Emperor were actually with them. Once the installation of the image was completed, the town celebrated in festival style. All for an image!<sup>266</sup> Once we begin hearing of these kinds of practices, medieval Byzantium can't be far behind.

4) Similarities?: What could Augustus and Justinian possibly have in common other than the fact that they were both Roman Emperors? First of all, the polytheistic victory cult established under Augustus continued deep into the Byzantine period. We have seen that the goddess Victoria appears in Augustan imagery, as well as Justinian imagery over five hundred years and several major religions later. Even after the great theological battle in the Roman Senate over the statue of Victoria offending the Christian Emperors, pagan imagery abounds. In the statue atop the Column of Justinian we see that anatomically idealized imperial sculpture pushed deep into Roman history. We may also see that on Justinian's statue and Augustus' coins, the Emperor makes use of the *adlocutio* hand gesture to halt a potential enemy. By his genius, they would halt; there was no need for war. It would take more than five hundred years to deconstruct the imperial pagan cult, as well as imperial pagan imagery.

Whether the Christians wanted to acknowledge it or not, their religious movement grew out of, and was surrounded by, non-Christian imagery. The fact that the Christian movement was influenced by this imagery can not be denied. The long pagan office of *Imperator Romanorum* could not simply drop its pagan imagery. The cultural imprint was deep and could not be filled in overnight. It would be for future generations to completely remove the "pagans" from the Empire, and in time Victoria too would be absorbed into Christianity as so many Gods and Goddesses before. Every other outward manifestation of the Emperors may have changed, but the fact remains that the polytheistic imagery of the victorious Emperor and his cult is the continuity that binds Augustus to Justinian.

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- <sup>3</sup> Everitt, *Augustus*, 182-185.
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- <sup>247</sup> Grierson, *Byzantine Coinage*, 6-8.
- <sup>248</sup> Dalton, *Byzantine Art and Archaeology*, 627.
- <sup>249</sup> Grierson, *Byzantine Coinage*, 32.
- <sup>250</sup> Michael Grant, *The Roman Emperors* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1985), 305, 330, 332.
- <sup>251</sup> Warwick Wroth, *Imperial Byzantine Coinage* (Chicago: Argonaut, Inc. Publishers, 1966), plate IV.
- <sup>252</sup> Wroth, *Imperial Byzantine Coinage*, plate III, IV, V.
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- <sup>259</sup> Grant, *The Climax of Rome*, 71
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- <sup>261</sup> Grant, *The Climax of Rome*, 69-70.
- <sup>262</sup> Norwich, *A Short History of Byzantium*, 23-24.
- <sup>263</sup> MacCormack., *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity*, 242-244.
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- <sup>265</sup> MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity*, 217.
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