

To Gaius Arrius Clemens: private soldier in the Praetorian Guard; mounted trooper in the same Cohort; decorated by the Emperor Trajan with the Twisted Necklets, Armbands and Chest-pieces for service in the Dacian War; aide to the prefects of the Praetorian Guard; detailed to charge of the watchword; candidate for the centurionate; officer in charge of the pay chest; clerk to the military tribune; recalled for service as a veteran; centurion of the First Cohort of Watchmen; of the Imperial Messengers; of the Fourteenth Urban Cohort; of the Seventh Cohort of the Praetorian Guard; officer on special duties; decorated by the Emperor Hadrian with the Untipped Spear and the Golden Crown; centurion of the Third, Augustan, Legion; leading centurion; quinquennial duovir; patron of the municipality; curator of the community. The members of the city council, the Augustales members of the board of six, and the citizens of the municipality of Matilica [set this up].
(Smallwood, *Nerva-Hadrian* no. 300; Levick no. 145)

THE IMAGE OF THE EMPEROR

Most Roman emperors went to great lengths to disguise the obviousness of their reliance on naked military force for their retention of power. Among the political élite in Rome, this sometimes entailed portraying themselves as equal in status to other senatorial aristocrats, superior only by virtue of the prestige freely bestowed upon them by the people in recognition of the excellence of their qualities. But at other times in their relations with senators, and quite generally in their relations with their other subjects, especially in the provinces, it entailed the portrayal of themselves as more than mortal.¹

AUGUSTUS: THE MODEL EMPEROR

When Octavian achieved sole control over the Roman world after Actium in 31 BC it was patent to all that his success was due to the ruthless manipulation of a huge fighting machine in the preceding ten years. To disguise such a fact was neither possible nor wholly desirable: the memory of the past would deter future challengers. For maintenance of control no constitutional change whatsoever was needed – after all, in 30 BC the whole of Italy was controlled on Octavian's behalf by Maecenas, who had no formal authority at all and was not even a senator. But it was possible to choose, more negatively, not to emphasize the crudity of the power struggle: not to mask power, but to legitimize it. In 25 BC Augustus, as he now was, issued a justification of his actions in his *Life*, now no longer extant. But in the meantime he gradually established a new image for himself in which no hint of violence, or any need for violence, could be glimpsed.

In 27 BC Octavian formally laid down his powers and returned the state (*res publica*) to the senate and people of Rome.² Octavian was showered with symbolic honours, which were widely advertised on the imperial coinage, from the oak-wreath, which declared that he had saved the lives of fellow-citizens, to the impressive name Augustus, which he appended to his existing name as proudly and consistently as Pompeius had used his name Magnus (see Figure 16). Since, at the same meeting of the senate in January 27 BC, Octavian was granted a command for ten years in Gaul, Spain, Syria and



Figure 16 Golden aureus minted in Spain in c. 19–18 BC. The obverse reads simply *Caesar Augustus*; the significance of Octavian's new title was so widely advertised that no more needed to be stated. The reverse depicts the oak-wreath given to Augustus in 27 BC with three words to explain the symbolism: 'On account of citizens saved'.

Photo courtesy of CNG Coins.

Egypt, and a huge number of legions to aid him in the task, the episode in no way diminished his actual power. What then was the significance of this dramatic act? In Augustus' self-portrayal in the *Res Gestae*, published on his death in AD 14, these events still loom large. But what did he reckon that he had done?

In constitutional terms, the need for a momentous occasion of some kind was probably required because of the terms of the *lex Titia*, under which in 43 BC the triumvirs, Antonius, Lepidus and Octavian, had been appointed to supreme control over the Roman state *ad rem publicam constituendam* (to set up the state). For that purpose the three men had full rights to appoint and dismiss as they saw fit all the magistrates and pro-magistrates (those who governed provinces or otherwise acted with the power of magistrates without actually holding a magistracy at the time). The granting of such powers was originally for five years, but none of the three saw it as necessary to lay down their commands when the time expired in December 38 BC, and in the spring of 37 BC their positions were prolonged for a further five years, made retrospective to January in order to legalize their decisions taken in the interim.³ It must be presumed that in the first half of the year all the triumvirs based their authority on the undeniable fact that their task was not yet complete: the state had not yet been set back on its feet. What was true in the first half of 37 BC was presumably also true after Actium, except that now only one of the triumvirs was left to proclaim *res publica restituta* (the restoration of the state) and mark the end of the emergency period when magistrates had been appointed rather than elected, and the normal operations of the state had been in abeyance.

But if that was the issue in January 27 BC, why did Octavian not say so outright? An answer is not hard to find. In the campaign before Actium, Antonius' coins had proclaimed him vociferously as *triumvir* – again,

incidentally, after the expiry of the five-year term voted in 37 BC. But Octavian's propaganda made no mention of the post. A *triumvirate* implied three people. Legitimacy earned by that title reflected equally on the other two holders of the post. It was not a legitimacy that Octavian, who had ousted the one and killed the other, was willing to confer.

January 27 BC thus marked a much-heralded return to political normality of a sort. Already in 29 BC Octavian had appeared in contemporary documents boasting the title of consul.⁴ Now as Augustus he proclaimed with enthusiasm that the old political language of the Roman state would always suffice. If he was to remain pre-eminent in the state, it would not be through any formal position but because of his *auctoritas* (influence). His fellow-senators would do his bidding because they freely chose to do so, in exchange for his benevolent patronage and to boost their careers. This was the assumption that underlay the whole constitutional image of the emperor for the next two centuries. The emperor was no autocrat, he did not need to be. As first among equals – the princeps or leading man of the state – his wishes were followed because the senate and people thought them wise and him deserving. Such an image was not easy to sustain.

Actual challenges to the emperor's power were consistently met with force rather than recourse to the will of the people, and each use of force denied the picture of benevolent rule, freely accepted. A few emperors lacked patience or interest in the preservation of their image, which they perceived, in some ways rightly, as almost an irrelevant distraction from their enjoyment of despotism. Emperors like these were consistently denigrated as tyrants in the literary sources. Such was the judgement of Suetonius and Tacitus on Gaius and Domitian, who demanded that their fellow-senators treat them not as powerful friends but as divine masters. As Suetonius wrote:

Gaius, on being reminded once that he had surpassed the heights both of princes and of kings, began from that time on to lay claim to divine majesty for himself. He made it his business to have statues of the gods which were famous for the reverence attached to them or for their artistic merit, including the Olympian Zeus, brought from Greece, so as to remove their heads and replace them with his own. ... He also set up a separate temple to his own godhead, with priests and with sacrificial victims of the choicest kind. In this temple stood a golden life-size statue [of Gaius], and it was dressed each day in clothing such as he himself wore. (Gaius 22)

But such denigration of those who failed to sustain the image in many ways points up in contrast the great success of the majority of emperors in upholding the principle established, by example, by Augustus. All the authors whose disapproval is recorded did, after all, write under other different emperors who were glad to have their enlightened rule 'by universal consent' contrasted to the iniquities of their predecessors. Much of this success was due to the willing connivance in deception by the senators themselves, a self-deception

quite soundly based. But it is also rash to underestimate the effort put into image-building by emperors from Augustus onwards.

The first major challenge to Augustus' image came within four or five years of the great propaganda effort of 27 BC. The restoration of free elections to the Roman people naturally left Augustus just as much in the public eye as before the Republic had been restored. He was elected consul each year to 23 BC, owing his popularity not least to his competence in ensuring the corn supply to the city. But as consul he was naturally required to share power equally with his fellow incumbent, and after 23 BC he avoided embarrassment by holding the post only rarely, and then only with a member of his family or a close personal friend.

Such a solution might have severely damaged the image which Augustus had been at such pains to create, that of a senator on equal terms with others. Over the next few years Augustus therefore gradually had himself elected to a variety of positions which between them would permit him legally to take such action as he desired without requiring his direct intervention or making him the direct and precisely equal colleague of anyone.⁵

In 22 BC Augustus refused the offer of the title of *dictator* and a perpetual consulship. The dissatisfaction of the Roman plebs in the city of Rome with this refusal was all to the emperor's advantage. Their attempts to elect him despite his reluctance in 22, 21 and 20 BC may even have been engineered. In any case, their dissatisfaction was effectively stilled by Augustus' acceptance in 22 BC, at a time of shortage, of a long-term responsibility for the corn supply (*cura annonae*), which he exercised by appointing a board of prefects (and, later, an eques) to perform the task on his behalf. In the meantime Augustus retained, under a series of grants, each for periods of five years, command of a huge *provincia* (administrative area) with the *imperium* (power) of a proconsul. Like Pompeius Magnus in 52 BC he also retained the right to hold his command while himself in Rome, ruling the provinces through legates chosen by himself. The life-long grant of *tribunitia potestas* (tribunician power) permitted him to summon the senate and to introduce legislation.

By 19 BC Augustus' accumulation of rights and positions was sufficient to ensure that a repetition of the embarrassment, even perhaps danger, of 22 BC would be always avoided. He enjoyed *imperium proconsulare maius* (for the rest of his life), which gave him the formal right to intervene in provinces not specifically assigned to him when this was to the advantage of the Roman people. In 36 BC he had been granted the sacrosanctity of a tribune, which made an assault on his person technically equivalent in Roman law to an assault on the Roman plebs as a whole. Already in 30 BC he was given some tribunician power, but from 23 BC he held the power of tribune for life, which gave him the indefinite right to veto all legislation proposed by other tribunes, thereby effectively rendering the office of tribune of the plebs so useless for other senators that it rapidly became quite hard to find candidates to fill what had once been a most desirable stepping stone for an ambitious young noble.

From about 18 BC, the years of Augustus' tribunician power began to be used throughout the empire as a useful means of marking the date, and this became a standard method for later emperors to signify regnal years. The accumulation of roles left Augustus legally unable to undertake only one desirable act that might perhaps be of use to him, namely to address the senate first, before the consuls. This problem was easily rectified: in 23 BC the people voted to him a *ius primae relationis*, the right to be the first speaker to the senate, in order to fill the gap. He was also permitted to address the senate by letter and, probably, to hold the insignia of a consul even when not occupying that office.⁶

This jumble of legal powers gathered by Augustus proved so effective that each emperor after him ensured his election to precisely the same combination. By AD 69 the process was entirely formal, and the whole parcel of rights was voted to Vespasian *en bloc* in the *lex de imperio Vespasiani*, found inscribed on a bronze tablet at Rome.⁷ To take one clause at random, it was enacted:

that he shall have the right, just as the deified Augustus and Tiberius Julius Caesar Augustus and Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus had, to convene the senate, to put and refer proposals to it, and to cause decrees of the senate to be enacted by proposal and division of the house.

For Cassius Dio (*History of Rome* 53.28.2 and 54.10.5-7), writing about Augustus' rule in the early third century AD, it seemed that the emperor had in 24 BC been released from all compulsion by the law, and in 19 BC been established as the supreme authority to enact laws and supervise the morals of the Roman people. By his day it was indeed true that emperors behaved openly in this way. But the careful phrasing of Augustus' *Res Gestae* shows that this was precisely the image that the founder of the principate did not want to present.

More optional for later emperors were the titles and honours bestowed on emperors by a grateful state. The summit of Augustus' achievement as portrayed in *Res Gestae* 35 was the conferment on him, in 2 BC, of the title *pater patriae* (father of his country), which had once been enjoyed by Cicero. Most later emperors were aware of the need not to cheapen the coinage of such honorary titles, and graciously accepted both that and similar marks of respect only sparingly.

The great care spent by emperors in building up their image as Roman nobles in the Republican tradition, as upholders of Roman morals and law and heroic victors on behalf of the state against foreign enemies, was not prompted either by sentiment or by fear, for power rested ultimately not on image but on troops. It was prompted by common sense. It was possible for an emperor to preclude senatorial opposition to a limited extent simply by weeding out the disgruntled. But acquiescence in autocracy did not suffice. The emperors, who needed troops to maintain their power, needed equally trustworthy and competent army commanders to lead those troops into battle.

The gravest danger for the emperor derived from the fact that he now monopolized the glory to be won from victory. The last non-imperial triumph took place in 19 BC. The danger was that the attractions of a military career would disappear altogether for other senators, and the emperor would be left unable to exercise his military might because he had no generals. It was therefore crucial to uphold, and indeed to enhance, the prestige of an officer élite, which might as well continue with the Republican tradition of being called senators, in order to encourage energetic young men both of aristocratic and 'new' blood to devote their lives to Rome's wars. It was as much in the emperor's interests that senators should maintain their dignity as it was in theirs. Thus emperors *looked* like senators in their everyday business. The court was a standard Roman family house, writ (very) large. Behaviour at the court followed normal senatorial custom, without any special elaborate rituals.

This image of the emperor as a great Roman noble was in no way played down in his projection of himself to the plebs of Rome and to the provincials who comprised the mass of his subjects. After all, the *congiaria* (gifts of money) about which Augustus so proudly boasted in his *Res Gestae* 15.1–3 will have been of most interest to the former group:

To the Roman plebs I paid 300 sesterces apiece in accordance with the will of my father; and in my fifth consulship I gave each 400 sesterces in my own name out of the spoils of war; and a second time in my tenth consulship I paid out of my own patrimony a largesse of 400 sesterces to every individual; in my eleventh consulship I made twelve distributions of food out of grain purchased at my own expense; and in the twelfth year of my tribunician power for the third time I gave 400 sesterces to every individual. These largesses of mine reached never less than 250,000 persons. In the eighteenth year of my tribunician power and my twelfth consulship I gave sixty denarii to each of 320,000 persons of the urban plebs.

The survival of copies of the same document in far-flung parts of the empire suggests that provincials too were expected to be in some way impressed.

The role of the emperor as a unifying figure is undoubted, but quite how the process operated has generated considerable scholarly debate. In his role as *pater patriae*, he functioned as a universal patron of the empire and its inhabitants. Inscriptions erected in provincial communities praised the emperor for his *indulgentia* (kindness) and *liberalitas* (generosity) in the remission of tax burdens or assistance in the construction of public works. The inhabitants of Forum Claudii in Etruria honoured emperor Trajan as the 'most kind emperor' (*indulgentissimus princeps*) because he provided the funds for an aqueduct (CIL XI 3309). What is less certain is the extent to which provincials colluded in acceptance of this image, creating a sort of consensus about the validity of imperial rule (see below, Chapter 12).

There is some evidence that the imperial image could be manipulated to appeal to different audiences. The Greek version of Augustus' *Res Gestae*, which was erected at Pisdian Antioch and Apollonia, shows subtle but perceptible differences to the Latin original, sometimes explaining unfamiliar

Roman institutions, and, on other occasions, playing down imperialist or triumphal messages which may have rankled with a provincial audience. Some scholars have proposed that different denominations of coinage could be used to target specific groups – for instance by featuring, on gold coinage, iconography and messages that would appeal to the aristocracy, but on bronzes, ideals that would resonate with the populace at large. (For example, the Colosseum is never represented on the higher denominations). There are methodological considerations to bear in mind here, however, most notably that fact that the larger bronze denominations could feature more intricate designs than the smaller *aurei*.

Statues of the emperor and his family would have been present across the Roman world – a recent estimate suggests that there were between 25,000–50,000 images of Augustus throughout the empire. But it is important to remember that these statues were not all produced in Rome by the central administration. Instead, prototype images were sent to the provinces, where they were copied by artisans and sculptors and bought by the local inhabitants. The fact that there was a market for such statues and portraits suggests that the provincials were enthusiastic consumers of this imagery, illustrating the key role they played in validating imperial rule.

Nonetheless, the emperor's senatorial image was primarily aimed at senators and those with the capacity to become such. For the Roman poor and the provincials, the political system of the Republic had led to suffering and devastation in the civil wars, and the announcement of its restoration would have evoked no great enthusiasm. For them, therefore, the image of the emperor as princeps was allied to a strikingly contrasting image of the emperor as divine.

THE EMPEROR AS A GOD

The notion that a ruler might be a god was by no means as curious to Romans as might have been expected.⁹ After the death of Julius Caesar it was believed by some that a comet which had appeared in the sky was his soul ascending to heaven. In January 42 BC this fact was formally accepted by the senate and people, who thereby recognized him as a god to whom temples and altars should and could reasonably be dedicated. A temple to *Divus Julius* was built in the forum itself, and dedicated in 29 BC. Octavian, as Caesar's adopted son, exploited the relationship with enthusiasm, proclaiming himself on his coins as *divi filius* (son of a god).

There was no reason why Romans should not treat the idea with the utmost seriousness. For Greek and Roman polytheists, omnipotence was by definition not an expected attribute of divinity.¹⁰ Gods differed from humans primarily only in their greater power (but some gods, of course, were stronger than others) and in their immortality – necessarily, as in the case of Caesar, in non-corporeal form. The notion of life after death, in the form of the continued

he was more than human. The civility of the princeps who was willing to treat his fellow nobles as social equals was all the more acceptable to them because, as he ensured that they should remember, not least by the magnificence and inaccessibility of his palace, he could have demanded their worship. The possibility of rubbing shoulders with a god made doubly attractive the role of senator, and thus all the more effectively provided the emperor with the generals whom he so much needed.

THE CREATION OF THE IMAGE

All this of course was the ideal princeps, as embodied in Augustus for the second half of his remarkably long rule over the Roman people. Augustus bolstered his image by promotion of building styles, literature and catchwords which were absorbed by his subjects, at least in the city of Rome.¹³ Already in the 30s BC, as triumvir, he had emphasized his enthusiasm for traditional Rome by putting on the Trojan games, claiming them as a revival of an ancient custom, and expelling 'alien' astrologers and magicians; this side of the image was reinforced in 27 BC by the extraordinary solemnity of the new name 'Augustus' (revered one), the significance of which cannot be overemphasized. But at the same time his buildings in Rome were remarkable for their grandiose Hellenistic triumphalism – for instance, his bizarre mausoleum, a vast building in a circular, layered shape, finished possibly by 28 BC. It was only after 23 BC that imperial buildings began to portray the sober, utilitarian, old Roman face of the regime, as in the *Ara Pacis Augustae* (the altar of Augustan peace) dedicated in 9 BC,¹⁴ and the temple of Mars Ultor (Mars the avenger), dedicated in 2 BC in the new forum of Augustus.

Later emperors competed with their predecessors to leave their own mark on the city, hence the rapidly expanding number of buildings which consumed the area north of the *forum Romanum* in the first two centuries AD: after the *forum* of Julius Caesar and Augustus, Vespasian's 'Temple of Peace', the *forum transitorium* (completed by Nerva), and the monumental complex of Trajan's forum, complete with libraries and a basilica. Often these constructions erased the monuments of their disgraced forebears, such as Nero's 'Golden House', parts of which disappeared beneath the Baths of Titus and Trajan. Trajan's many public works, such as his Odeon, baths, forum and column, were ultimately designed to serve the specific ideological agenda of a new golden age (see Figure 17). The arch at Beneventum, inaugurated in AD 114 to celebrate the Via Traiana which ran to Brundisium, depicts the emperor in various guises as a war-leader and paternalistic figure, distributing the *alimenta* to the children of Italy. This strategy was successful, as the emperor won praise from all quarters; even the critical Fronto wrote that in 'the arts of peace scarcely anyone has excelled, if indeed anyone has equalled, Trajan in popularity with the people'. (*Princ. Hist.* 17, trans. Loeb).

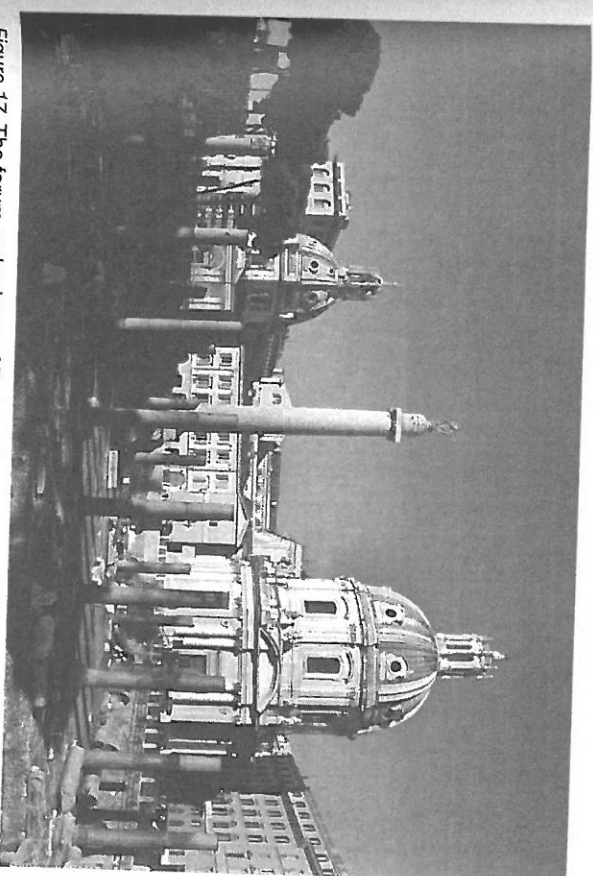


Figure 17 The forum and column of Trajan. The column, with a remarkable frieze which recorded many details of Trajan's successful campaigns in Dacia, was located within a grand architectural setting designed to permit the emperor's achievements to be fully appreciated. Photo © istockphoto.com/Philipp Minnis.

The power of images lay more in cumulative associations than in direct propaganda. Thus the intensive use of coin types as propaganda in the civil wars and in 27 BC declined dramatically later in the principate, perhaps because there was less need for such issues. More effective and more subtle were such actions as the re-naming in 27 BC of the sixth month, *Sexilis*, as 'August', the gradual extension of imperial monuments into public space in the city of Rome, and the irregular but liberal donations by the princeps to the plebs and soldiers – donations that could be portrayed as pure generosity because of the institution of regular payments to which the emperor added from his own liberality. Inscriptions and literature repeated the catchwords of the regime: under Augustus, *virtus*, *clementia*, *iustitia*, *pietas* (valour, mercy, justice, piety), the qualities attributed to him on the golden shield presented to him by the senate in 27 BC. The city witnessed frequent pageants, to mark imperial returns, funerals and triumphs, when the princeps would be acclaimed by a grateful plebs at a series of designated places in the suburbs across the River Tiber, and coins proclaimed imperial virtues to the widest audience possible.¹⁵

Augustus insisted that the imperial family, as loyal supporters of the patriarch, became part of the image, as in their depiction on the *Ara Pacis*. Their devotion to the community, demonstrated not least by their own building projects in the capital city, in turn reflected glory on the princeps.

THE EXTENT OF POLITICAL UNITY

The greatest challenge to Augustus' image thus came in 6 BC, when his stepson Tiberius sullenly retreated to Rhodes, and in 2 BC, when his daughter Julia was exiled for adultery. Later emperors similarly stressed dynastic continuity and solidarity, so that imperial women often become part of the public face of the regime (see Figure 18).

All this can be demonstrated best for the age of Augustus, the first princeps so carefully to mould his image in this fashion. Other emperors portrayed themselves in a similar way, with suitable personal modifications; they were measured against Augustus' model, and did not always pass. Tiberius did not care sufficiently to demonstrate his social equality with his fellow senators. Gaius and Domitian demanded fulsome worship of themselves in Rome during their lifetime. Other emperors failed in other ways. Each earned the obloquy of historians and biographers of succeeding generations, who thereby confirmed the power of the Augustan ideal, which, though never stated by any authority or enshrined in any constitution, yet remained the model image of the princeps in the Early Roman Empire.



Figure 18 Cameo (dimensions: 12 x 15.2 cm) showing the heads of Claudius and his wife Agrippina Minor facing his brother Germanicus and Germanicus' wife Agrippina Major. (The latter pair were also parents of the younger Agrippina, since Claudius had married his niece). Claudius much valued association with the heroic military reputation of his brother. Photo © Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

ALLIES OR SUBJECTS?

The empire over which the princeps ruled was a huge area of variegated peoples and cultures. The core remained the inhabitants of the Mediterranean coastal strip, but Caesar's conquest of Gaul shifted the balance of empire into northern Europe. Trajan's campaigns in Dacia and against Parthia and his incorporation of Arabia as a province added much territory in the Balkans and the Near East, albeit some of it only temporary: the addition of the provinces of Armenia and Mesopotamia saw the empire reach its fullest extent. In strategic terms these accessions rendered the land-mass north of the Mediterranean the communications artery of the empire, with increasing military traffic from northern Italy across the Balkans and the Anatolian plateau. The other disparate regions of the empire were also physically linked by a network of military roads, constantly upgraded and extended, as many extant milestones proudly boast.

From the centre in Rome it was possible to view these subject populations in a variety of ways. They could be seen as foreigners conquered by Rome and controlled by force, as allies in a common culture, or as fully paid-up members of a unified society. In practice each of these attitudes is attested at one time or another in the world-view of the inhabitants of the Roman state. Provincials, too, might react to Roman rule by seeking accommodation, opposition, or integration, but the parameters within which they might adapt themselves were in essence fixed by the state. A fine visual representation of the empire as a conglomeration of varied, sometimes exotic, peoples held together by the emperor's sway is found in a series of sculptures set up in the temple of Augustus, in Aphrodisias in Turkey, in the first century AD: it is striking that the Greek city adopted an artistic motif which apparently originated in Rome and reflected so directly the Roman government's view of its empire.¹

In the history of Livy, composed at the very start of the principate under Augustus, Roman history was the story of a city that stood alone in its struggle to win control first over Italy and then over the wider Mediterranean. Livy's account of the first century BC unfortunately does not survive, so it is