

- i) **The Ideal Man: The Projection of Masculinity in Augustan Propaganda**
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- iv) Dissertation submitted to the University of Wales Trinity Saint David for the degree of MA Ancient History
- v) 30/09/2025



Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

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viii) **Abstract**

Discussion of Augustus' reign primarily focuses on his political position and the consolidation of his power during his principate. This dissertation investigates Augustus' careful use of propaganda to promote his image as the idealised masculine figure in Roman society. This investigation examines how Augustus strategically promoted his masculinity using the Republican ideal of *virtus*, which encompassed a wide range of values important to Roman society. The investigation included a multi-methodology approach, including a desk-top qualitative survey of a range of sources, including a range of numismatic iconography and three historical accounts – those of contemporary writers Velleius Paterculus and Nicolaus of Damascus, and that of the non-contemporary Suetonius. The findings of this research reveal a coordinated approach by Augustus to promote his masculinity through key Republican values, such as marital success and selfless public service. These values are consistently reflected in both the contemporary written accounts and numismatic iconography, focusing on his martial prowess and public acts. Suetonius' account, however, raises questions on whether Augustus' propaganda was fully successful, with anecdotes of a loss of emotional control by Augustus both before and during his principate, giving us a more critical viewpoint. It is the view of this dissertation, however, that due to the nature and focus of Suetonius' writings and the lack of corroborating evidence from contemporary accounts and iconography, this apparent loss of control was successfully hidden from the public. Therefore, this dissertation concludes that Augustus was able to successfully promote his image as the idealised masculine figure throughout Rome and the wider Empire.

ix) **Signed declaration:**

x) **Acknowledgements**

Firstly, I wish to thank my supervisor, Matthew Cobb, whose early guidance helped to shape my thinking and research. His gentle encouragement ensured that I was able to complete the work on time.

I would like to express my gratitude to my father, David Ward, who kept me on track with my writing, pushing me to keep to my own set deadlines and helped me convert my ideas to paper. I would also like to thank my good friend Jenny Walker, who humoured my endless chatter about the merits of Augustus. I thank her for her patience in checking through my work and offering a useful eye.

1. Introduction and literature review

It is my view that Augustus took care to promote himself as the idealised masculine figure to the Roman people and across the Empire. Augustus' reign is a much researched and written-about period in Roman history, with a scrutiny of his actions and propaganda. The discussion around Augustus has primarily focused on the extent to which he restored the constitution to the previous Roman republican system, with scholars discussing his methods, his relationship with the senate and plebeian classes, his military reputation and most thoroughly, the extent to which Augustus truly wished to restore Republican ideals to Rome, including *virtus*. In more recent years, there has been a marked increase in scholarly works focused on gender. However, they have primarily focused on the role and importance of women across the ancient world and across different civilisations. Within Augustus' principate, there has, for example, been an increasing discussion around the role of Livia in his reign. While this is an important growing area of research, I believe the importance of masculinity has room for exploration, as I believe the specific role of masculinity within Augustan propaganda has, as a result, been overlooked. The concept of masculinity, *virtus*, was "one of the most important ideas that made up the Roman set of values" (Balmaceda, 2021, p14). Men were constantly judged on the extent to which they met masculine ideals and norms. This was then used to assess how well they fulfilled their role as true Roman men. There is a broad discussion in the literature in this area, and *virtus* can be seen as "a complex set of ideas whose meaning and usage varied" (Balmaceda, 2021, p15). I believe that this is an area of gender theory that has been neglected in relation to Augustus, in particular, how he presented himself to the Roman people and the wider Empire. I hypothesise that Augustus aimed to present himself as the idealised Roman man, fulfilling the concept of republican *virtus* in his actions and his resulting propaganda. My aim in this work is to illustrate that the concept of *virtus* can be applied to Augustus' reign and that Augustus took great care to promote his masculinity to the Roman people.

Augustus' reign was long, and it encompassed a wide range of actions, legislative reforms and military campaigns. Augustus undertook a wide-reaching programme of reform across his principate. His reforms ranged from physically rebuilding the city to its former glory (as detailed in the *Res Gestae*), expanding infrastructure, aqueducts and harbours, restoring temples and improving the morality of the Roman people. He revised the arrangements of the Empire's provinces, broadly enhancing their inhabitants' lives with improved

governance, taxes and communications. The expansion of the Empire continued under his reign, albeit on a more modest scale compared to expansions by previous Republican generals such as Julius Caesar, alongside the creation of the Pax Romana (or Pax Augusta) across the known world: “I extended the boundaries of the provinces,” “I brought under control,” “I subdued the enemy” (Res Gestae 26 and 27). He passed legislation to encourage and enforce marriage within the senatorial class. Morality was brought back to be central to people’s lives through the Julian Morality Laws, such as the *lex Julia de maritandis ordinibus* to encourage marriage, the *lex Julia de adulteriis coercendis*, which made adultery a crime, and the *lex Julia de ambitu*, which penalised the use of bribery when acquiring political office. He reorganised the political system through two Constitutional Settlements to fix the power struggle and ineffective political system he had survived during the Late Republican era. He claimed to have brought back the Golden Age to Rome, creating peace and stability for all citizens and provincials, as shown by Virgil, where he claims that it is Augustus “who shall bring back again the age of gold to Latium” (Virgil Aeneid, 6.791-2). All these aspects could be considered part of his performative masculinity, but it would be impossible to cover all aspects of his reign in enough detail to explore my aims and objectives fully. As a result, I have decided to narrow the scope to focus on two key aspects of Augustus’ image: his military prowess and self-control. To examine this, I will focus on the following sources:

- The military iconography of contemporary coinage
- The presentation of Augustus’ masculinity in the Res Gestae Divi Augusti through his military prowess and actions for the public good
- The accounts of Augustus’ reign in the historical accounts of Nicolaus of Damascus, Velleius Paterculus and Suetonius to illustrate his public image and examples of self-control

As the concept of *virtus* was so broad in Roman society, I have also decided to narrow my approach when considering Augustus’ life and reign. I have decided to focus primarily on Augustus’ military feats to explore the courage and martial aspect of *virtus*. Through the exploration of written accounts by Velleius, Suetonius and Nicolaus of Damascus, I will also discuss the presentation of Augustus’ political and private actions, demonstrating his self-control and restraint, another significant value that formed part of the concept of *virtus*.

2. Methodology

When considering Augustus as the idealised masculine figure, I was acutely aware of the wide range of source material that could be considered. Initially, I planned to compare archaeological evidence to contemporary writings and poets such as Virgil and Horace and to use numismatic evidence to support this analysis. After an initial desk-top survey of a range of primary sources, some contemporary to Augustus' reign and others written later I began a qualitative survey through different mediums: online, books, journal articles and my own collection of photos of coins from museums, such as the British Museum, Numismatic Museum of Athens and the Museo Nazionale Romano. I read accounts by a range of ancient authors, such as Velleius Paterculus, Suetonius, Tacitus, Cassius Dio and Livy. Through this, I was able to collect a wide range of evidence to consider, and it was during this primary research stage that I decided to narrow my approach, as these fields of evidence were seemingly never-ending. As a result, my methodological approach was qualitative and narrowed to two primary categories of source material: written accounts from ancient historians and numismatic evidence. I have curated a selection of source material within these categories, which will allow for a focused and in-depth examination of Augustus' presentation of his masculinity.

For archaeological evidence, I have chosen to focus on the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* (*Res Gestae*). I have decided to focus on this source because it is a first-hand written by Augustus himself, which will give a clear insight into the military successes of Augustus, although self-serving in its nature, allowing us to assess "his accomplishments as the ultimate authority regarding the fields of war and peace" (Havener, 2022, p490) and compare this to the aspect of *virtus*, which encompassed the ideal virtue of courage, allowing me to compare his presentation to the Republican concept of *virtus* through an analysis of the iconography of the coins.

In terms of numismatic evidence, I have chosen to focus on a range of coins again, primarily covering Augustus' military feats, such as the capture of Egypt and Armenia. Military achievements were a common theme in Augustan coinage, so it was, therefore, logical to explore this theme further from the above-outlined archaeological evidence.

In order to explore Augustus' self-control and restraint and support the analysis of the archaeological and numismatic evidence, I decided to focus on written accounts from

ancient authors. The choice of written evidence was significantly harder to decide between, as Augustus' reign has such a range of different authors giving, at times, a hugely detailed account of his actions and impact. I have decided to focus on Suetonius, Velleius and Nicolaus of Damascus. I decided to focus on Suetonius due to his thematic approach when covering the life of the Caesars. This has allowed me to survey Augustus' military achievements, as well as anecdotes from his life where he appeared to lose self-control, suggesting his public image of the ideal masculine figure was not always successfully upheld. Velleius has proven to be a useful foil to compare to Suetonius due to his overriding positivity when discussing Augustus and Tiberius. Nicolaus of Damascus was a source I came across during my research of the primary written accounts. When reading his work, I discovered that he, like Suetonius, covered the early part of Augustus' life and, like Velleius, was contemporary to the period (having lived between 64 BC and 4 AD). His works continue with Augustus' political career up until the formation of the Second Triumvirate in 43 BC. This made it a useful source to compare with Suetonius and Velleius as it focuses on Augustus' earlier actions, allowing for an exploration of Augustus' personality, which is not always clear in other accounts. This ensures that I have been able to consider Augustus's ability to self-restrain throughout his life, not just while he was emperor. As Nicolaus and Velleius were both contemporaries of Augustus, this is useful for understanding how Augustus' masculinity was perceived at the time by the Roman people.

When considering Velleius, previous scholarship assessed his work to be 'historically superficial' (Gowing, 2007, p11) due to the belief that his work had the propensity to parrot Imperial propaganda due to his obvious enthusiasm for the emperor Tiberius, Augustus' eventual heir. In more recent scholarship, there has been a re-assessment of his work, with Woodman (1977) arguing that his work is profoundly important for understanding the Augustan period. What is particularly useful for our understanding of Augustus' presentation of his masculinity is that Velleius "uses the standards and models of the republican past" (Gowing, 2007, p412), especially when "in a Roman context, a man's virtues must be measured against the standards of the past" (Gowing, 2007, p412). This is relevant because the definition of masculinity had not evolved as it had during the later Imperial period as it was "a rather dynamic concept" (Balmaceda, p14), meaning his insight is highly valuable and the Republican standards "took on renewed significance under Augustus" (Gowing, 2007, p412) and his "interest in cultural matters" (Rich, 2011, p80) will reflect the

iconography of the coins discussed earlier, and the focus on military prowess and public good in the *Res Gestae*. It was impossible for Velleius to “reject outright the value system of the republic” (Gowing, 2007, p417), confirming the value of Velleius for understanding Augustus’ masculinity. While it is argued that Velleius’ overwhelming positivity was designed to demonstrate the Romans’ “final redemption by Augustus and Tiberius” (Rich, 2011, p. 79), this does not diminish his overall usefulness for understanding Augustus’ masculinity.

Suetonius, however, wrote significantly later, under Emperor Hadrian. This can be useful despite not being contemporary, as his work will prove that Augustus’ masculinity continued to be understood by the Roman people over a century later. Suetonius’ work is not chronological, but instead a “thematic, more static presentation” (Matthews, 2007, p. 292). His “shrewd observation of character” (Matthews, 2007, p. 292) is useful for our understanding of Augustus’ character and masculinity through episodes of behaviour and actions, focusing on events that are “the sober and the scandalous, the erudite and the fanciful” (Matthews, 2007, p. 296) throughout his life. As his position as director of the imperial archives under Trajan, and then as secretary to Hadrian (before his sacking), Suetonius would have had access to records and accounts since lost, allowing Suetonius to present and evaluate Augustus’ life through a lens of “the Roman elite and his assessment is Romancentric” (Wardle, 2012, p307). This is useful for understanding the presentation of Augustus’ masculinity to the Roman people, as we can see how this is viewed through Roman eyes, especially as, according to Swain et al (2010), he wrote thematically, allowing us to focus in on relevant aspects of Augustus’ reign more easily.

Nicolaus of Damascus, as noted earlier, was contemporary to Augustus, and some have claimed that he was “a personal friend of Augustus himself” (Toher, 2017, p. 159), but this is disputed by others who argue that he “cannot be said to have been an intimate of the Emperor or part of an inner-circle” (Yarrow, 2006, p76). The parts of his account of the life of Augustus that have survived use the technique of historical narrative, much like Velleius. Unlike Velleius and Suetonius, Nicolaus was not Roman but instead came to prominence under Herod and is known to have acted as an intermediary on a number of occasions, such as accompanying Herod with Agrippa around Ionia. His most significant political actions centre around calming relations between Herod and Augustus, most notably after Herod’s unauthorised invasion of Arabia in 12BC. Yarrow (2006) argues that his writings on Augustus are based on rationality, making his work an asset for understanding the contemporary and

non-Roman view of Augustus' masculinity. However, we must also note that he tends to "extol the virtues of Augustus" (Yarrow, 2006, p. 74) – but at no greater level than Velleius or Suetonius. The fact that Nicolaus "consulted valuable but now lost authors" (Toher, 2017, p172), including possibly Augustus' lost autobiography, makes his account of Augustus' masculinity extremely useful.

When applying gender methodology to the Principate, it should be noted that there could be changes to the representation of masculinity, because of political, religious and cultural necessity. Therefore, our understanding of masculinity is dependent on several areas, such as Roman culture, the role of the man, stereotypes (both of manliness and effeminacy) and what was considered the 'ideal' in Roman society. Indeed, "nostalgia around manhood was always strong in Rome" (Masterson, 2013, p22). The masculine image was vital to Roman men during the Republic, and this continued into the principate. The characteristics of masculinity were constantly evolving in Roman society (Masterson, 2013) and therefore should be considered "a rather dynamic concept" (Balmaceda, 2021, p14). These characteristics served as the basis of every Roman man's identity. To be seen as effeminate, for example, could cause great harm to a politician's reputation and subsequent career (Williams, 1999) as being perceived as 'soft' or effeminate was "the antithesis of masculinity" (Williams, 1999, p128). There has been great discussion in the scholarship of the performative nature of Roman masculinity, at times focusing on the use of language (L'Hoir, 1992), rhetorical skill (Gleason, 1995), the expression of masculinity through dress (Olson, 2014; Christ, 1997) and presentation in archaeological evidence such as monuments (Welch, 2004; Hölscher, 2014; Kellum, 2003). As a result, I will use ancient authors such as Cicero and Aristotle to define masculinity, which can be applied to Augustus through the examination of numismatic iconography and a range of historical accounts, primarily those who were contemporary to Augustus.

Iconography and numismatic evidence

One theory and methodological approach that I have applied to my analysis of numismatic evidence is that of iconography. It is useful as Augustus was "without doubt the most practised in the art of publicity" (Freyburger, 2009, p28) and used iconography across different forms of propaganda to promote several key images of himself, such as the saviour and father of Rome and the reason for peace in the Empire. This propaganda is then, in

turn, reflected in the iconography on the numismatic evidence, allowing for analysis of the presentation of Augustus' masculinity. Coins were minted throughout Italy and the wider Empire, using symbols and imagery that ordinary people would have been able to understand without the requirement of written literacy. They served two main purposes: to disseminate information about events, anniversaries and policy (Grant, 2020), but also "to disseminate propaganda" (Bond, 1957, p149). It should be noted, however, that Augustus did not control the iconography on coins, as there was no central minting organisation during his principate, but instead coins were minted through moneyers. As a result, it must be understood that the iconography instead reflects the propaganda being presented in other forms, such as triumphal arches, poems and other archaeological evidence. However, this can make interpreting the iconography difficult, as several messages are often being portrayed at the same time and will reflect imagery contained on archaeological evidence, such as the Ara Pacis and triumphal arches, which is often hotly contested by scholars for their meaning. While we can try to interpret the message being given by Augustus in his broader propaganda, we do not know how the Roman people reacted to the propaganda messages being given to them and whether they bought into the portrayal of Augustus' masculinity. Despite this, the iconography used by Augustus "perpetuated itself and transcended the realities of everyday life to project onto the future generations" (Zanker, 1990, p4) the image of his masculinity that Augustus wanted the people to understand.

3. Defining Virtus: An Analysis of Roman Masculinity

Ancient writers and modern historians have written in detail about the concept of *virtus* in Roman society. There is no singularly agreed-upon definition, and ancient writers spent a lot of time in the Republican and Imperial Ages defining and redefining the concept as it was adapted to their changing society and political system. The following section will discuss the changing definitions of *virtus* and ultimately try to determine how it can be applied to Augustus during his principate.

Cicero

Cicero clarifies that *virtus* "is from the word for 'man' that the word 'virtue' is derived" (Balmaceda, 2021, p15) - 'man' being *vir* in Latin. As a result, the translation of *vir* can be

seen as “a real, manly man” (Asikainen, 2018, p20), which is then encapsulated by the broad term of *virtus*. However, this only gives a brief starting point. *Virtus* became associated with a wide range of ‘virtues’ by which a man’s masculinity was judged in Roman society during the Republican and Imperial age. The man’s masculinity then ‘had to be recognised by their peers’ (Racette-Campbell, 2023, p4) through performative actions such as, but not limited to, maintaining an orderly family (in relation to his wife and his children), military prowess, and political success. According to Cicero, “a *vir* is courageous” (L’Hoir, 1992, p13).

Cicero develops his definition of *virtus*, or virtue, across a range of different philosophical works. In the *Tusculan Disputations* he argues that:

Virtue, then, is a consistent and harmonious condition of mind, one which makes its possessors worthy of praise and which is worthy of praise on its own account, even without considering its utility. From virtue proceeds every honourable activity, whether in volition, speech, or action, and all right reasoning. (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 3.34)

From this, we can understand that according to Cicero, to be masculine in Roman society, a man must act in an honourable way, based upon reasoned thinking, which can then be judged as being praiseworthy by the rest of society. Cicero has defined the concept of masculinity as ensuring that a man’s actions align with the well-being of the wider community.

Further, to act out in anger meant a person “while this emotion lasts, there can be no doubt [they are] insane” (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 3.77) – further suggesting that to act in a virtuous manner always involved self-control over one’s emotions. To act solely out of anger without consideration of the wider impact was not to be Roman. Cicero argues that reason and self-control are key to a virtuous and masculine life. He also argued that masculinity depends on a man’s self-control – ensuring he does not act rashly or unchecked. Therefore, the art of self-control in every part of a man’s life is essential (Cicero, *De Officiis*).

In *De Officiis*, Cicero explores the link between duty and virtue:

When that which seems to be expedient seems to conflict with that which is morally right; for when expediency seems to be pulling one way, while moral right seems to be calling back in the opposite direction, the result is that the mind is distracted in its inquiry and brings to it the irresolution that is born of deliberation. (Cicero, *De Officiis* 1.9)

This develops the idea that to have *virtus*, a truly masculine man should consider and weigh up options before deciding on a course of action, even if there is pressure to act quickly. If not, a man will be forced into a state of confusion and be unable to act in the correct and just manner.

Cicero continues to define the core aspects of *virtus*:

For, since all moral rectitude springs from four sources (one of which is prudence; the second, social instinct; the third, courage; the fourth, temperance) (Cicero, *De Officiis* 1.50)

Further suggesting that we can begin to narrow *virtus* to courage, whether in military action or within society as a whole. In other words, it is the courage to act rationally for the greater good of society and for the army in battle. A man should “live on fair and equal terms with his fellow-citizens,” and when acting for the state, “labour for her peace and honour” as to do would be called “good citizen” (Cicero, *De Officiis* 34.124).

Aristotle

Aristotle outlines virtue as including characteristics such as “justice, courage, self-control, magnificence, magnanimity, liberality, gentleness, practical and speculative wisdom” (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1366b). He further argues that the most valid characteristics of virtue are those that “are most useful to others” in both times of war and peace, and “for the height of virtue is to do good to all” (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1367b). In other words, the “ideal man in the ancient Greco-Roman..... was also self-controlled in his use of power’ (Asikainen, 2018, p30).

Aristotle develops this further and argues that “to take vengeance on one's enemies is nobler than to come to terms with them; for to retaliate is just” (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1367a), suggesting that it is right to take revenge on one’s enemies rather than to make peace with them. This can therefore be applied to the foreign policy of Augustus during his reign, where at times we will be able to see him follow this idea, but at other times ignore it.

Sallust

For Sallust, *virtus* was “an expression of mental excellence: what men achieve in agriculture, seafaring, building” (Nikola, 2020, p. 778), therefore based on what had made the Romans great in the past - hard work and selflessness. Sallust argues that *virtus* was a key quality for

an honourable life and was closely linked to a man's moral integrity and discipline and ultimately fed into the pursuit of glory in the Republic. Sallust further argues that "a realm that is strong if you prove virtuous, but weak if you do ill; for harmony makes small states great, while discord undermines the mightiest empires." (Sallust, *The Jugurthine War*, 10.6). This suggests that to have Virtus, a Roman male should act in a way to bring the greatest harmony to the state and not focus on their own selfish goals. While military achievements and prowess are something to be sought, it should not be the defining quality and goal of a person. Too close focus on personal achievement and the greed that developed from this is something which Sallust believed caused the Republic to fail and collapse before Augustus' principate was established.

This idea that Roman men had moved away from Virtus is further developed in his on the Catilinarian Conspiracy. He argues that the wealth and power gained from the mass expansion of the Empire and the defeat of Carthage had corrupted Roman men and had, in turn, created a corrupt and cruel state. It was "the lust for money first, and then power" (Sallust, *Catilinarian Conspiracy* 10) which in turn led to avarice, which "destroyed honour, integrity, and every other virtue; and instead taught men to be insolent and cruel, to neglect the gods, and to set a price on everything" (Sallust, *Catilinarian Conspiracy* 10). While Sallust agreed that ambition could be considered a virtue, it was only one if it was pursued for noble means (i.e. for the greater good of the state) and not for self-interest.

Velleius

Velleius in his 'Roman History' argues similarly to Sallust. While he "avoids using the word virtus ascribed to groups of people, armies, or the soldiery in general. He talks only once about the courage of the Roman soldier in general" (Balmaceda, 2021, p134), we can see Velleius' attempt to define virtus through what had been lost to Roman society before the principate of Augustus.

As previously argued by Sallust, Velleius outlines that the "path of virtue was abandoned for that of corruption" (Velleius, *Roman History* 2.11.1) after the defeat of Carthage. He implies that before this, Rome had been a virtuous state due to a "pursuit of arms" (Velleius, *Roman History* 2.11.1) and that Roman society had moved from this to "idleness" (Velleius, *Roman History* 2.11.1). For Velleius, the "avarice furnished a motive for ruthlessness" (Velleius, *Roman History* 2.5), and as a result, "nothing was regarded as dishonourable that brought

profit" (Velleius, Roman History 2.5). As a result, we can see that Velleius viewed Virtus as the combination of different qualities such as discipline, vigilance, public-spiritedness, upstanding personal conduct and having the right intentions. He argues these qualities were restored by the principates of Augustus and Tiberius, which will be discussed later.

While all of these characteristics outlined by Cicero, Aristotle, Sallust and Velleius appear to widen the definition of virtus, I instead argue that these all contribute to the Republican idea that virtus was primarily found and defined in war, which would then reflect on a man's wider political and social activity. To be masculine was to act in battle for the greater good (i.e the Republic/Empire) and for your soldiers. To consider the aims of war or battle instead of acting in haste. To show self-restraint in your actions on the battlefield and then afterwards. While there is clearly an ethical widening of virtus in the Roman world toward the end of the Republican period, as seen in Cicero's work mentioned above, these ethics clearly overlap with courage and valour in battle, as "courage has been seen as a quality that is always usefully and necessarily awarded public recognition and honours" (Balmaceda, 2021, p17). In reality, "virtus came to be used for a variety of moral traits considered admirable in men" (Williams, 1999, p132). Williams (1999) suggests the virtus was the ideal of masculine behaviour, which all Roman men sought to embody in their actions and lifestyle. Further, according to McDonnell (2006), virtus in early Latin could be largely defined as courage, particularly in the field of martial action. It is noted, however, that due to the ambiguous definition of virtus in the Republic, this allowed virtus to be used as a tool for the "redefinition of Roman manliness" (McDonnell, 2006, p294), ensuring that Augustus was able to fit into the socially accepted definition during the early Empire.

As a result, my definition of virtus can be established and used to judge Augustus' relative masculinity:

- To act bravely in war
- To not act in anger or haste
- To focus on the public good

4. Forging an Image: Masculinity in Augustus' Coinage

The iconography from the coinage of Augustus' principate is an essential place to identify the presentation of Augustus' masculinity. Burnett (1977) explains that in 23 BC, Augustus brought the minting of gold and silver coinage under his direct control, while the minting of bronze and copper coins technically remained under the control of the Senate. Augustus' coinage reforms included standardising the composition of metals within coins and the denominations of values (Britannica, 2025). Augustus initially used mints in the East and Spain for gold and silver, but by 12 BC, Lugdunum became the main mint for gold, silver and bronze in the West (Britannica, 2025). As a result of these reforms in 23 BC, it can be argued that Augustus (and later emperors) "took enormous care to acquit their massive subject populations with the features of the emperor" (Grant, 2020, p81) – both literally and figuratively. However, this is not to suggest that Augustus had an ongoing direct say in the coinage design, which I will be using to illustrate his masculinity. But there is agreement across scholarship in this area that "the attachment of traditional Roman virtues to the figure of the emperor was communicated systematically" (Noreña, 2001, p153) through the imagery placed on the obverse and reverse of coins as these must be "read as part of a coherent whole" (Wallace-Hadrill, 1986, p69) to understand the message being portrayed to the wider public.

Wallace-Hadrill (1986) argues that coin iconography was used in part by Augustus to help the public identify and link his personal values and qualities with those of the state, which is reflected in the focus of the coins. Frequently, coins "celebrated the military exploits and martial glory of the emperor" (Noreña, 2001, p. 146) and were used to "spread throughout the Empire knowledge of their victories and achievements" (Bond, 1957, p.149). Alongside the military successes, the coins referenced "selected landmarks....such as important reforms, or popular building programs, or real or pretended victories" (Grant, 2020, p83). Therefore, coins are a very useful source for understanding how Augustus projected his masculinity to the Roman people and across the Empire, as the iconography of the coins would reflect the messages Augustus would have presented in his widespread propaganda.

As Augustus' reign was long and the minting of coins was extensive, I have had to be selective of the coins to be discussed to demonstrate his masculinity. The most frequent iconography theme is related to military prowess.

Actium



Image 1: RIC AUGUSTUS 545

Augustus outlined in the *Res Gestae* his martial “accomplishments as the ultimate authority regarding the fields of war and peace” (Havener, 2022, p490). Augustus’ masculinity can be clearly seen through the emphasis of his martial ability throughout the iconography on coins related to his

victory at Actium in 31 BC. Augustus “wanted to consolidate his status in Rome” (Herklotz, 2012, p13) through his military success, as it emphasised his masculinity. This can be seen in relation to two parts of the definition created earlier: to act bravely in war and to focus on the public good.

The obverse on **Image 1**, a coin dated to 27 BC, shows a bare-headed Augustus facing right, with the writing CAESAR DIVI F COS VII (Caesar Son of the Divine Consul for the 7th time). On the reverse is a crocodile facing right, with the writing AEGVPTO CAPTA (Egypt captured).

The victory at Actium in 31 BC was against a combined force of Mark Antony and Cleopatra. However, it was presented to the people of Rome as a victory over a foreign invader through the inclusion of the image of a crocodile, representing Egypt, and as outlined by Suetonius, “Augustus turned the kingdom of Egypt into a Roman province” (Suetonius, Deified Augustus 18). He ensured the image of a victory over a foreign power became a permanent idea by founding “a city close to the scene of the battle and named it Nicopolis” (Suetonius, Deified Augustus 18). Egypt

was still considered a powerful adversary by 31 BC, although the Ptolemies had become increasingly reliant on Rome for support against their enemies (Herklotz, 2012). However, Augustus



Image 2: RIC Augustus 131

and Rome still highly celebrated the defeat and capture of Egypt. The Senate rewarded his success against Egypt with a previously unheard-of triple triumph (Lewis, 2023), commemorating his success in Illyricum, the Battle of Actium, and the conquest of

Egypt. This triumph was commemorated with the building of the Arch of Augustus, as seen in **Image 2**. We can again see on the obverse the bare head of Octavian facing right, and on the reverse the Arch of Augustus. The Arch of Augustus, when built, spanned the Via Sacra between the Temple of Castor and Pollux and the Temple of Caesar. It was dedicated in 29BC for Augustus' success at Actium and formed part of the Forum Augusti. Its position by these two temples also emphasises Augustus' martial success (and therefore his masculinity) as the Temple of Castor and Pollux was dedicated to the two deities, who had appeared as horsemen at the Battle of Lake Regillus in aid of the Republic against the tyrannical kings of Rome. This creates the link between Augustus' success at Actium and his saving of the Republic from the threat of a foreign invader (Cleopatra) who would have ended the liberty of the Romans, like the hated kings of the past had done. This also fulfils the third criterion of masculinity – acting for the public good. The commemoration of the building of the Arch of Augustus suggests it was an event “of which the government was proud and which [was] worthy of remembrance” (Bond, 1957, p157) and that Augustus could be seen as the “sole source of victory” (Bond, 1957, p152) and therefore the sole saviour of Rome.



Image 3: RIC Augustus 264

Augustus' masculinity, as demonstrated through his martial prowess, can be further seen in **Image 3**. As the coin was minted in 29 – 27 BC, it again commemorates Augustus' triumph over Egypt. The obverse has an image of Victoria –

the Roman personification of victory (Britannica, 2025), standing on the prow of a ship, which is a reference to the Battle of Actium. On the reverse, we can see Augustus standing within a quadriga, complete with four horses, holding a wreath. The quadriga formed an essential part of the triumphal procession, and it could be assumed that the wreath is made



Image 4: 19-18 BC RIC AUGUSTUS 249

of laurel, further symbolising victory (Forum Ancient Coins, 2025). This can be assumed due to **Image 4**, as we can see on the obverse of this coin two laurel branches, with CAESAR AVGVSTVS

inscribed between them. The shape of the branches or wreath in image 3 is very similar to the laurel branches seen in **image 10**, so I suggest that these branches are indeed the same. On the reverse can be seen an oak wreath with the inscription OB OVIS SERVATOS (for the saved citizens). The oak wreath is in reference to the Civic Crown awarded to Augustus in 27 BC, a symbolic thanksgiving for saving the life of a citizen in battle – in this case, Augustus saving the Roman people from Egypt, again showing Augustus' masculinity, fulfilling the need to act for the public good. It could also be suggested that the victory at Actium was a victory "over the feminine forces of the East" (Kellum, 2003, p280), proving Augustus'



Image 5: RIC AUGUSTUS 277

masculinity. The awarding of the Civic Crown can be further seen in **image 5**, a coin minted in 27 BC when the honour was voted to Augustus by the Senate. The obverse has an image of a bare-headed Augustus facing right, while

the reverse has an eagle, symbolising a link to Jupiter, who was seen as the most important god for protecting the Roman state (National Geographic, 2025). Augustus, as military commander at Actium, would have had to pay homage to Jupiter at his temple after winning the battle. The eagle can be seen sitting above an oak wreath, symbolising the Civic Crown. Poking out above the eagle's wings can be seen the tops of two more branches, in the same shape of the laurel branches mentioned previously. The combination of the Civic Crown, the eagle and the laurel branches emphasises Augustus' martial masculinity.

Finally, **image 6**, a coin minted somewhere between 32 and 29BC, could be used to



Image 6: RIC AUGUSTUS 251

demonstrate the masculinity of Augustus as a result of Actium. The obverse of the coin shows the head of Venus, who was linked through Augustan propaganda to the myth of Aeneas, a Trojan hero repurposed to justify Augustus'

reign. Augustus claimed familiar links to Venus through the Julian bloodline, and Venus was the mother of Aeneas. Aeneas, being a Trojan hero, gave further legitimacy to Augustus'

reign and further confirmed his masculinity as a successful military leader, likened to the heroism of Aeneas. Venus was also linked to fertility, creating a link between Augustus and the peace and prosperity that followed his takeover of the Roman state. Augustus brought about a period of peace and prosperity (i.e. Pax Romana), acting in the public good by ending civil war and strife and removing the threat of Cleopatra/Egypt. In Augustus' own words, he had "extinguished the civil wars" (Res Gestae 31.1) and was named *pater patriae* (Father of the Fatherland) to honour his services to the state. Horace portrays Cleopatra as dangerous and "demented" and claims that she was "plotting demented ruin for the Capitol, Planning our empire's funeral rites" (Horace, Odes 1.37). This success over Egypt, therefore, further confirms his masculinity in the eyes of the Roman people. The reverse of the coin further cements this idea, as Augustus is shown in military dress, emphasising his military successes, which were celebrated in a previously unheard-of triple triumph. Cassius Dio outlines that Augustus celebrated victories against the Pannonians, Dalmatians, Iapydes, some Germans and Gauls (all on day one), the naval victory of Actium on day two, and the subjugation of Egypt on day three (Cassius Dio, Roman History 51.21).

Parthia

Augustus' masculinity being confirmed through military success can be further seen in coinage celebrating Rome's 'victory' over Parthia, and the "victory over Parthia was central to the image Augustus presented of himself" (Popkin, 2018, p. 271). To recover the standards lost after Crassus' death in 53BC while on campaign in the region, Augustus agreed to release the son of King Phraates IV. This success was so significant that Augustus' name was included in the hymn of the Salii by decree of the Senate (Cassius Dio, Roman History 51.20). This moment was commemorated in coinage, such as **Image 7**, which was



Image 7: RIC AUGUSTUS 287

minted in 18BC. On the obverse of the coin, the head of Liber Pater can be seen, facing right. Liber Pater was the Roman god of viticulture and wine, and embodied not just the bounty of the harvest, but also freedom and fertility

(Grimal, 1990, p246). On the reverse, we can see a kneeling male figure dressed in Eastern garb, holding a Roman standard, which is being held as a suppliant towards an unseen figure. The kneeling further suggests that the Eastern figure is subservient to the unseen

figure, demonstrating that the Romans, or Augustus (as can be implied as likely being the unseen figure), have not only regained the standards but now dominate the Parthians, being represented by this Eastern figure. The figure could potentially be the Parthian king, as this image was used elsewhere in poetry and sculpture (Wilson, 2023). From the combination of both images, which is essential for understanding the messaging of Roman coins as “both the obverse and reverse images represent images of authority” (Wallace-Hadrill, 1986, p. 69) and therefore the coins “persuade by offering images of authority” (Wallace-Hadrill, 1986, p. 84) we can infer that Augustus not only regained the Standards and status of the Roman army but also gave freedom (linked to Liber Pater) back to the Roman people because of this military ‘conquest’. Therefore, Augustus confirmed his masculinity through his successful military leadership and had acted for the public good through diplomacy.

Image 2 further supports the use of Parthia to secure the image of Augustus’ masculinity. Augustus himself proclaims that he “compelled them to return the spoils and standards of



Image 2: RIC Augustus 131

three Roman armies” (Res Gestae 29.2), and this coin celebrates the diplomatic victory as a military success. This coin is dated between 18 and 17BC and the obverse has the image of Augustus’ head, bare, facing right. On the reverse is a triple arch, with a four-horse chariot atop the arch. Two figures can be seen, one on each side of the chariot, with each figure holding a military standard over the chariot. Cassius Dio outlines that Augustus

took great pride in the achievement, declaring that he had recovered without a struggle what had formerly been lost in battle. Indeed, in honour of this success he commanded that sacrifices be decreed..... Moreover he rode into the city on horseback and was honoured with a triumphal arch.. (Cassius Dio, Roman History 54:8)

Therefore, it is likely that this coin commemorates this Triumphal Arch and further secures Augustus’ masculine image to the Roman people as a great military leader, conquering the Parthians for the Roman people and securing peace and prosperity for the Empire. The new

temple to Mars the Avenger was built to house the returned standards: “a temple to Mars Ultor on the Capitol, in imitation of that of Jupiter Feretrius, in which to dedicate the standards” (Cassius Dio, Roman History 54:8), further cementing Augustus’ masculine image and reputation, including an important act “of revenge on the Parthians” (Galinsky, 2012, p87). The text around the edge of the coin further supports this as it reads CIVIB ET SIGN MILIT A PARTH RECV, which can be translated to – Citizens and standards having been recovered from the Parthians. This emphasises the propaganda that Augustus promoted over the Parthian episode and demonstrates his masculinity to the Roman people.

Further victories

A broader theme of Augustus’ victories in military campaigns can be seen across several different coins. These military victories were important in Augustan propaganda as “they demonstrate that the morally reborn ‘Republic’ has won back the gods to its side” (Zanker, 1990, p185). Augustus’ successful intervention through his stepson Tiberius in the dynastic tribulations in Armenia resulted in the crowning of Tigranes III and “the recovery of Armenia and the installation of a client king” (Velleius, Roman History 122.1). As a result, Augustus



Image 8: RIC AUGUSTUS 514

was able to announce that he had successfully conquered Armenia, again outdoing great generals of the Republic era, such as Antony in the 30s BC.

Image 8 celebrates the successes of Augustus in

Armenia. This coin was issued between 20BC and 18BC, around the time of Armenia becoming a client-kingdom of the Roman Empire. The obverse shows a bare-headed Augustus facing right, while the reverse references Augustus’ actions in Armenia as a military conquest. On the reverse, we can see a bull on the floor, with Victory straddling it, stretching the neck of the bull upwards and cutting its throat in the same motion. Bulls were “often associated with the god Mars, who was the god of war and



Image 9: RIC AUGUSTUS 515

agriculture. As such, the bull was a symbol of both strength and fertility” (Baldwin, 2025), further highlighting Augustus’ military prowess over a militarily strategically important nation. Writing on the coin outlines the propaganda that had been present about the actions of Augustus, with the words ‘ARMENIA CAPTA’ – Armenia captured. These words are also seen on the coin in **image 9**, with this coin on the reverse showing a tiara and a bow case with a quiver. The tiara was a distinctive Armenian headdress of the royal family and was used to depict the nation itself. The use of the tiara signified the victory of Rome over Armenia, and the bow and arrow case were integral to Armenian culture and military. By having these images on the coin, it would be easy for the wider population to understand the messaging of Augustus’ reign, and his resulting masculinity from this military success.

Further evidence can be found of Augustus’ military dominance and masculinity with the use of imagery around Victory and triumph. We have already seen Victory specifically referenced in **image 3** with reference to Actium and **image 8** with the capture of Armenia. Victory also appears in **image 10**. The coin was issued around 19/18BC and commemorates



Image 10: RIC AUGUSTUS 31

either a victory or a period of peace. Victory can be seen flying, holding a wreath (a symbol of victory as well), above a shield inscribed with the initials CLV. The CLV dedication can be translated to the phrase Clipeus Votivis, or ‘Votive Shield’. The shield was a symbol of protection and military strength and was dedicated to deities as thanks for a military success. This, coupled with Augustus’ head appearing on the obverse, demonstrates that the coin celebrates Augustus’ masculinity through military prowess.

Evidence of further celebration of Augustus’ masculinity through military victory can be seen



Image 11: RIC AUGUSTUS 164b

in **image 11**. This coin was minted between 15 and 12BC. The obverse of the coin shows Augustus’ bare head facing right. The reverse shows two figures holding triumphal branches before Augustus, who is seated on a raised platform. The two figures are presenting the triumphal

in **image 11**. This coin was minted between 15 and 12BC. The obverse of the coin shows Augustus’ bare head facing right. The reverse shows two figures holding triumphal branches before Augustus, who is seated on a raised platform. The two figures are presenting the triumphal

branches to Augustus, passing their military success to him under his role as Imperator. Under the seated figure of Augustus, we can see the initials IMP X – celebrating Augustus' tenth year as Imperator. These triumphal branches are related to the military successes of Augustus' stepsons, Tiberius and Drusus, in the Alps region. In 15BC, they conducted campaigns in the region and annexed Raetia and Noricum into the Roman Empire. This also secured the northern frontier of Italy and established this area as a Roman province. Despite not taking the military action directly himself, receiving the triumph from his stepsons confirms Augustus' masculinity through the transfer of honour as the military successes occurred under his auspices. Augustus dresses this military success up as his own personal victory by claiming that he "successfully settl[ed] the affairs of those provinces" (Res Gestae 12.2), confirming the public image of his masculinity.

Image 12 continues with this theme of military victory over foreign adversaries. The obverse again bears the bare head of Augustus, with text reading IMP CAESAR AVGVST (Imperator Caesar Augustus). The reverse has the text P CARISIVS LEG PRO PR (Publius Carisius,



Image 12: RIC AUGUSTUS 6

legate for the praetor). Carisius had founded the colony of Emerita Augusta in 25BC for the veterans of legions who had previously participated in campaigns in northwestern Spain during the Cantabrian Wars (British Museum, 2025), which is where this coin was minted under the authority of Augustus. The reverse of the coin shows a trophy resting upon the head of a kneeling captive. The Cantabri, Astures and the Gallaceci were the last independent Celtic nations of Hispania and had been resisting the Romans' attempts to occupy the region. The Cantabrians were initially so successful that Augustus was forced to deploy eight legions into the conflict, with the conflict finally ending (excluding later rebellions) in 19BC. Augustus had journeyed to Segisama in 26BC to supervise the campaign in person, although he was forced to retire to Tarragona within a year due to illness. This coin could therefore be referring to the emperor's success at the Battle of Vellicia, which Augustus had personally led and had resulted in the taking of the town. This demonstrated Augustus' masculinity as he was "willing to undertake less glamorous tasks in the interests of

the state, and to fulfil his promise of restoring order and security to the provinces” (Goldsworthy, 2014, p. 244).

Augustus’ masculinity through military domination can be further shown through **image 13**,



Image 13: RIC AUGUSTUS 142

a coin issued in 17 BC. The obverse of the coin shows the bare head of Augustus facing right, alongside text reading SPQR IMP CAESARI (Senate and People of Rome to Emperor Caesar). The reverse of the coin shows two arches on a viaduct, with

each surmounted by an equestrian statue and a trophy of arms. The text between the arches reads QVOD VIAE MVNITAE SVNT – Because the roads have been repaired. This is significant as it is argued that “road-building was a prestigious activity symbolic of Roman triumph over the physical landscape and its conquered inhabitants” (Cooley, 2003, p. 255). This would therefore explain why the design of the viaduct on the coin looks like a military monument, similar in style to a triumphal arch. This, therefore, emphasises Augustus’ masculinity through the conquering of lands, even if by only building roads. In 20 BC, Augustus took direct responsibility for road building across Rome and the wider Empire, and through a Senate decree, the curators viarum kept track of the ongoing state of roads. Through these works, it became possible to “reach all parts of Italy and the provinces to the north, west and east” (Eck, 2007, p95), creating the dominance as required and therefore reinforcing Augustus’ masculinity.

Virtue

An aspect of Augustus’ masculinity in relation to focusing on the public good can also be



Image 14: BM CM 1995.4-1.1

seen in coinage. **Image 14** shows a coin which was produced in 28 BC. The obverse of the coin shows Augustus wearing the laurel wreath that was awarded to him during his triple triumph, facing right. The reverse of the coin

shows Augustus seated on a magistrates' chair, wearing a toga and holding out a scroll in his right hand. There is a magistrate's document container on the ground to his left. The inscription reads LEGES ET IVRA P R RESTITVIT, which is translated to: 'He has restored to the Roman people their laws and rights'. This coin is referencing the first Constitutional Settlement of 28-27BC in which Augustus' position as the head of the state was made legal through



Image 15: RIC Augustus 413

the passing of honours and powers by the Senate. Augustus formally returned the government to the Senate and people of Rome, which, on paper, meant they were "the final authority for important decisions" (Eck, 2007, p. 51). In the settlement, Augustus continued as consul and remained as imperator (amongst a range of honours), therefore retaining control of the army, giving him the real power over the Republic. It is obvious that Augustus "had not the slightest intention of really surrendering power" (Eck, 2007, p51), but the Senate was willing to allow this to end civil strife and bring in peace. The coin suggests that Augustus has acted in the public interest by accepting these powers and honours, such as the planting of laurel trees by the entrance of his house, the awarding of the Civic Crown and Shield of Virtue, whilst turning down others, he had restored peace and liberty in the process. This can be further supported by **image 15**, as the reverse of the coin, which was produced in 12BC, shows an image of Augustus helping to raise the personification of Res Publica to her feet, "at least in name" (Eck, 2007, p48). This can be seen as Augustus restoring the Republic to its former glory and improving upon it by ending the civil wars (i.e. 'raising' her from the floor), which had plagued it. Augustus has acted in the public good and therefore confirms his masculinity to the people of Rome.

The clipeus virtutis (Shield of Virtue) became an important symbol within the propaganda of



Image 16: RIC Augustus 42b

Augustus. The shield named four noble qualities upon it – virtutis L. clementiae, iustitiae pietatisque erga deos patriamque. These are translated to clemency, justice, military excellence and piety. The shield is referenced in **images 16 and 10**. On the obverse of

Image 16 we can see the image of Augustus, with bare head, facing left. The reverse shows the *clipeus virtutis*, with the inscription S.P.Q.R C.V, which is translated to ‘The Senate and People of Rome [dedicated the] Shield of Virtue. Image 14 also shows the *clipeus virtutis*, with Victory flying above the shield on the reverse of the coin. As previously explained, this coin was produced to commemorate a victory or period of peace, but is likely to be referring to the victories at the beginning of Augustus’ reign due to the reference to the *clipeus virtutis*, and “his virtues and service to the state [are] displayed by means of the symbolic tokens” (Zanker, 1990, p98), confirming his masculinity to the Roman public. Augustus was awarded the *clipeus virtutis* in 28-27 BC as part of the Constitutional Settlements. Augustus refers to this in the *Res Gestae* as a gift of thanks from the Senate and People of Rome “in return from this service of mine” (*Res Gestae* 34.2) and when the shield was placed in the Julian Senate House it was with an inscription “attesting that the Senate and the Roman people gave it to me because of my courage, clemency, justice and piety” (*Res Gestae* 34.2), reflecting my previously created definition – specifically in relation to justice (in my view, acting in the public good comes under the same umbrella) and military excellence. Therefore, it confirms Augustus’ public image of his masculinity.

Bringing all of these coins together, we can clearly see how Augustus’ masculinity was confirmed and promoted to the Roman people through a deliberate propaganda campaign. The iconography consistently portrayed Augustus as a great military leader, with a wide range of military victories, with a clear emphasis on his Eastern victories, who also brought peace and stability to Rome and the Empire. This therefore also fulfils the criteria of *virtus* established earlier by acting for the public good by expanding the Empire whilst bringing peace.

5. *Res Gestae: The Self-Authored Masculine Ideal*

The *Res Gestae Divi Augustus* (*Res Gestae*) is an inscription which was first discovered at Ankara, at a site commonly referred to as the *Monumentum Ancyranum*. The inscription was mainly intact and was in both Latin and Greek. The *Res Gestae* was inscribed on bronze pillars outside Augustus’ mausoleum in Rome after his death, but these have been lost (Claassen, 2019, p1). Further copies of the *Res Gestae* were inscribed on temples dedicated to him around the empire. It is from the version in Galatia that we can see how Augustus

wanted his masculinity to be seen by the wider public. We must approach the *Res Gestae* with caution, however, as “here is the truth, but not all of it” (Keppie, 1991, p131). While Augustus cannot openly lie, as it was inscribed for public scrutiny, and many of the events were witnessed by those reading the initial inscriptions outside of the mausoleum, he paints a picture of his reign and actions to fit his personal narrative and to promote his masculinity. Any facts and events which do not fit with his created image are either briefly covered or left out completely.

Further consideration must be taken in terms of the style of the *Res Gestae*. Claassen (2019) argues that the *Res Gestae* cannot be considered either as an example of ancient rhetorical or historiographic genre. Instead, Claassen (2019) suggests that it contained aspects of both. As a result, events presented in the *Res Gestae* can “be considered narratological regarding emphasis” (Claassen, 2019, p1). This is supported further by Galinsky (1996), as the order of the final paragraphs is narrative in style, with an emphasis on interpreting events fitting within the narrative genre. Therefore, it must be considered that Augustus tended to romanticise the events of his reign and the presentation of his masculinity. It must be considered that the *Res Gestae* is a memorial narrative of Augustus’ career and achievements; it will inevitably try to spin events in Augustus’ favour (Woolf, 1996) to best promote his masculinity.

For the purpose of this analysis, I will be using a translation by Takács, as they “have tried to follow Augustus’ syntax as much as possible” (Eck, 2007, p172). This will allow my analysis to focus more closely on how Augustus aimed to portray his masculinity, in his own words. After all, Augustus was “presenting himself in the way he hoped posterity would remember him” (Keppie, 1991, p131).

The presentation of Augustus’ masculinity in relation to his military success and acting for the public good is clear to see throughout the inscription.

From the beginning of the *Res Gestae*, Augustus emphasises his military success, even if the context is left deliberately vague. Augustus claims that when he raised an army at the age of 19, he did so to free “the Republic oppressed by the tyranny of a faction” (*Res Gestae* 1) – meaning the conspirators of the assassination of his adopted father, Julius Caesar. By phrasing the illegal act of raising an army before holding the required political office as an action to protect the wider Republic from ‘tyranny’, he can confirm his masculinity as acting

in the public good, while also claiming some military glory through the defeat of the 'faction. This idea is further developed when Augustus outlines that "those murdered my father I drove into exile and avenged their crime through lawful legal proceedings" (Res Gestae 2), referencing the fact that he was given *propraetorian imperium* by the Senate after he threatened to march on Rome, though Augustus suggests this was given to him by a willing Senate "to see to it that the Republic suffered no harm" (Res Gestae 1). This legalised his possession of the army, allowing him to present these unusual acts as legal and acting in the public good. An aspect of having virtue in the Republic was also to avenge those who had wronged you, hence his emphasis on attacking the conspirators to avenge Caesar's murder. The fact that the assassination occurred due to the belief that Caesar was acting king-like, as his dictatorship "meant an undisguised tyranny; his power was now not only absolute but perpetual" (Plutarch, Caesar 57) and was seen as a tyrannical figure, is conspicuously left out by Augustus, as this would not fit his masculine image of avenging Caesar's murder.

The scale of Augustus' military prowess across the borders of the Empire is clear through a wide range of sections of the Res Gestae and is something that Augustus clearly wanted to emphasise to the Roman people to demonstrate his masculinity. Early in the Res Gestae, Augustus outlines the sheer scale of his prowess and masculinity by stating that he

Celebrated two ovations and three curule triumphs, and I was acclaimed Imperator twenty-one times.... I deposited in the Capitol the laurel with which my fasces were wreathed fulfilling the vows that I had made in each war. For campaigns led successfully by me or my legates under my auspices, on land or on sea, the Senate decreed supplication for the immortal gods fifty-five times.... In my triumphs, nine kings and children of kings were led before my chariot. (Res Gestae 4)

This overwhelming evidence of military success and might clearly outlines the strong level of masculinity that Augustus was promoting to the Roman people, and reflects the imagery discussed in the coins earlier. No commander in the Republic had been awarded three triumphs, emphasising the scale of Augustus' military prowess and masculinity compared to other great Roman military leaders during the Republican era.

Other military themes are also contained within the Res Gestae. The following sections focus on Augustus extending the Empire, acting as a strong military commander for Rome, whether in person or through his family members:

I enlarged the territory of all provinces of the Roman people on whose borders were people who were not yet subject to our Imperium....Under my auspices, two armies

were led into Ethiopia and Arabia... great forces of both peoples were cut down in battle, and many towns captured. (Res Gestae 26)

I added Egypt to the empire of the Roman people. (Res Gestae 27)

The peoples of Pannonia.... were conquered by Tiberius Nero. I extended the borders of Illyricum up to the bank of the River Danube.... and compelled the Dacian peoples to submit to the commands of the Roman people. (Res Gestae 30)

Taking these sections together, we can see that Augustus promoted the idea that he had successfully extended the power and scope of the Empire, conquering places which had not been part of the Empire previously, as mentioned in Res Gestae 26 and 27. His emphasis on Ethiopia, Arabia and Egypt highlights that he had extended the boundary southwards into Africa and eastwards, both areas known to have fierce fighters. This shows Augustus' masculinity was strong as he had conquered places previously unconquerable. This is echoed in Res Gestae 30, with a focus on bringing the Pannonians and Germanic tribes near the River Danube. These tribes had caused a number of issues for the Romans near the Empire's border, so bringing them under control emphasises Augustus' military prowess and masculinity very clearly. While Res Gestae 26 and 30 both acknowledge that Augustus did not directly take part in the military action being outlined in the Res Gestae, Augustus ensures that the reader knows that these actions were conducted under his command as Imperator, a title and position he had held since 27BC under the First Constitutional Settlement. This supports the previous discussion of image 11, where he was being handed the triumphal branches after another military success led by his stepsons, Tiberius and Drusus, as discussed earlier.

Augustus also showed his masculinity by the fact that many states and kings asked for friendship with the Romans instead of having to face him in battle:

The Cimbri and Charydes and Semnones and other German peoples of that region, through their legates sought my friendship. (Res Gestae 26)

[The Parthians] to ask as suppliants the friendship of the Roman people. (Res Gestae 29)

This provides evidence of Augustus' military prowess and therefore masculinity as his reputation of power and military might is so great that these nations would rather seek friendship with the emperor than risk fighting and losing.

His masculinity is further confirmed through his ability to bring peace and order to provinces with a reputation for being difficult to manage and control:

When I returned from Spain and Gaul, after successfully having taken care of the affairs in these provinces, the Senate decreed... That an altar of Augustan peace should be consecrated next to the Field of Mars in honour of my return. (Res Gestae 12)

I recovered from Spain and Gaul and from the Dalmatians several military standards which were lost by other commanders. (Res Gestae 29)

I waged many wars on land and on sea, against internal and external foes, throughout the whole world and as victor I spared all citizens who asked for forgiveness. (Res Gestae 3)

The return of the standards referenced in Res Gestae 29 is an echo of the return of the standards from the Parthians discussed previously. By ensuring their return from Spain, Gaul, and Dalmatia, Augustus can claim not only military prowess through their successful recapture, but he is also returning prestige to the Roman people and the Empire. He has surpassed the generals and commanders under whom the standards were originally lost, proving his masculinity to be stronger. This is proven to be true by the fact that the Senate decreed for the Ara Pacis to be built to celebrate the era of peace brought by Augustus after his return to Rome, as outlined in Res Gestae 12. Figures on the Altar's outer walls wear laurel crowns, symbolising the victories Augustus brought to Rome, ensuring peace for the Roman people. Further to this, there is a great deal of symbolism contained in the sculpture across the walls (Ara Pacis Museum, 2025). For example, the panel on the East Wall is believed to show the goddess Roma seated on a pile of weapons, ensuring peace across the Empire (Galinsky, 2012), demonstrating Augustus' masculinity through military success by conquering other nations and ensuring the security of the Empire's borders.

There has been debate around the identity of two youths in the procession of figures on the altar, with Rose (2005) arguing that their Eastern-style dress suggests they are representing the sons and grandsons of Phraates sent to Rome as part of the agreement to secure the return of the standards from Parthia, as referenced in RG 29. Rose (2005) argues that the success over the standards and Parthia was vital to Augustus' image, as these themes and motifs are repeated across different media, such as the Ara Pacis, coins (as seen in images 2 and 7), the Temple of Mars Ultor and in Augustan poetry. It seems that the 'victory' over Parthia was vital to Augustus to promote his masculinity to the Roman people.

This is further shown in the continued highlighting in the Res Gestae of Parthia and the return of the military standards, and the matters in Armenia:

I could have made Greater Armenia a province, but I preferred, following the example of our ancestors, to hand over the Kingdom to Tigranes. (Res Gestae 27)

I compelled the Parthians to restore the spoils and the standards of three Roman legions to me, and to ask as suppliants the friendship of the Roman people. Those standards, moreover, I placed in the innermost part of the Temple of Mars Ultor. (Res Gestae 29)

The kings of the Parthians... sought refuge with me as suppliants....he sought our friendship by pledging his children. (Res Gestae 32)

I built the curia.... Temples on the capital to Jupiter Feretrius ... And Jupiter Libertas. (Res Gestae 19)

This is particularly important in relation to the Parthians seeking friendship and returning the lost standards, as shown in Res Gestae 29, as the Romans and Parthians had clashed and rivalled each other's power since the mid-first century BC. Their powerful forces had ensured the Parthians' ascendancy in the East, especially as they controlled what would become the Silk Road. Their famed archers also ensured their power in the region. A military success, even when in reality it was a negotiated peace, was vital for Augustus to be able to promote his masculinity.

Further to this, the rebuilding of temples was central to Augustus' claim of restoration of Rome's morals and, therefore, acting in the public good, further demonstrating his masculinity. But the choice of Augustus to highlight the Temple of Jupiter Feretrius and Temple of Jupiter Libertas is interesting and suggests that the Res Gestae was used by Augustus to promote not only his legacy, but also his masculinity.

The original Temple of Jupiter Libertas was built and dedicated by Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, who was consul in 238 BC. His son "placed a painting of the celebration of the victory of Beneventum in 214BC" (Platner, 1929, p. 297) during the Second Punic War, in which the Romans had defeated the Carthaginians and prevented Hannibal from receiving crucial reinforcements. The battle highlighted the importance of resilience for Roman success, and Tiberius Gracchus had proclaimed the liberty of his soldiers after the battle. The temple originally built by Gracchus was dedicated to the personification of Liberty, or freedom, which was now being tied to Augustus' reign. Augustus had acted in the public good by restoring freedom to the Roman people after a long period of instability and civil war at the end of the Republican period. Thus demonstrating his masculinity to the public.

The second temple, dedicated to Jupiter Feretrius is also significant for Augustus' masculinity. The cult of Jupiter Feretrius had continued to be important to the Romans after the first temple was said to have been the first in Rome and erected and dedicated by Romulus to commemorate his success over Acron, king of the Caeninenses (Platner, 1929, p293). The temple was said to hold the spolia opima from this victory and held later spoils of war after this point. The temple was rebuilt by Augustus early in his reign, and it kept its "religious and political significance of the temple offerings" (Springer, 1954, p31), although Springer (1954) argues that Augustus' dedication of the Temple of Mars Ultor on the Capitoline undermined its purpose to hold the spoils of war and therefore lessened its significance for the Roman people. This can be supported by the fact that Augustus had the scene of Romulus dedicating the spolia opima engraved onto the door of the Temple of Mars Ultor and had it built to revive the Temple of Jupiter Feretrius. It was into this temple that the standards regained from the Parthians were placed. However, the fact that Augustus did restore the Temple of Jupiter Feretrius shows that he was again demonstrating his masculinity by linking it to not only restoring an important religious building (and therefore acting in the public good) but also linking his 'military victory' over the Parthians to Romulus' spolia opima. Especially as, according to Cassius Dio, "Augustus received the standards and the prisoners as though he had defeated the Parthians in a campaign" (Cassius Dio, Roman History 54:8), reinforcing the importance of the Parthian campaign as a demonstration of Augustus' masculinity.

Finally, within the Res Gestae, Augustus outlines actions he took for the wider good of the people, beyond his military exploits. A clear focus is given to his extreme generosity, with Augustus outlining his various largesse for the people of Rome:

Of the grain supply.... I liberated the whole city from immediate fear and present danger by my expenditures and care. (Res Gestae 5)

In accordance with the testament of my father, I paid each member of the Roman plebs. (Res Gestae 15)

I assisted the public treasury with my own money four times". (Res Gestae 17)

When the revenue in kind fell short, I gave out allocations of grain and money from my own. (Res Gestae 18)

The monetary generosity is clear, with Augustus outlining the gifts of sesterces to the plebs in Res Gestae 15, outlining numerous occurrences in 29BC (twice), 24BC, 23BC, 11BC, 5BC,

and 2BC. Coupled with the giving of money to the treasury as stated in RG 17 and 18, a clear picture of Augustus as the main benefactor of Rome becomes clear. His actions are clearly in line with my definition of masculinity, as by giving these gifts to the people, he was acting in the public interest.

His intervention in the grain supply as outlined in Res Gestae 5 is more complicated than is suggested. While it is clear that his intervention saved Rome's population from immanent starvation, it has been suggested that Augustus allowed the crisis "to worsen in order to provoke the desired outbreak of popular loyalism" (Yakobson, 2021, p278), to create a food shortage in order to allow him to step in by "reorganising the administration of the grain supply" (Galinsky, 2012, p90), elevate starvation and secure his popularity with the people. Augustus was careful to portray that his new position of cura annonae was due to "the pressure of immediate circumstances: by agreeing to take up this additional burden he bowed to necessity and to the people's wishes" (Yakobson, 2021, p277), allowing him to portray his masculinity by acting in the public good and preventing famine from taking hold in Rome, whilst also portraying himself as the protector of the Republic by refusing the pleb's demand for him to hold the dictatorship as a result of the food emergency (Res Gestae 5).

As a result of this examination of the Res Gestae, we can clearly see that Augustus took great care to present himself as the idealised masculine figure to the Roman people through his focus on his military prowess and actions he took in the public good. Augustus clearly conforms to the definition established earlier, and the coins discussed previously echo the carefully curated image of Augustus as presented in the Res Gestae. The Res Gestae confirms Augustus as the embodiment of virtus and the ideal masculine man.

6. Military Prowess and the Public good: Velleius, Suetonius and Nicolaus on Augustus' Virtus

As seen with the iconography on the coins alongside the accounts of military action within the Res Gestae, all three authors highlight Augustus' masculinity through military prowess. Firstly, we can see an emphasis on Augustus' ability to expand the boundaries of the Empire and therefore confirming his masculinity through military prowess. Nicolaus and Velleius

portray these military actions as more significant and extensive than any previous Roman commander. Nicolaus claims that Augustus “extended the boundary of Roman power to its farthest extent”, which included areas and people “who had never been subjugated in the memory of man” (Nicolaus, *The Life of Augustus* Ex 1.1). Velleius echoes this sentiment by describing Augustus’ victories as “the universal peace his victories imposed upon the world, the innumerable achievements” (Velleius, *Roman History* 89.6). These authors are referencing victories including Egypt, Dalmatia, Pannonia, Noricum, Raetia, Hispania and areas in Africa. As Nicolaus suggests, these were “great wars, both domestic and foreign” (Nicolaus, *The Life of Augustus* Ex. 2.2). Velleius also outlines that the victory over Dalmatia was particularly important as Augustus’ actions meant that “after 220 years of armed rebellion, [Dalmatia] was brought to a firm acknowledgement of Roman rule” (Velleius, *Roman History* 90.1), suggesting that he has out-performed previous generals and therefore could be considered more masculine than these men. This large expansion of the Empire shows that Augustus was able to prove his masculinity to the Roman people, acting as a great military commander while also bringing peace to the Empire. These two authors, being contemporaries of Augustus, also reflect that his masculinity was understood by the Romans at the time, due to masculinity continuing to be based on Republican ideals at the time of Augustus’ reign, as the achievements “largely line up with the traditional areas of elite masculinity” (Racette-Campbell, 2023, p12).

Suetonius also acknowledges Augustus’ masculinity when discussing his military achievements, but in less hyperbolic terms. Suetonius notes that Augustus “celebrated three full triumphs” (Suetonius, *Deified Augustus* 22), which Livy outlines was a recognition for his victories: “the first for his campaign in Illyricum, the second for his victory at Actium, and the third for his defeat of Cleopatra” (Livy, *Periochae* 133.2). The victory at Actium was so important for Augustus and his masculinity that he “founded a city close to the scene of the battle and named it Nicopolis” (Suetonius, *Deified Augustus* 18), translating from the Greek as ‘City of Victory’, commemorating his victory over Egypt, and his masculinity, for all eternity. Suetonius also describes Augustus’ military policy in terms that are similar to Cicero’s description of *virtus* in *Tusculan Disputations* 3.34, as Suetonius notes that Augustus condemned military commanders who acted in “haste and recklessness” (Suetonius, *Deified Augustus* 25), suggesting that Augustus’ masculinity has not only been proven through military success as seen in the triple triumph, but that his expansion of the Empire was

carefully planned and designed to not endanger the stability of the Empire. Therefore, his masculinity can also be shown through his acting in the public good, as previously defined. Conversely, Suetonius notes that Augustus “never wantonly invaded any country, and felt no temptation to increase the boundaries of the Empire or enhance his military glory” (Suetonius, Deified Augustus 21). This assessment by Suetonius however cannot be seen as entirely correct as the *Res Gestae* clearly emphasises that Augustus wanted to project the image that he did in fact wish to extend the Empire, as sections of the *Res Gestae* 26 to 33 outline in great detail the expansion of the Empire and the conquering of a vast number of areas, such as Dalmatia, Gaul, Spain, Germany, the Alps, Ethiopia, Arabia, Egypt and Pannonia. This, in fact, shows he had “expanded [the Empire] frontiers in many directions” (Britannica, 2025). Therefore, despite what Suetonius suggests, Augustus did confirm his masculinity through extensive military success and prowess.

As noted in the coins and *Res Gestae*, the diplomatic victory over Parthia and Armenia is also noted by Velleius and Suetonius. Velleius summarises the victory over these nations as a time when “the Parthian king handed back to Augustus the Roman standards lost... and those yielded to his son Phraates when Anthony's army was repelled” (Velleius, Roman History 91.1) and that “he marched into Armenia with his legions and brought it back into the control of the Roman people” (Velleius, Roman History 94.4). Augustus sent Tiberius to the East, as he knew Tiberius’ reputation as a successful commander, “so alarmed the Parthian king that he sent his own children to Caesar as hostages” (Velleius, Roman History 94.4). While these quotes do show that the victory was indeed a diplomatic victory and less of a military victory, as the coins and *Res Gestae* discussed previously suggested, this victory over the Parthians and return of the standards enforced Augustus’ masculinity, as he could force a strong empire like the Parthians to capitulate to Roman will without even having to fight. This is reflected in Suetonius, although the language used is more neutral and does not imply a military or diplomatic victory. Suetonius instead describes that the Parthians

Were ready to grant Augustus’ claims on Armenia and, when he demanded the surrender of the Eagles captured from Crassus and Antony, not only returned them but offered hostages into the bargain. (Suetonius, Deified Augustus 21)

There is no explanation of why the Parthians offered to send hostages to Augustus. Strabo collaborates this as he argues that Phraates IV was “so eager to maintain friendly relations with Caesar Augustus that he even returned the standards” (Strabo, Geography 16.1.28), but

again without any real explanation for why he was keen to do so. Tacitus suggests that this action was taken as a result of “not so much fear of Rome as distrust of the loyalty of his own people” (Tacitus, *Annals* 2.1). In reality, Phraates IV was willing to return the standards in order to retrieve his son, who had been taken hostage by Tiridates II after he was ousted by Phraates in 27BC and had fled to Rome (Garthwaite, 2005, p80). So while Augustus had been able to project his negotiations with Parthia as a victory to confirm his masculinity to the Roman people, by using these other sources, we get a clearer picture of the reality of the situation. This confirms that Augustus’ projection of his masculinity from the Parthian and Armenian episodes was extremely successful propaganda, based on the Republican values of masculinity where “courage, particularly of the martial variety, represented the highest standard of manliness” (McDonnell, 2006, p62).

As previously discussed, Augustus was also able to promote his masculinity by showing that he, in fact, did not always need to fight wars, as his reputation as a military commander and leader was so renowned that other nations asked for peace and confirmed his domination. Nicolaus claims that “even without arms...he persuaded them to voluntary obedience through the manifest demonstration of his benevolence” (Nicolaus, *The Life of Augustus* Ex. 1.1). Augustus outlines some instances where this occurred:

Embassies of kings from India, not seen with any Roman commander before, were often sent to me. The Bastarnae, the Scythians, and the kings of the Sarmatians, who live on this side of the river Tanais and beyond, the kings of the Albanians and the Iberians and the Medes sent ambassadors to seek our friendship. (*Res Gestae* 31)

He goes further, detailing that the kings of:

“the Parthians...the Medes...the Adiabeniens, Dumnobellaunus and Tincommis of the Britons, Maelo of the Sugambrians...of the Marcomani and Suebians, sought refuge with me as suppliants.” (*Res Gestae* 32)

This gives a clear image of Augustus’ reputation being so great that a vast number of nations sought peace from the Romans, rather than fight. Suetonius supports this as he gives the reason for supplication by the Indians and Scythians as being due to “his reputation for courage and clemency” and that these nations “voluntarily sent envoys to Rome, pleading for his friendship and that of his people” (Suetonius, *Deified Augustus* 21). Not only does Augustus’ masculinity come from his many military victories, but also through his ability to ensure peace across the Empire by maintaining positive relationships with other nations beyond the empire’s boundaries. As Velleius claims, “There was nothing thereafter, which

men could hope for from the gods, nor the gods provide to men, no blessings which in their wildest imaginings men could pray for" (Velleius, Roman History 89.2) as "twenty years of civil strife were ended, foreign wars laid to rest, peace restored, and man's crazed lust for warfare everywhere dead and buried" (Velleius, Roman History 89.3). No other military commander in the Republican era had been as successful in bringing peace to the Roman people. This further cements Augustus' masculinity through acting for the public good by restoring peace and stability. Suetonius states that "The gates of the Temple Janus Quirinus, which had been closed more than twice since the foundation of Rome, he closed three times during a far shorter period" (Suetonius, Deified Augustus 22). The so-called gates of the Temple were symbolic, with large bronze doors which were opened in times of war to allow Janus to lead the Roman army. As a result, the gates served as "a kind of barometer of war. When the temple doors were open, it showed that the state was under arms; when closed, that all the surrounding peoples were subdued" (Livy, Periochae 1.19.2). Augustus's ability to close the gates three times, as noted by Suetonius, shows that Augustus "brought peace to the whole world, by land and sea" (Livy 1.19.3).

Suetonius on Augustus' Temper and Lack of Self-Control

There are instances, however, outlined in Suetonius, which would suggest that Augustus was not always fully in control of his emotions. This could be seen to undermine his masculinity, as Cicero argued that to act in anger meant you were not in control of your mind and actions (Cicero, Tusculan Disputations 3.77). There are a number of instances in particular which we should note, some of which occurred before Augustus' principate, while he was a member of the Second Triumvirate. According to Suetonius, while in the Triumvirate, "many of Augustus' acts won him the hatred of the people" (Suetonius, Deified Augustus 26), particularly in relation to the extensive and excessive proscriptions undertaken by the Triumvirate against their enemies after 43BC. Suetonius states that Augustus "carried it out more ruthlessly than either of them" and that "Augustus alone demanded that no one was to be spared" (Suetonius, Deified Augustus 27). The proscriptions targeted members of the senate and equestrian class and included Augustus' former ally Cicero. To carry out mass murder for the principal reason of removing enemies and gathering funds for the war against the conspirators of Caesar's assassination, as Augustus "sold the remainder of the property confiscated under the proscriptions" (Appian, Civil War 5.12), does not suggest a man in control of his emotions and actions. Augustus' masculinity could be seen to be

undermined by these actions, although Suetonius noted that Augustus later “emphasised his regret for this rigorous attitude” (Suetonius, *Deified Augustus* 27), suggesting a softening in approach by Augustus, helping to restore his masculine image to some extent. Some have argued that during this period, Augustus “was not ‘naturally cruel’, but wished to be loved” (Harlow, 2019, p168). However, two other examples of extreme behaviour while a member of the Triumvirate further undermine this. Suetonius outlines the murder of an equestrian called Pinarius, who was transcribing a speech being given by Augustus. According to Suetonius, Augustus “had him stabbed there and then” for “taking too close an interest in the proceedings” (Suetonius, *Deified Augustus* 26) and then in relation to the praetor Quintus Gallius, a rather unpleasant set of actions were taken:

While paying Augustus his respects, clutched a set of writing-tablets underneath his robe. Augustus suspected that he had a sword, but dared not have him searched on the spot, for fear of being mistaken; so presently ordered an officer’s party to drag him away from the tribunal. Gallius was tortured as if he were a slave, and though he confessed to nothing, Augustus himself tore out his eyes and sentenced him to death. (Suetonius, *Deified Augustus* 26)

The torture and murder of a person who was likely not carrying a sword (this detail is not confirmed in Suetonius’ account) does not confirm Augustus’ masculinity as he is clearly not thinking clearly or rationally – the opposite of what Cicero, Aristotle, Sallust and Velleius outline as the key to a man’s masculinity.

During Augustus’ reign, we also see two examples of his anger and lack of masculinity. The Varus disaster is a well-known moment of military failure for Augustus. Taking place in 9 AD, the Battle of Teutoburg Forest was fought between an alliance of Germanic peoples and the Romans. While Varus was deliberately led astray by his advisor Arminius, his poor decision-making led to the deaths of between 15,000 and 20,000 – three legions (Syme, 1933) of Roman soldiers. The disaster is considered one of the most important defeats in Roman history, as it brought to an end the period of expansion which Augustus had been leading, as seen previously. While the failure in itself undermines Augustus’ masculinity due to a lack of military prowess, his reaction to the news highlights could be seen as an overly emotional display, which could have been perceived as effeminate. To be considered effeminate a Roman man would demonstrate “an underlying failure to live up to the central imperative of

masculinity: control and dominion, both of others and yourself” (Williams, 1999, p127).

According to Suetonius, Augustus

took the disaster so deeply to heart that he left his hair and beard untrimmed for months; he would often beat his head on a door, shouting: ‘Quintilius Varus, give me back my legions!’ and always kept the anniversary as a day of deep mourning. (Suetonius, Deified Augustus 23)

Augustus would have been expected to have shown more restraint and stoicism in defeat instead of reacting like a woman. Roman masculinity was “embodied in restraint and control” (Williams, 1999, p132), which is not shown by Augustus in relation to the Varus disaster.

A final two stories from Suetonius highlight this pattern of overreaction. One is in relation to his grandson’s tutor. Suetonius describes that “Gaius Caesar’s tutor and attendants used their master’s sickness and subsequent death as an excuse for arrogant, greedy behaviour in his province, Augustus had them flung into a river with weights tied around their necks” (Suetonius, Deified Augustus 67). The second story in the same section sees Suetonius explain how Augustus sentenced “Thallus, an imperial secretary, to have his legs broken for divulging the contents of a letter” (Suetonius, Deified Augustus 67). These actions do not have the hallmarks of an individual thinking rationally and therefore undermine Augustus’ masculinity.

However, due to Suetonius’ enjoyment of scandalous stories and salacious gossip, we must approach these stories with a little caution. These different stories also do not appear in other accounts, so it is difficult to verify their validity. Also, in comparison to later emperors such as Tiberius and Gaius, of whom there are many accounts of torture and over-the-top executions, Augustus’ behaviour in these anecdotes is less severe and has less of an impact on his masculine image.

As a result of combining the contemporary accounts of Nicolaus and Velleius, alongside the later Suetonius, we can see how Augustus used his military successes to demonstrate and prove his masculinity to the people of Rome. He was able to “generate social prestige from successful military operations” (Havener, 2022, p489). He extended the Empire, but not without a plan, and compelled other nations to seek peace with the Romans. He won back

the standards lost to Parthia, restoring *dignitas* and glory to Rome – acting in the public good. While there are stories within Suetonius which could be seen to undermine Augustus' masculine image, his focus on scandal does undermine the evidence to some extent. Therefore, these written accounts prove that Augustus was successful in promoting his masculinity and was seen as an idealised masculine figure in Rome.

7. Conclusion

Through the examination of the iconography of the selected coins, I have successfully proven that the image of Augustus as the idealised masculine figure was promoted to the Roman people. His military prowess has surpassed others in Roman History, conquering and pacifying peoples and provinces across the Empire. His restoration of the Standards lost in Parthia was portrayed as the pinnacle of his military prowess. By promoting the diplomatic victory as a military success to the Roman people, as shown through the awarding of a triumphal arch referenced in the coins seen in images 2 and 7, Augustus had simultaneously restored military pride and brought peace and stability to the people of Rome. When combined with the continued emphasis of the military victories in Augustus' own words through the *Res Gestae*, a clear and unambiguous image of the ideal masculine emerges. Powerful nations sought out the friendship of Augustus; they agreed to the terms of Roman peace. Augustus cared for the people through important public acts such as the restoration of the grain supply, noted in the *Res Gestae*, the repair of roads, which was also promoted as a military victory, as seen in image 13, as well as gifts of money to the plebeians. He acted, according to the *Res Gestae*, for the public good consistently and throughout his principate. The accounts of Nicolaus and Velleius echo this propaganda and image, and it is only Suetonius who suggests a quick temper, as shown through his torture and murder of individuals suspected of undermining his position, and a morose temperament illustrated by the Varus disaster, which could have undermined his masculinity. However, these anecdotes of Suetonius are not verified by other source material I covered and coupled with Suetonius's enjoyment of a good scandal, we can dismiss this characterisation of Augustus' masculinity. Therefore, the combination of the wealth of evidence from coinage, the *Res Gestae* and a range of different written historical accounts confirms that Augustus was

indeed seen as the idealised masculine figure, an image he was careful to propagate in Rome and across the Empire.

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