

**AA309\_3   Culture, Identity and Power in the Roman Empire**

**The repute and reality of being a Roman emperor**

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## Introduction

This course considers the relationship of the emperor with the Roman provinces, and how this relationship was mediated and represented, as well as how the culture of empire was manifested in the identity of the emperor.

This OpenLearn course provides a sample of Level 3 study in [Arts and Humanities](http://www.open.ac.uk/courses/find/arts-and-humanities?utm_source=openlearn&utm_campaign=ol&utm_medium=ebook).

## Learning outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

* understand the central role played by the Roman emperor in the construction and development of culture, identity and power.

## 1 The emperor and his subjects

The image of Augustus as a good emperor persisted after his death. This was due at least in part to the success and thoroughness of his own image creation. But it also reflected the interests of his immediate successors. The Julio-Claudian emperors (so named because they were connected by blood with Julius Caesar or the Claudian family of Tiberius – see the family tree in Wells, pp. 64–5) claimed power by descent and thus it generally assisted and justified their own position to celebrate Augustus and his achievements. To a degree this was true not just of the Julio-Claudians but all subsequent emperors. This is not to say that Augustus was above criticism in the centuries that followed his life (for example, see Tacitus, Annals 1.1–1.4, and Essay Two in Huskinson, p. 44); but to condemn Augustus outright would be to condemn the political system he created and thus by association the living emperor.

In this course you will explore the public image of some of Augustus’ successors. Integral to this public image was the way in which the emperor treated and was seen to treat his subjects. Here you will focus on one key group – the provincials – but other key groups of subjects included the senatorial élite, the populace of Rome and the army. These groups sum up the major divisions of people with whom the emperor had to interact; in broad terms his popularity depended on winning their favour and support. These group labels are being employed for convenience and where appropriate other groups will also be considered. General labels, such as provincials, troops, people and senators, inevitably lead to a loss of individuality and you will need to remember that not all members of these groups thought the same or were the same.

Reconstructing what anyone actually thought of a given emperor is impossible, as is knowing what the emperor thought of them. The evidence often reflects idealisations or demonisations of relationships. The voices of the common people, troops or provincials are rarely found in the extant sources. This reflects, in part, both geographical and political distance from the centre of power. It is not to say that these people did not have opinions about the emperor, but these were rarely recorded or they were summarised in sources mediated through an élite perspective centred on Rome. Even when evidence such as statues, inscriptions and honorary dedications set up to the emperor by soldiers or civilians survives, it remains difficult to evaluate the rationale behind these gestures and the responses they evoked. As the geographical and political distance between people and the emperor decreases the evidence becomes less abstract. The bulk of the evidence is focused on Rome itself and the loudest voice belongs to the élite, and especially those of senatorial and equestrian status. These were men of money and education who served the emperor and some of whom wrote or commissioned diverse forms of literature, largely for the consumption of men of the same standing. Within this literature opinions were expressed and judgements passed on emperors, although when studying these it needs to be remembered that the authors often had their own political agendas or were influenced by those of others.

A particular emperor may have been, and may have remained, the hero of the common people or the troops but despised by the senatorial élite, or indeed vice versa. The possibility of a mixed response to the life and times of a given emperor is important to note since often the surviving literary accounts tend to polarise emperors as good or bad, as loved by all or hated by all. The evidence is often coloured by the objectives of the creators; we are left with a series of representations – not just of how the living emperor presented himself but how he was presented by others once he was dead. Evaluating the reign of an emperor involves not only assessing how the emperor treated others and was regarded by them, but how he manipulated the reputations of his predecessors and how his own reputation was subsequently manipulated by his successors.

Your work in this course will involve an assessment of the ways in which the emperor had contact with the provinces in particular and how and why this affected his reputation. The types of evidence available are diverse and the following sections by necessity focus only on selected aspects of this. In particular you will look at a range of literature – history, biography and panegyric. You will be introduced to the conventions of these genres and the importance of understanding the perspectives of the individual authors. In particular you will become familiar with the ancient approach to writing history, which was often very different from our own. Much, although not all, of what you consider will represent posthumous judgements on the emperors involved rather than full accounts of reigns. It will not be possible here to assess in detail the actions, policies, building schemes and so forth of all the emperors mentioned, but you should remember that literary judgements were only one aspect of the posthumous legacy left by an emperor.

The sources you will consider provide insights into the reigns of some of the emperors of the first two centuries AD. The intention is to identify general trends and thus you are not expected to learn all the dates and events associated with these emperors. You should, however, familiarise yourself with this information by looking at the list of key dates from Experiencing Rome, below. For further details on the reigns of the emperors mentioned you should refer, if you so wish, to Goodman (chapters 5, 6 and 7) or Wells (chapters 5, 7 and 9).

Please click to view [key dates from Experiencing Rome](https://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/mod/resource/view.php?id=26008) (pdf, 1 page)

## 2 The emperor and the provinces

## 2.1 The provinces

Controlling and governing the provinces was a substantial part of an emperor's remit. Here you will consider different ways in which the emperor had contact with his provincial subjects. You will work through some sections from books by Goodman and Lewis, and Reinhold and watch a short video sequence.

Start of Activity

**Exercise 1**

Start of Question

Initially I would like you to consider, in general terms, how the face, name and authority of the emperor were promoted across the vast territories of the empire. In the Res Gestae of Augustus (a vast inscription in which Augustus recorded his achievements as a type of autobiographical epitaph) he was presented as a world ruler in both Rome and the provinces. Can you suggest some other major mechanisms through which the provincials would have come into contact with the emperor or would have been reminded of his importance? Very briefly note down your ideas.

End of Question

[View discussion - Exercise 1](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session2_Discussion1)

End of Activity

I want now to consider each of these factors in more detail.

## 2.2 Personal contact

Remember that although the city was important to him the emperor did not have to pass all his time in Rome, and many emperors visited other parts of the empire. Such mobility was often associated with military campaigns. For instance, there were a significant number of campaigns undertaken during the reign of Augustus, and these were generally headed by the emperor or members of his family. Emperors such as Gaius, Claudius, Domitian, Trajan and Marcus Aurelius also campaigned on the edges of the empire, which meant that they had to pass through and stay in many provincial towns. The emperor Hadrian is also known to have travelled the empire extensively, viewing and exploring his domain (see Lewis and Reinhold, pp. 460–2). It is also worth remembering that many emperors had family connections with certain provinces and cities. The family of Trajan, for example, was from Spain and the emperor Septimius Severus came from north Africa. Even if the emperor could not visit all parts of the empire, he could maintain personal contact through intermediaries ([see Section 2.3](#sec002_003)). In addition the representatives of the provinces could come to Rome. Towns and settlements could send ambassadors to Rome to represent their viewpoints, and in addition every Roman citizen had the right to appeal to the emperor for a fair trial. (For references to embassies see Lewis and Reinhold, pp. 9, 274, 287, 522.) This is not to say that all provincials had close contact with the emperor, but it was important for the emperor to appear accessible and not to allow communications to be hindered by the size of the empire.

## 2.3 Intermediaries

The emperor could not be in all places at once, and he employed subordinates and representatives in the provinces to act on his behalf.

Start of Activity

**Exercise 2**

Start of Question

You should now read Goodman, pages 100–4 and 107–10, below. This will provide you with an overview of how the provinces were administered.

What did the emperor expect of his representatives and how did he achieve this?

Please click to read the [Goodman extract](https://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/mod/resource/view.php?id=26011). (PDF, 9 pages, 0.6 MB)

End of Question

[View discussion - Exercise 2](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session2_Discussion2)

End of Activity

It is difficult to judge the degree to which individual emperors took an active interest in the details of provincial administration. Many may have been content to allow their subordinates to monitor affairs, only interfering when a crisis arose. But the correspondence between the emperor Trajan and the governor of Bithynia, Pliny the Younger, illustrates the emperor's advisory role on many matters concerning the day-to-day running of the province. (For examples look up Pliny the Younger in the index of Lewis and Reinhold.) We do not know how representative Trajan and specifically his relationship with Pliny was, but the correspondence at the very least illustrates one of the avenues by which the provincials could gain the ear of the emperor. (For further discussion of correspondence and communication between the emperor and his officials refer to Experiencing Rome, Essay Two, pp. 37–41.) You should also note that informal intermediaries could be important. People who knew and met the emperor, both in official and unofficial contexts, could serve as points of contact between the emperor and local communities. In particular, towns and cities sought patrons – wealthy and influential men who could represent their interests in Rome (for examples of patrons see Lewis and Reinhold, pp. 45, 262, 271–4). Members of the imperial family could be particularly powerful patrons and the ultimate patron was the emperor himself.

## 2.4 Image

In the city of Rome the emperor glorified his relationship with the provinces. Here you will consider how the emperor was exalted in the provinces. It was impossible for the emperor to be seen personally by all his subjects and so methods were employed to publicise his face and name – to overcome geographic distance by making the emperor familiar to his people. Standardised images of the emperor – on statues, busts and coins – were widely copied and placed in prominent public locations.

Start of Activity

**Exercise 3**

Start of Question

To explore these and some additional methods you should now watch ‘The emperor in the provinces’, below. This video sequence examines how the face and name of the emperor were promoted in the provinces.

You may find it useful to refer to the map showing the provinces of the empire (Map 1 from Experiencing Rome, below) and the statue of Augustus (Plates 1 and 2).

Please click to view [the map](https://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/mod/resource/view.php?id=26012). (PDF, 1 page, 0.4 MB)

Please click to view [Plate 1 Marble statue of Augustus](https://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/mod/resource/view.php?id=26019), found in the Via Labicana, Rome. The head is covered, suggesting Augustus' role as pontifex maximus. After 12 BC, height 207 cm. Museo Nazionale, Rome. (Photo: Alinari). (PDF, 1 page, 1.7 MB)

Please click to view [Plate 2 Detail of Plate 1](https://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/mod/resource/view.php?id=26020). (Photo: Alinari). (PDF, 1 page, 2.3 MB)

As you watch note the major ways in which the image of the emperor was presented in the provinces.

Emperor and empire (part 1; 9 minutes)

Start of Media Content

Video content is not available in this format.

Emperor and empire - part 1

[View transcript - Emperor and empire - part 1](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session2_Transcript1)

End of Media Content

Emperor and empire (part 2; 6.5 minutes)

Start of Media Content

Video content is not available in this format.

Emperor and empire - part 2

[View transcript - Emperor and empire - part 2](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session2_Transcript2)

End of Media Content

Emperor and empire (part 3; 6 minutes)

Start of Media Content

Video content is not available in this format.

Emperor and empire - part 3

[View transcript - Emperor and empire - part 3](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session2_Transcript3)

End of Media Content

End of Question

[View discussion - Exercise 3](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session2_Discussion3)

End of Activity

The image of the emperor was promoted in the provinces through multiple methods. Additional areas not explored in the video include further elements of the emperor's role as a benefactor. For example the emperor might fund local shows or gladiatorial contests, or he could elevate the status of a community or reward elements of the population with Roman citizenship. Such actions might be commemorated by inscriptions and those who gained citizenship under a given emperor normally adopted elements of the imperial nomenclature as their own. But above all such actions indebted the populace to the emperor and promoted loyalty to his name and image.

Promoting the name of the emperor entailed benefits to both sides. It was to the emperor's advantage to gain popularity and support, but it could also benefit the local community to gain imperial favour. It is often difficult to reconstruct the specific circumstances behind certain actions such as the erection of statues. Did the emperor dictate that these should be set up? Or was it a spontaneous gesture from the provincial community? Often the reality probably lay somewhere between the polarity of an enforced action and a voluntary one. Both sides knew the benefits to be gained and the power that was associated with the face and name of the emperor.

## 2.5 Cult

In many ways the emperor became a figurehead who helped to bind the empire together. The emperor was promoted as larger than life, a man who bordered on the divine. It is worth noting that the text of the Res Gestae from Ankara was found attached to the walls of the temple of Rome and Augustus; it was placed in a religious centre where the emperor was worshipped. The video section on ‘The emperor in the provinces’ also examined several cult buildings which promoted the emperor's name and image in a religious context. While alive Augustus and his successors were not regarded as gods, at least not in Rome. It was only at death that apotheosis, or the raising of the emperor's spirit to divine heights, occurred as a result of a vote in the senate. But Augustus (and his successors) did explore and exploit his divine associations. He became the leader of Roman state religion – the pontifex maximus; the relationship between Augustus and the divine Julius Caesar was celebrated. Augustus also traced his ancestral line back to the goddess Venus and claimed close ties with the god Apollo – and few people could boast of such close personal connections with the gods! Even the name Augustus had a sense of the revered and sacred about it. It was thus a relatively small step for his subjects to view Augustus himself as divine and in some parts of the empire the living emperor was worshipped.

To a modern audience it may seem bizarre or even offensive that the inhabitants of the empire could actually believe that their emperor was a god or demigod. Was anything more involved than tasteless flattery and indulgent egotism? It is important to note the role that the cult played in the relationship between emperor and subject, and also that the relevance and nature of the cult, probably differed widely across the empire. As with other elements that promoted the emperor's image, a two-way process was often in operation.

I would like you now to read an extract from a letter written by the emperor Claudius to the inhabitants of the city of Alexandria in Egypt. In this letter the emperor responds to certain requests made by the Alexandrians and tries to resolve disputes and problems which have arisen.

Start of Activity

**Exercise 4**

Start of Question

Please read the short extract, taken from Lewis and Reinhold, below.

As you read make notes on the following questions.

1. Where does the impetus for the honours listed come from?
2. What honours is Claudius prepared to accept and what does he reject?

Please click to view the extract from [Lewis and Reinhold](https://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/mod/resource/view.php?id=26021).

End of Question

[View discussion - Exercise 4](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session2_Discussion4)

End of Activity

Claudius' hesitation over divine honours reveals the predicament faced by at least some emperors. The impetus for divine worship might arise in the provinces rather than at the emperor's instigation, and how should he respond to this? In some areas of the empire, such as Egypt, ruler-cult was a long-held tradition – but to declare oneself divine before death would be to invite scorn and even ridicule from other parts of the empire. (For example, see Goodman, p. 125, for the excesses of Gaius.) It is worth noting that most emperors were eager to appear modest in the titles and praise which they accepted or were seen to accept (see Lewis and Reinhold, pp. 286, 521–3). But it could also be to the emperor's advantage to exploit the ambiguous position he occupied between the gods and men. The divine concept reflected in part the unique position which Augustus created for himself and his successors; he appeared superhuman or like a gift from the gods (Wallace-Hadrill, 1993). There was much to be gained in stature by appearing, if not completely divine, certainly more than human. The vast majority of the inhabitants of the empire would never have seen the emperor face to face; to them he was a figure who symbolised Rome and the empire, and the continuity and security of that empire, and who personally held vast power and wealth. All this may well have contributed to an image of omnipotence and thus divinity.

## 2.6 Centre and periphery

Here you have considered some of the ways in which the power and authority of the emperor were communicated to the inhabitants of the empire. The full dynamics of the relationship are difficult to reconstruct especially as the view gained is mainly from Rome looking out to the provinces rather than vice versa. It was important for the emperor to appear to be a competent ruler of the empire. It was one method used by his peers and successors to evaluate an emperor's reign. But it is often difficult to see beyond the projected image to the reality. To those in Rome it was only if something went drastically wrong or if there was an opportunity for military glory that the provinces deserved to be mentioned. The Rome-centred view also makes it difficult to know the degree to which individual emperors made an impression in the provinces. Heads on statues and faces on coins might change, but did much else? Nevertheless it is possible to note that the relationship often flowed in two directions. The urge to commemorate and celebrate the emperor often originated within a given province at the will of the inhabitants, not because it was decreed or enforced by Rome. The inhabitants of the empire were not simply ruled and controlled by others but participated in the process themselves. However, to speak of the provinces collectively and of the provincials en masse is to mask the level of diversity. The consideration of the imperial cult illustrates that the responses to both the emperor and imperial rule could vary greatly.

## Conclusion

This free course provided an introduction to studying the arts and humanities. It took you through a series of exercises designed to develop your approach to study and learning at a distance and helped to improve your confidence as an independent learner.

## Keep on learning

Start of Figure



End of Figure

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Figure Plate 7 in Goodman: courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society.

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## Solutions

## Exercise 1

#### Discussion

These are the four major areas which I have thought of – you may have considered some additional factors or may have organised your answer differently.

* Personal contact. The emperor or members of the imperial family could visit and travel the empire.
* Intermediaries. Subordinates and representatives, whether administrative officials, governors or army commanders, could act in the emperor's name and were a reminder of his authority.
* Image. The emperor's image could be promoted through statues, inscriptions, coins and benefactions, such as buildings, which were funded by the imperial family.
* Cult. The emperor could be represented as a saviour, the bringer of peace and security, which made him appear superhuman or divine.

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## Exercise 2

#### Discussion

You were probably struck by the flexibility of the system. ‘No one, not even Augustus, seems ever to have produced an overall strategy for provincial administration’ (Goodman, p. 100). There were set offices such as governors appointed either by the senate or the emperor, legionary commanders and procurators who collected taxes. However, the emperor could and often did employ his own private agents to resolve difficulties. Goodman's discussion highlights certain objectives for these officials. In particular the financial relationship between the emperor and the provinces is described in detail; it was a primary role of intermediaries such as governors to ensure that the taxes were collected. For this to occur the provinces needed to be well ordered; thus the administration of justice and the supervision and command of the army were also entrusted to suitable subordinates. The source of administrative and military officials was in general, although not exclusively, the élite of Rome, especially those drawn from the equestrian and senatorial orders. Simultaneously local élites were encouraged to maintain a level of autonomy in their towns and cities and this helped to minimise the number of officials. It was through this élite that the provincials had contact with the sources of power in the Roman empire. One major concern in using intermediaries was that individuals might accumulate too much personal power. This was overcome by the short tenure attached to most posts and the idea that important issues should always be referred back to the centre. Disloyalty to the emperor was thus rare but certainly not unheard of.

[Back to - Exercise 2](%22%20%5Cl%20%22Session2_Activity2)

## Exercise 3

#### Discussion

The video sequence focuses on both the visual and verbal means that were used to promote the emperor in the provinces. Busts, statues and coin images recorded the likeness of the emperor and could associate him with certain attributes. So the emperor might be represented as a priest or a soldier, while on coins his image might be associated with military victories and conquests or idealised virtues. (For further discussion of this, see Experiencing Rome Essay Two, pp. 42–4.) The name of the emperor was recorded through inscriptions which could also list his official titles and authority. Inscriptions might accompany statues and portraits but were often associated with buildings and structures. These might be funded by the emperor, who was thus recorded as a benefactor providing a gift to the local community; or the buildings might be dedicated to the emperor by local communities. An important avenue for promoting the name and image of the emperor was the imperial cult. Through buildings and rituals the relationship between emperor and provincial was placed in a religious context.

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## Exercise 4

#### Discussion

1. Claudius lists many honours but repeatedly makes it clear that these have been suggested and requested by others. He does not tell the Alexandrians that they must set up statues and so forth but grants them permission to do these things if they so wish. The inhabitants of the city – presumably at the instigation of their leading citizens – wish to honour Claudius in various ways. This declaration of loyalty needs to be brought to the emperor's attention since Claudius, who is miles away in Rome, cannot see for himself that Alexandria is devoted to him. But the Alexandrians also gain an opportunity to show their loyalty in Rome itself since one of the statues is to be set up in the capital while its partner remains in Alexandria to become the focus of extravagant rituals. These gestures, although apparently instigated by the Alexandrians, are designed to unite Rome and Alexandria to mutual advantage.
2. Claudius begins by noting that he is not particularly partial to such honours but continues to accept just about everything that he has been offered – his birthday as a holiday, statues of himself and his family, and numerous other images which are to be set up in various locations. It is almost as if the emperor feels obliged to sanction the honours for fear of causing offence – and as he notes, to accept some and to refuse others would appear inconsistent. However, Claudius does draw the line at the suggested appointment of a high priest and the building of a temple. Golden statues, thrones, processions and all their trappings are acceptable but he is not to be revered as a god. Claudius does not wish to cause offence by appearing to condone the blurring of the line between human and divine.

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# Emperor and empire - part 1

## Transcript

VAL HOPE:

The extent of the Roman empire - its sheer scale and diversity made communications difficult.

It could take months to travel from place to place and letters or messages could equally take weeks to reach their destination. Cicero who corresponded from Rome with his son in Athens noted that letters took 3 to 7 weeks to arrive.

How was this distance between Rome and the provinces bridged? Focusing on the symbolic rather than the physical aspects of communication, we’re going to explore the role of the emperor as a unifying force.

Ancient Rome, like its modern successor, was cosmopolitan, the hub of the empire. Despite the difficulties of getting there, people from all over the known world travelled to the city and in return the city provided them with experiences drawn from all its empire.

For the inhabitants of Rome, the empire was a spectacle displayed to them by their emperor. And it was in the emperor’s interests to remind the inhabitants of the glories of empire and present himself as world ruler.

The empire was present in Rome through a variety of media - some subtle, some more blatant. In the arena were beasts and strange creatures transported to the city from around the empire, for display and slaughter; and also put to death were captives and prisoners of war.

Scenes like these, representing the latest conquests were also carved in stone and used to decorate the buildings and monuments of the city; providing a more lasting physical symbol of the glories of both emperor and empire.

These grandiose imperial structures also drew upon architectural designs and building materials from across the empire.

Quarries like Chemtou, in Tunisia supplied Rome with the building materials that lined the walls and floors of these new buildings. In the Pantheon, the luxurious Numidian yellow marble was set in the floor. It was surrounded by a whitish marble with purple veins from Turkey, and encircled roundels of red porphyry from Egypt.

The massive grey granite columns supporting the porch of the Pantheon are also from Egypt, with capitals and bases made of white Greek marble. Egypt provides a graphic illustration of how a particular province impacted upon the physical appearance of Rome.

During the early days of the empire the ancient culture had been a source of intrigue, so its defeat and annexation by Rome was a cause for celebration.

A few private citizens of Rome adopted Egyptian designs. This funerary monument, in the shape of a pyramid, was constructed during the reign of Augustus to commemorate the public official Gaius Cestius Epulo.

But original Egyptian artefacts were also imported to Rome and set up in prominent locations. This small obelisk now placed upon the back of an elephant carved by Bernini may have originally stood in the temple to the Egyptian goddess of Isis located in the Campus Martius.

Also found in the Campus Martius was the obelisk used by Augustus as the pointer for his huge sundial. It was accompanied by an inscription, commemorating the defeat of Egypt, in the reign of Augustus.

Since obelisks were already ancient monuments, hundreds of years old, their removal from Egypt and their incorporation into the cityscape of Rome physically symbolised the conquest of the province. The splendours of the ancient civilisation now belonged to the emperor and to Rome.

The emperor who appropriated these treasures ruled the world and the extent of his empire was displayed on huge maps.

We know from literary sources that Augustus commissioned a plan of the world to be set before the eyes of the city. Although the original does not survive, these 20th century versions, set up by the Fascist regime, suggest how maps writ large could themselves be monuments, reminding all who saw them of the size and extent of their empire.

The Augustan map may well have been the pictorial equivalent to the Res Gestae, the lengthy biographical epitaph of Augustus. This monumental inscription, also recreated by the Fascists, includes sequences describing Augustus’ expansion of the empire.

But the emperor’s role as a warrior and world conqueror was most powerfully expressed through trophy monuments.

The emperor celebrated military victories by “triumphs” or parades that followed a set route through the streets of Rome.

The triumphal arches or ceremonial gateways were set up along the triumphal route, recording the successful campaigns and promoting the image of the victorious emperor.

Although only a few survive today, one famous example is the arch of Titus, actually constructed after the death and deification of the emperor in AD 81. On the underside of the arch his figure is carried heavenward by an eagle.

The inscription records that the arch was set up by the Senate and people of Rome to divo Tito - the divine Titus, son of the divine Vespasian.

Beneath the inscription a frieze depicts the triumphal procession which Titus had celebrated with his father the emperor Vespasian in AD 71 following the defeat of the Jews.

The reliefs carved on the inner walls of the arch record the details of the triumph. On one side the plunder from the sacking of the Great Temple of Jerusalem is displayed - the silver trumpets and the seven branched candle-stick. The placards carried by the troops may have been painted with the names of the defeated cities and peoples.

On the other side, in a chariot drawn by four horses, rides Titus and on his right, a winged Victory holds a wreath over his head.

Crowning the archway are more winged Victories, this time with their feet resting on globes - symbolising the degree of the Emperor’s control over much of the known world.

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# Emperor and empire - part 2

## Transcript

VAL HOPE:

Winged Victories were a common motif on triumphal arches and are also found on the triple arch at the edge of the forum.

This honoured the emperor Septimius Severus and his sons. The arch was set up in AD 203 to celebrate victories in Parthia. Again, the sculpture depicts scenes from the campaign, showing Roman soldiers and Parthian prisoners.

Similar scenes of victory and conquest are found on the fourth century arch of Constantine.

Another form of commemoration was the monumental column. The most famous of these was set up to record Trajan's successes against the Dacians.

The base on which the column stands depicts heaps of Dacian arms and armour. An inscription records how the column was dedicated to Trajan and marks height of the hill that had to be removed to build Trajan’s forum.

The column, with its spiral reliefs, stands more than 38 metres high. A statue of Trajan would have originally stood on the top, where the figure of St Peter now stands.

On the spiral reliefs are images and scenes from the wars. The emperor addressing his troops; battle scenes; Dacian prisoners; and of course more winged victories.

This later column of Marcus Aurelius is similar in design. It celebrates his campaigns north of the Danube.

But whether on column or arch, the purpose of such displays was the same - to stress the might and power of the emperor, to present him as an all conquering ruler of the world.

The depictions of barbarians and other Roman enemies might have been formulaic but their similarity must have helped to define and unify those who saw the monuments as Romans.

And, whatever the origins, it was as Romans that those who lived in the city shared in the success and the fruits of empire.

Triumphal arches, columns, maps, objects or materials appropriated from the provinces all brought the empire to Rome, celebrating the extent and diversity of that empire.

And symbolising the power and control of the emperor who brought peace, stability and glory to Rome.

VAL HOPE:

Expansion of the empire might bring glory to individual emperors but maintaining the existing territories and established provinces was just as important. The Emperor’s presence and influence had to be felt beyond Rome but clearly he couldn’t be everywhere at once.

Some emperors did visit parts of their kingdom but often in connection with military campaigns. The Emperor Hadrian travelled extensively across the empire, but more for diplomatic reasons and because of his own curiosity.

In Athens, he was impressed by the ancient city and became a major benefactor. In Britain, to mark the northern limit of the province, he decreed the building of the huge wall.

The coins minted in Rome and elsewhere celebrated his travels, recording where he’d been and what he’d done.

Personifications of the provinces, like Africa and Judaea, are shown greeting the emperor.

Coins could also celebrate military conquests. This one issued, under the emperor Vespasian, shows two Jews, in mourning beneath a palm tree. It celebrates the capture of Judaea.

This coin marks the Emperor Claudius' invasion of Britain. It shows the triumphal arch erected in Rome to celebrate this victory.

Coins could also be used to commemorate the completion and dedication of important buildings in Rome, like the Colosseum, which was built and dedicated under the Flavian emperors.

But above all coins carried personal likenesses of the emperor and members of his family, throughout the empire. Encircling each emperor were his titles and offices, legitimating his power.

The images and text on coins combined to represent virtues and powers which the emperor wished to stress:

Justice,

Discipline,

Patience

and Victory.

Of course it’s quite reasonable to ask just how far people were aware of these images. Coins once in the pocket may be little studied and the miniature pictures little noted.

But even if it only operated on a subliminal level the image and texts on coins must have been a constant reminder of just who was in control.

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# Emperor and empire - part 3

## Transcript

VAL HOPE:

The emperor’s personal appearance was also promoted through statues which were set up throughout the empire.

This magnificent bronze statue of Augustus is from Athens.

We may question how closely this image resembled the true appearance of the emperor but such statues created a sense of dignity which could be admired and respected by onlookers.

Nor is it always possible to judge who funded such statues. Did the Athenians receive official encouragement to set up the statue, in order to place the image of the emperor in the public eye? Or was it a spontaneous gesture by Athenians who were eager to publicly express their loyalty?

Whether Rome and the emperor intervened directly in this case, standard statue types were widely available. This meant that even those who’d never seen the emperor could still reproduce his likeness. This statue of the Emperor Augustus, found in Rome, shows him with his head covered in the guise of a priest.

This second statue is from Corinth. There are differences - the angle of the face, the quality of execution and in the details of the drapery. The overall impression created is very similar. Two parts of the empire were thus united by a shared image of the emperor.

The emperor’s name was also promoted. The Imperial name was often connected with gifts of amenities - everything from theatres and aqueducts to defensive walls or it was inscribed on grand buildings, dedicated to the emperor as a sign of allegiance by local communities.

Here at Chemtou in Tunisia are the remains of a bridge, which was dedicated to the emperor Trajan. The accompanying inscription lists his titles, reminding the inhabitants of his power and authority. It also highlights the relationship between the emperor on the one hand and the province on the other. Trajan might be in Rome but his presence was felt in Tunisia

In Athens the emperor Hadrian funded several structures including the new library complex. At the same time, Athenians were honouring the emperor in dedications on buildings like this monumental gateway.

This recalls the triumphal arches found in Rome and the construction of gateways in provincial towns was often associated with members of the imperial family. These arches at the entrance to the forum in Pompeii may well have been dedicated to members of the ruling dynasty.

In Thugga this monumental gateway was dedicated to Severus Alexander. The evidence of such gateways, placed at the entrance to settlements or other key locations, is a powerful indication of how town's inhabitants aligned themselves with Rome and the emperor.

Many of the statues and buildings which recalled the emperor and stressed his relationship with the provincial towns were placed in a religious context. At Thugga the pediment of the temple to Jupiter is decorated with a relief that records the apotheosis of Antoninus Pius. The emperor is carried heavenwards to take his place among the gods The divine descent of the emperors past and present was celebrated in specially constructed cult centres throughout the empire. Many towns such as Ephesus, in Asia Minor, had temples which were dedicated to the emperor and Rome.

In Athens, during the reign of Augustus, a small round temple was built on the Acropolis.

And in Britain, following the invasion, a temple was erected in Colchester. Although a later fort now stands on the site, it helps to illustrate the size and scale of the original temple which acted as an equally imposing symbol of Roman domination. Here the worship of Claudius was encouraged to promote loyalty among the inhabitants.

Through buildings, statues, temples and coins, each succeeding emperor was represented to his subjects across the empire. The images helped to create an illusion of familiarity with and even accessibility to his person. So the emperor could be both physically distant yet ever present, remote but familiar, uniting the people of his provinces through the shared currency of the Imperial image.

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