

Sample Application # 1

"The City Adorned: The Visual Rhetoric of Augustan Rome"

I propose to complete a book entitled *The City Adorned. The Visual Rhetoric of Augustan Rome* which presents a new analytical framework for understanding the meaning of visual representation in Augustan Rome. The first emperor Augustus (emp. 27BC-AD14) is famed for transforming Rome from a city of mud-brick into one clothed in marble.¹ The archaeological excavations of the last twenty-five years have made clearer the actual parameters of this urban transfiguration, but have also made more apparent the limitations of the historical paradigm used to understand them. *The City Adorned* will provide a more synthetic reading not only of the urban fabric, but of the period as a whole, by mapping the visual complexities of the city itself --the spatial configurations of its buildings and the phantasmagoria of natural wonders, paintings, and sculpture on display within and between them -- according to a new model based on Roman rhetorical practice.

The first chapter of the book reconsiders a famous anecdote related by the second century historian Suetonius: on his deathbed, Augustus called for a mirror, had his hair combed and his jaw set straight, and then asked those assembled if he had played his part in the mime of life well, enjoining them to dismiss him from the stage with applause.² Since at least the eighteenth century, this episode has been central to a history of the Augustan age dominated by a duplicitous emperor, who claimed to restore the Republic, but in fact established sole rule.³ This conception of Augustus as dictator was codified for twentieth-century scholarship by Sir Ronald Syme in his 1939 *The Roman Revolution*, and by the concomitant appropriation of the image of Augustus by the Fascist leader Benito Mussolini.⁴ Many contemporary scholars, myself included, have written of the "propaganda" of Augustan art.⁵ In *The City Adorned*, however, I will argue that although the notion of the actor-emperor is of key importance, we have failed to understand it because we have not considered the project of visual representation in Augustan Rome in all its complexity.

Giving precedence to the literary texts of the ancient world, especially Tacitus, we have continued to mourn the loss of the Republic, and have assumed that all Romans did as well.⁶ The monumental and inscriptional records tell a different tale: the imperial system opened paths to ritual participation in the state to a far wider spectrum of the population than ever before as the burgeoning numbers and dedications of the Augustales and freedmen *apparitores* demonstrate.⁷ I believe that the visual constructions of the city were particularly attuned to these newly privileged members of society, who often appropriated elements from the Augustan monuments to make their own personalized meanings in municipalities throughout the Roman world. In this context, Augustus' last words, spoken as the *archimimus*, signal a deliberately theatrical visual and social world that was Augustan Rome.⁸

In an environment where literacy was limited, visual experience was of key importance, as chapter two will demonstrate.⁹ Everything in Augustan Rome was constructed as spectacle and the displays were as protean and multivalent in their structures and meanings as the poetry of Virgil, Horace, and Ovid. Visual representations were the focus of strong emotions, as in the case of the custodians who had to guarantee with their lives the safety of the popular bronze of a hound licking its wound in the shrine of Juno, and also the homoerotic marble statues at the Voting Enclosure (Saepta) depicting the boy flautist Olympus with the goat-man Pan and the young Achilles with his centaur tutor Chiron.¹⁰ When Augustus' successor Tiberius removed a statue from the Baths of Agrippa and had it taken to his bedchamber, the populace "raised an outcry at the theater, shouting 'Give us back the *Apoxyomenos*' -- Man using a Body-scraper -- and the Emperor, although he had fallen quite in love with the statue, had to return it."¹¹ Objects functioned as the constituent signs of the city, marking the daily experience of its inhabitants: litigants were directed to legal tribunals according to locations keyed to particular statues in the Forum of Augustus. Objects also represented the city beyond its boundaries, when tourists took home mass-produced reproductions of favorite works. Objects were the visual currency by which culture was defined.

Romans possessed a keen observational acuity and the details and physical materials of things were meant to be noticed. At the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine, fifty statues of the murderous Danaids stood in a portico made of *giallo antico* -- yellow marble splotted with blood red -- and even the miniscule animals in figured column capitals corresponded to different locales: Pegasuses in the Temple of Mars Ultor, and paired rams at the Aedes Concordiae Augustae. Nor were statues, paintings, and architecture the only items on display. Natural wonders, plants, and live animals were also a part of these complex ensembles and, like the animal fable for the orator, were often of pivotal significance.¹²

Although they are separate categories for us, in the ancient world poetry, oratory, and history were all different species of the same genus, rhetoric. This study will present the system of visual persuasion in Augustan Rome as equally generated by rhetorical devices. Apposition, transposition, and varying patterns of significant repetition are the chief discursive mechanisms within this system of visual expression, and I will devote a chapter to each of them. Augustan representation achieved an extraordinary flexibility of association through the apposition of different objects in varying spatial environments. At the Saepta the famous marble statues of teachers and pupils mentioned above were displayed along with mural paintings of epic adventure, a live rhinoceros, and a one hundred foot larch ceiling beam.¹³ These reflected in different ways a sense of the wonders of the Augustan world and visually linked the complex both

to the nearby Porticus Vipsania, which housed Agrippa's world map bordered by representations of exotic animals,¹⁴ and to the adjacent ballot sorting hall (Diribitorium), famed for its miraculous, man-made, wide-span timber roof.¹⁵ Like the use of simile in adorning connected verbal discourse, the apposition or juxtaposition of objects from diverse spheres appears to have been of critical importance in generating visual meaning.¹⁶

So too was transposition, the reserving of one in a series of things on exhibit in a particular context for meaningful display in another. Thus, from an extensive series of paintings of the Trojan War by the Greek artist Theoros at the Porticus of Phillipus, the painting of Apollo's beloved Cassandra making prophecy to her family was reserved for exhibit at the Aedes Concordiae Augustae, which celebrated the nature of Apollo and the joys of family harmony. Transposed objects seem to have attracted particular attention, since this is a work that is reproduced both on Arretine terra cotta ware and in Pompeian wall painting.¹⁷

Perhaps the single most difficult rhetorical category for us to fully comprehend is the use of repetition. Yet its importance in ancient oratory is clear and it also pervaded the visual text of the city, from the ubiquitous use of elegant bucrania (bulls' skulls), to the display of statues by the 6th-century BC sculptors Bupalus and Athenis on practically every building built or refurbished by Augustus.¹⁸ Art historians have traditionally concerned themselves exclusively with whether or not these statues were originals. Surely, however, what is significant here is the repetition itself, which insistently invoked the distant past to glorify the Augustan present.

The penultimate chapter of *The City Adorned* considers the patterns of visual rhetoric as integral to an understanding of the Augustan city as a profoundly theatrical phenomenon. Not only were theater buildings important elements in the Augustan cityscape, the city was a theater. Mime, drama based on everyday life, and pantomime were the quintessential theatrical forms of the Augustan era. Pantomime was introduced to Rome by the freedmen Bathyllus and Pylades and featured a solo virtuoso dancer playing all the parts, accompanied by musicians and a chorus singing the themes that the dancer represented in gesture. Themes were drawn from a pastiche of sources old and new, comic and tragic, mythological and historical. These new and elegant performances mesmerized audiences from all walks of life, and in their structure they mirrored the larger stage frame, the city of Rome itself, which was configured in exactly the same way.

Just as the orator continually recreated the self through gesture and appearance, in order to persuade varying audiences in different cases, so the multifaceted constructions of the city generated visual personae for Augustan family members, who made individual areas of the city distinctively their own: Agrippa, the Campus Martius; Augustus, the Palatine; and his sister Octavia, the area around the theater named for her much lamented son, Marcellus, who died in his

twentieth year.¹⁹ But it was not just the imperial family who had performative roles here, for anyone who lived in or even visited Rome became a part of the play.²⁰

In the imperial capital, meanings danced continuously before the eyes, but they were implied and not inculcated. All was available for viewing and open to interpretation.²¹ The conclusion of the book will consider the relationship between the codes of visual and textual meaning in Augustan culture. Artful representation, like figured speech, was performative and involved the simultaneous concealing and revealing of meaning.²² Just as Horace in *Satires 2.1* could formulate a text that reads on one level as a serious discussion on the moral and legal issues involved in the writing of satire, and on another as a sustained discussion of states of penile erection, playing mercilessly on his own cognomen Flaccus (limp, hanging down), so the average wall paintings in the House of Augustus both affirmed the emperor's renowned tasteful modesty and at the same time asserted his relationship to the all-powerful sky god Jupiter through the repeated thunderbolt motifs on the painted ceiling coffers.²³ This was not botched camouflage, it was artful communication.

The structural comparison of visual and textual representation transforms what has been a far too literal reading of the Augustan period.²⁴ The visual displays of Rome were of a piece with the cultivated plain speech of Augustus and his spare phrases in the *Res Gestae*, which in their seeming artlessness demonstrated their art, and with the structuring of a social system which at once affirmed traditional class hierarchy (the *Lex Julia Theatralis* or the marriage laws) and opened paths to status and ritual participation in the state to a far wider spectrum of the population than ever before. This was not a static, classical, and totalitarian world; it was a shifting, multiplex and performative one.

An exploration of the ways in which visual meaning is generated cannot be separate from and is, indeed, integral to understanding the interrelations of history, art, and language. *The City Adorned* is addressed not only to experts in my own field, but to all those who are interested in the theater of life in the past, and in tracing and teaching the history of the varying yet related patterns by which visual and verbal meaning is made.

I have prepared to write this book for a very long time. My dissertation focused on two buildings in Augustan Rome, the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine and the Forum of Augustus. An NEH grant allowed me to extend my research to other Augustan public structures. During the course of this research, I realized that the linear progression of the traditional topographical monograph that I envisioned was ill-suited to the kaleidoscopic effects of the city as I had come to understand them. I embarked instead on a series of articles and pedagogical innovations to test my

ideas on major Augustan monuments. In the process I have become increasingly focused on the kinds of questions I ask and on issues of visual culture.

I now feel that I am in a position to produce a book on Augustan Rome that will be of lasting value. The research is complete and I will spend my Fall sabbatical completing the final draft of the first five chapters. An NEH grant for Spring, would provide the time to complete the theatrics chapter and the conclusion, and also to travel to Rome to inspect the House of Augustus. This monument has become crucial to my interpretation of the city, but was not one of the buildings I examined in detail in 1986. The German Archaeological Institute's library in Rome would also be the ideal place to check the references for *The City Adorned's* one appendix: a site by site list of every object on display, as well as popular art reproductions of them in other media. The appendix will be a useful teaching tool and will facilitate new multiple readings of the Augustan cityscape.

1. Suet. Aug. 28.3.
2. Suet. Aug. 99.
3. Gibbon, Edward *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1787), fifth ed., vol. 1, 70-71.
4. Syme, Ronald *The Roman Revolution* New York, 1968 reprint of 1939 ed., 129, 313-330.
Syme's *The Roman Revolution* was published a mere six days after the beginning of World War II.
For Mussolini: Spiro Kostof "The Emperor and the Duce" in *Art and Architecture in the Service of Politics* Henry A. Millon and Linda Nochlin eds. Cambridge, 1978.
5. My 1981 dissertation is entitled *Sculptural Programs and Propaganda in Augustan Rome*. See also Paul Zanker *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* A. Shapiro trans. Ann Arbor, 1988.
6. As the title of the 1988 Berlin exhibition catalogue -- a compendium of the current European scholarship on the subject -- *Kaiser Augustus und die verlorene Republik* ("Emperor Augustus and the Lost Republic") reveals we continue to mourn the loss of the Republic with Syme and with Tacitus. Arguably this proves Tacitus the consummate master of the cultural strategy at the heart of the Augustan imperial system. Tacitus states that his political status is new (*Hist.* 1.2), yet through his texts so artfully affiliates himself with the *nobiles* of the past that in effect he becomes noble.
7. S. Ostrow "Augustales Along the Bay of Naples: A Case for Their Early Growth" *Historia* 34 (1985) 64-101; N. Purcell "The Apparitores: A Study in Social Mobility" *Papers of the British School at Rome* 51 (1983) 125-173.
8. A.I. Kessissoglu "Mimus Vitae" *Mnemosyne* 41,3-4 (1988) 385-388.
9. W. V. Harris *Ancient Literacy* Cambridge, MA, 1989, *passim*.
10. Pliny *nh* 34.38 (*hound*); 36.29 (*Saepta*).
11. Pliny *nh* 34.62.
12. Cf. Quint. *Inst.* 5.11.19-20.
13. Pliny *nh* 36.29 (statues); *Not. Reg.* IX (Meleager mural); Dio 53.27 (Argonauts mural); Suetonius Aug. 43.4 (rhinoceros); Pliny *nh* 16.201 (larch beam).
14. Pliny *nh* 5.9-10 (Agrippa's world map).
15. Pliny *nh* 16.201; 36.102.
16. Quin. *Inst.* 8.3.72f.
17. Pliny *nh* 35.144.
18. Quin. *Inst.* 9.1.38f.; Pliny *nh* 36.13.
19. Cicero *De Or.* 2.41.177f. and 3.54.210f.
20. Strabo 5.3.8 is a kaleidoscopic description of the buildings, plantings and works of art to be seen in Augustan Rome. Having seen all this, he says, "you easily become oblivious to everything else outside. Such is Rome."
21. See Ovid on Augustus and Jupiter's thunderbolt: *Trist.* 1.69-72, etc.
22. Frederick Ahl's work on figured speech is of fundamental importance (ANRW32.1 (1984) 40-110; "Ars Est Caelare Artem" in Puns Jonathan Culler ed. New York, 1988, 17- 43; etc.), although, operating within the duplicitous emperor framework, he views it as an adversarial strategy of beleaguered poets.
23. K. Freudenburg "Horace's Satiric Program and the Language of Contemporary Theory in *Satires* 2.1" *American Journal of Philology* 111 (1990) 187-203.
24. For the most recent equation of Augustus' establishment of sole rule with classical standardization and cultural ossification, see P. Zanker *The Power of Images*, 335-339. As Moses Hadas observed long ago, if we believe the Romans when they insist on their *gravitas*, then the joke is on us (*Classical Journal* 31 (1935-36) 17-24).

Select Bibliography

The City Adorned. The Visual Rhetoric of Augustan Rome

Pliny the Elder, Suetonius, Quintilian, Vitruvius, Virgil, Horace, and Ovid are the primary sources I use most frequently.

The secondary literature on Augustan Rome is vast. The following list represents a sample of the studies I consider to be of fundamental importance to my work.

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2-page Curriculum Vitae

2 Letters of Recommendation

