

# The Buildings and the Images of the Imperial Cult



2. The birth of imperial cult under Augustus

The emperor cult is the practice of assimilating emperor and deity

In the Hellenistic world in 307 BC the hymn sung in honour of Demetrius Poliorcetes is the earliest attestation of the ruler as a "present god".

The great leap from the cult of the deceased ancestors to the veneration of living men takes place in Egypt, where the ruler cult is the strongest in the 14<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, when the living siblings Ptolemy II and his sister/wife Arsinoe II were deified.

In the Greek cities the divine cult of individual citizens can be found towards the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, one of the earliest cases is the cult of Diodorus Paspasros at Pergamon.

Also in the Roman world, in private/public relations, it had been usual for a long time to address a man with emphatic epithets and to honour him: this is the case of the relation patronus/clients, the patron is the benefactor of his clients

The object of worship in the household was the Genius of the paterfamilias. The worshippers were freedmen and slaves.

The development of intersections between the ideology of patronage and of Hellenistic kingship.

1. **Biography**
2. **Apotheosis**
3. **The cult settlement – state, private, provincial level**
4. **The images**

Terminology:

*Apotheosis* – the actual event of ascending to the divine sphere

*Divinization* – the Senate claims the divine principle of the emperor

*Consecration – consecratio* – practical implementation to the divine sphere



# 1. BIOGRAPHY

Born: Gaius Octavius, Rome, September 23<sup>rd</sup> , 63 BC

Parents: Gaius Octavius and Atia (Julius Caesar's niece)

Early training in public life: at the age of 12 - recited his grandmother's *laudatio*

46 BC – accompanied his great uncle in his triumphal procession

44BC – adopted by Julius Caesar (19 years old)

43BC – *propraetor* and *consul* - name *Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus*

2<sup>nd</sup> triumvirate – with Marcus Antonius, Marcus Lepidus

42BC – *battle at Philippi* – vowed to construct a temple to *Mars Ultor* if he won



42BC, January – *divi filius*

During the 30's – protection of *Apollo*

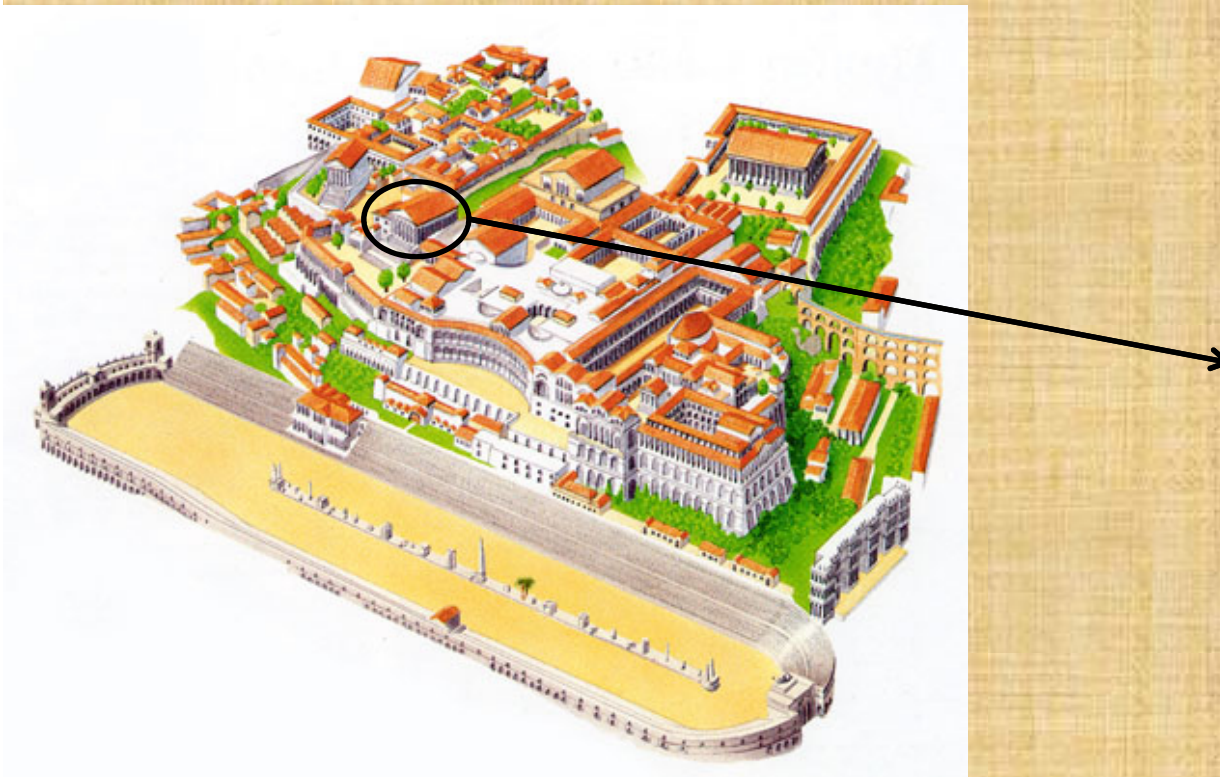
31BC – Actium – defeated Marcus Antonius and Cleopatra

28BC – the temple of Apollo on the Palatine hill – personal patron

27BC, January 16<sup>th</sup> – title *Augustus (by Plancus)*- the word used of votive offerings, temples and sites dedicated to the gods (original idea – Romulus)

-sacred places too, and those in which anything is consecrated by augural rites are called "august" (augusta), from the increase (auctus) in dignity

-Augustus - before used in ritual, formulaic language (obscure synonym to "divinus"), but it was regarded as a title only - any formal powers, after Augustus - the institution – emperor





Cliepeus virtutis – for Augustus from the Senate to acknowledge his virtus, clementia, iustitia, pietas, Curia Iulia, originally gold, marble copy preserved in Arles

Apart from the title, he **received**:

- a) the right to adorn the entrance of his house with *laurel*
- b) *the corona civica*
- c) *clipeus virtutis* (hung in the *Curia Iulia*)

23 BC – *imperium*

18 – 12 BC – *Lex Iulia de adulteriis, Lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus, Lex Papia Poppaea*

12BC – *pontifex maximus*

2BC – *pater patriae*

Last will, testament and a list of accomplishments: *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* – two bronze pillars in front of Augustus's mausoleum in Rome (now only copies)

Died: Nola, 19<sup>th</sup> August, 14 AD

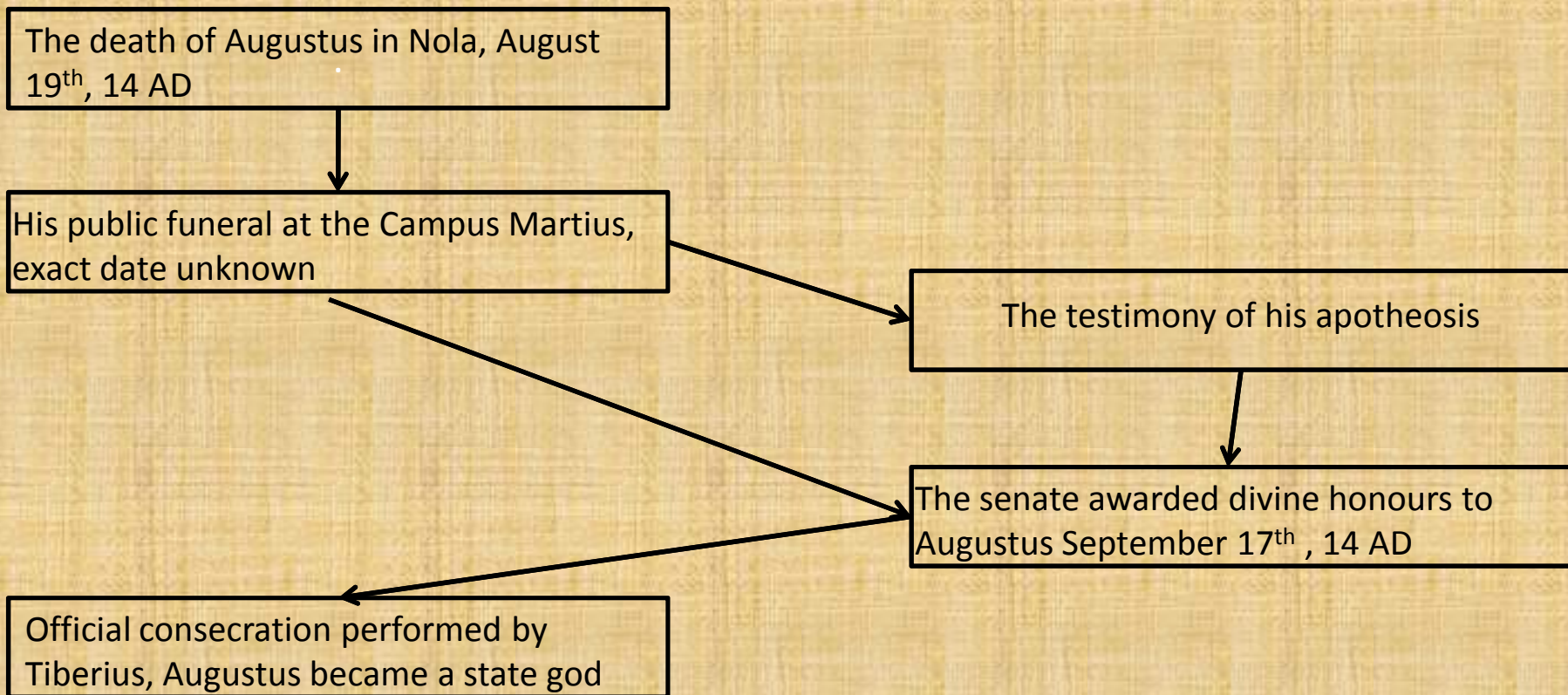
Succession – daughter Julia, 2<sup>nd</sup> marriage to Agrippa – two sons **Gaius and Lucius Caesar**, died Forced to adopt **Tiberius** – Livia's son from the first marriage

## 2. APOTHEOSIS

Augustus died 19<sup>th</sup> 14 AD, Nola and was cremated at Campus Marcius, buried in his family tomb

September 17<sup>th</sup> - officially deified and subsequently consecrated by his adoptive son Tiberius  
Shortly after his funeral – apotheosis – attested by an eyewitness (very doubtful) – Roman Senate - authority in religion.

The testimony – spontaneously or with an intention?



Ruling strategy:

*Reputation:* a military victor, a bringer of peace and a supporter of Roman traditions

*His genius:* combined history, law, social policy, religion, literature, art and architecture

*Ideology:* images by historians, poets, gem cutters, painters, sculptors and architects – **state relief**

- portraits, large scale monuments erected in new provinces

*Consolidating power*

*Expanding borders*





## 2. THE CULT SETTLEMENT

Caesar – was appointed god – monarchical position – resulted in his murder  
-demonstration - how not to go about reforming the Roman constitution

Augustus – the first among equals – defining this imagery (very cautious!)

**Artists:** free to declare anything:

**Tacitus, *Annals I 10.6*** – a bit exaggerated, but gives a picture of his politics:

“No honour was left for the gods, when Augustus chose to be himself **worshipped with temples and statues**, like those of the deities, and with flamines and priests.”

**Vergil, *Aeneid VI 789-794***

“Here Caesar [=Augustus], of Iulus’ glorious seed, look at him ascending to the world of light! Watch, at last, that man, whose coming so often you listened foretold, **Augustus Caesar, son of a god** [=Divus Julius]. He brings a golden age, he shall restore old Saturn’s sceptre to our Latin land”.

**Horace, *Odes III 5. 2-3***

“**praesens divu** habebitur Augustus”

**Letters II 1, 15-17**

***Praesenti tibi maturos largimur honores***

## **Historians:**

### **Suetonius**

“Although well aware that it was usual to vote temples even to proconsuls, yet in no province would he accept one save jointly in his own name and that of Rome, and in the city itself he refused this honour most emphatically.”

- doesn't claim that there wasn't a divine worship of the emperor in Rome – only that he never received a state temple in the city

Suetonius, Dio and other historians – **ignored private cults** – not important for them

In the imperial cult, the political and social cohesion had to be safeguarded. The sacrifices and the public rituals had the aim to define relationship of powers and their hierarchy.

**Continuous measures** – to secure the position of the emperor:

1. Roman magistrates ceased to be autonomous as they had been during the republic
2. The emperor only may celebrate the triumph
3. The title *imperator* was granted 11 AD
4. 11 AD – banned honours for governors in their provinces during term of office and for 60 days thereafter

## Different levels of the cult:

State cult level -Augustus constantly avoided direct deification – remembering Julius Caesar

Accepted measures to the very limit, but never beyond – thus he accepted the title Augustus

Other levels – provincial, municipal, private cults – no evidence that he was averse

Municipal cults – no restrictions

Provincial cults – insisted that Roma was worshipped with him in the same temple

Private cults – no restrictions

## STATE CULT

**Augustus became a god of the Roman state only after his death**

Generally believed – public worship of his *genius* – linked to gaining the function *pontifex maximus* in 12 BC

Holder of this office – *villa publica* in the Forum Romanum – handed it to Vestal Virgins and opened part of his house for the public

His house public – his household cult public – worship of his Lares and his Genius public.



Acknowledging *Genius* into a state cult, implied that the emperor was *paterfamilias* of the Roman state household and senators performing the cult would be taken as his *clientes* (humiliating for high-ranking senators)

Emperor – unlimited formal powers – the Roman state – a monarchy (again)

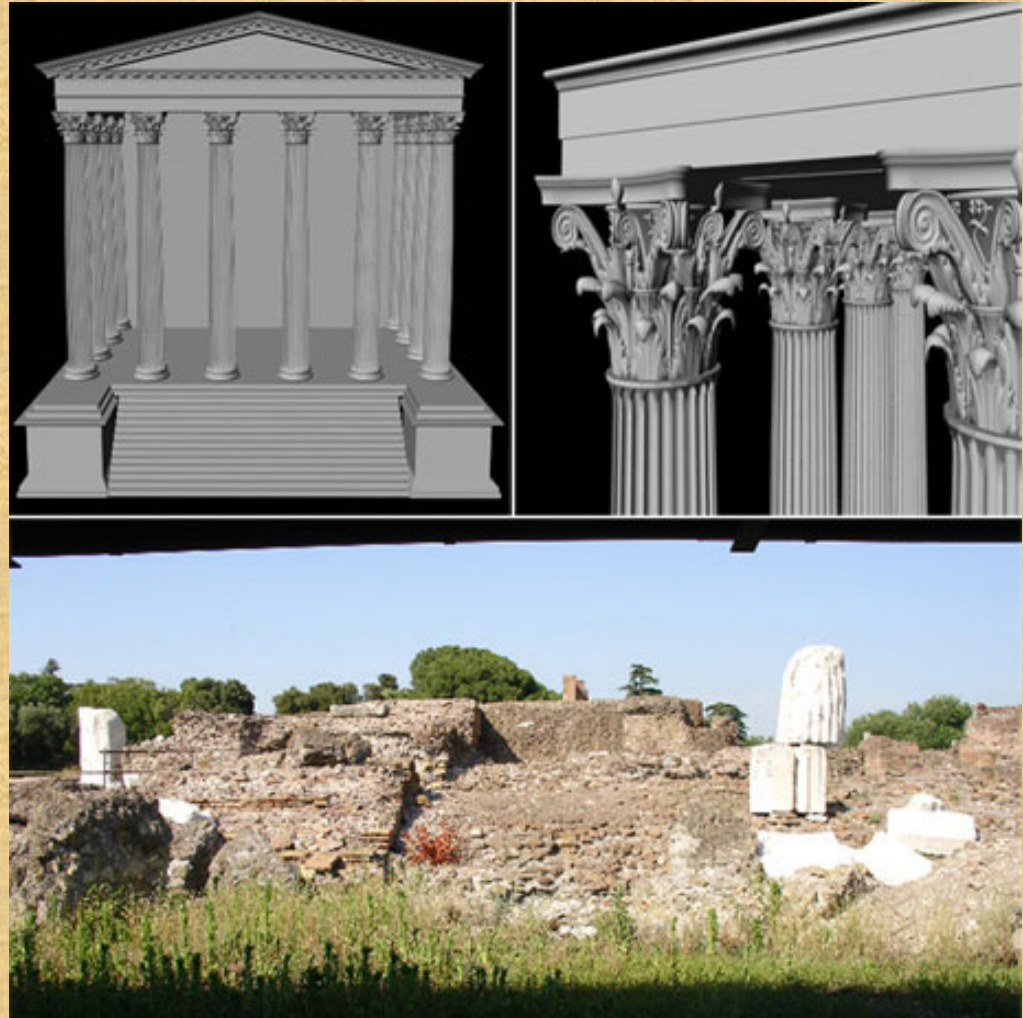
### Arguments against:

#### *Literary sources*

##### a) *Ovidius*:

Not that Augustus' house cult became public, but that the grandiose temple of Apollo and the new cult of Vesta were part of Augustus' domestic cults, which became public. Apollo was Augustus' personal tutelary god. [Gradel]

b) *Calendar from Praeneste*: mentions only Vesta, the new cult on Palatine, no Genius or Lares or Penates Augusti



c) *Birthday*

- man's birthday - the main feast of his Genius
- Augustus' birthday - sacrifice to Mars and Neptune (Campus Martius) and to Apollo (the theatre of Marcellus) – Augustan tutelary divinities

*"F(eriae) ex s(enatus) c(onsulto), q(uod) e(o) d(ie) Imp(erator) Caesar Aug(ustus) pont(ifex) ma[x(imus)] natus est: Marti, Neptuno in Campo, Apo[l]lini ad theatrum Marcelli"*

d) *Sacrifices*

Augustus' unique position was formulated only by sacrifices to the traditional gods on Augustus' behalf, for the welfare of the emperor (*pro salute Augusti*)

## PRIVATE CULT

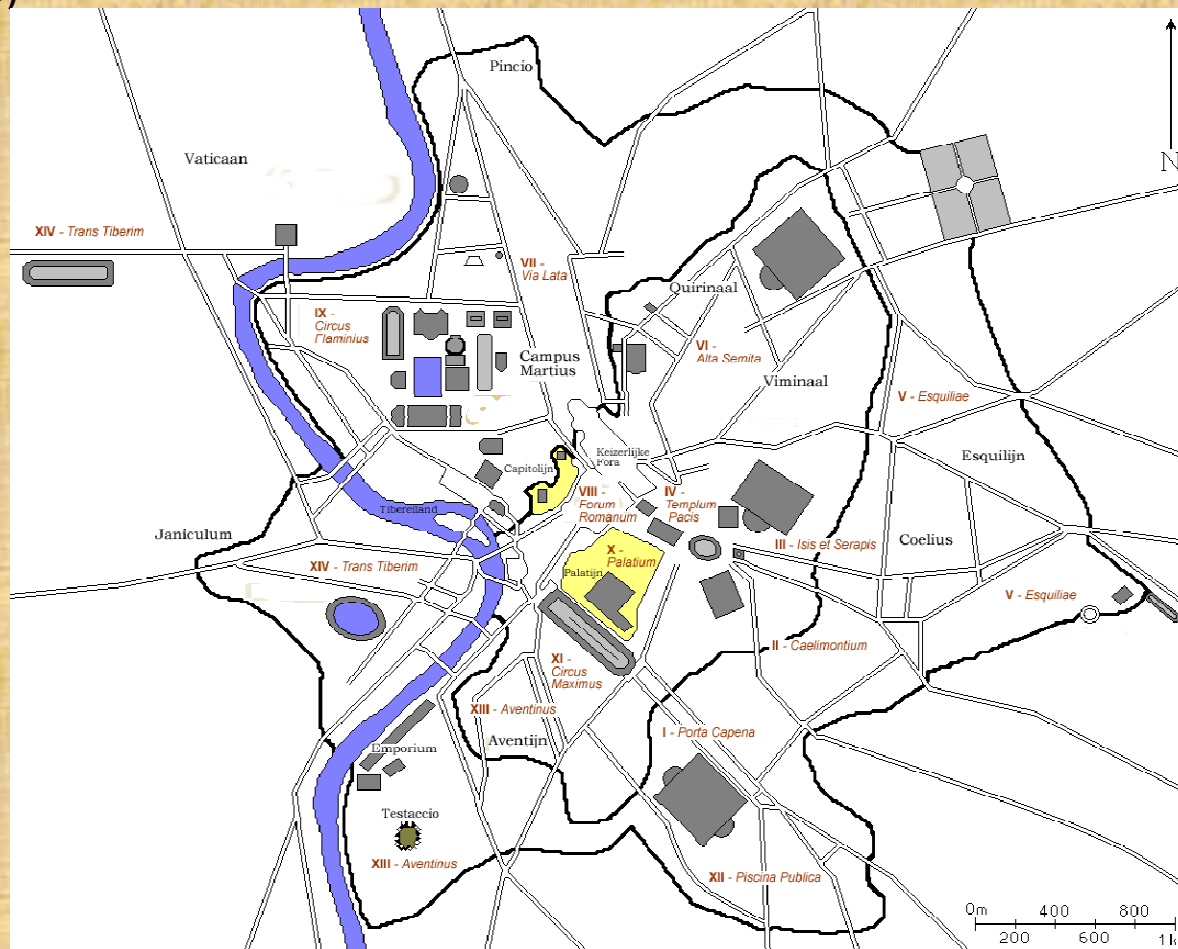
7 BC – Augustus reorganized the administrative system of the city of Rome

- 14 regiones and 265 vici

Augustus intention – restore age-old cults and traditions

- strongly involved in the reform – presented the shrines with their new cult images

- enthusiastic reception all over Italy (e.g. Pompeii – not the crossroads, but pavements at the side of main streets)



**Vicus** – own cult  
worshipped: Lares of the crossroads (*Lares compitales*)  
run by: *magistri* of the *vicus* plus four *ministri* (slaves)  
public events: the festival of *Compitalia*, games  
celebrated at the shrines (*compita*)

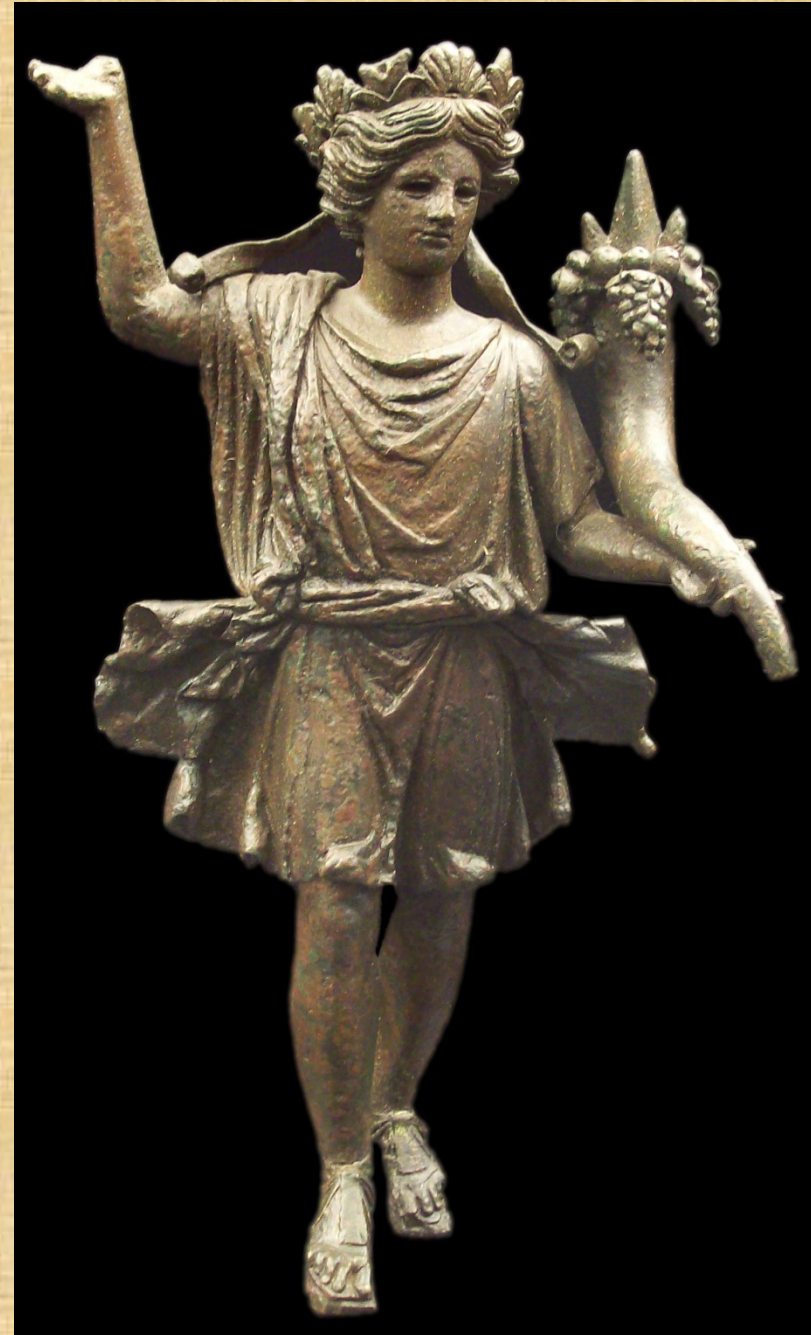
### ***Magistri vici***

- inhabitants of the *vicus*, freedman
- allowed to wear the magistrates' purple-bordered toga
- accompanied by a lictor

### Augustus reform – new function

- administrative tasks
- organizing firefighting
- conducting censuses for the grain dole

Cults were financed by *magistri* (inscriptions as dedicators), so that Augustus had to **make the position attractive**



*After the reform:*

Two lares compitales turned to Lares Augusti and Genius Augusti entered the worship - several relief-decorated and inscribed altars from the Augustan cults

*Sacrifice:*

*Lares* - blood offering (pig), *genius* - bloodless

Aspect imposed from above – sacrifice to the *Genius Augusti* of a bull (implication of the importance of this figure, maybe a main divinity of the cult)

Compital cults cannot be termed state cults – not a part of *sacra publica*, thus only *sacra privata*

*Sacra publica*

- rites performed by state officials
- paid for by public funds
- on behalf of the whole *populus Romanus*

But Augustus stays conservative also in the compital cults:

4BC – inscribed base, dedicated by Augustus – clearly after the reform – *Laribus publicis*, not *Laribus augustis*, any indication that Augustus' Genius was included in this cult



## Inscribed relief-decorated altars

### 1. 7 BC – Augustan compital altar

front side – togate *Genius Augusti* and the two *Lares Augusti*, in the background two laurel trees

short side – two *magistri vici* while pouring libations accompanied by a flute player, the other short side - identical, so that all four *magistri* are shown

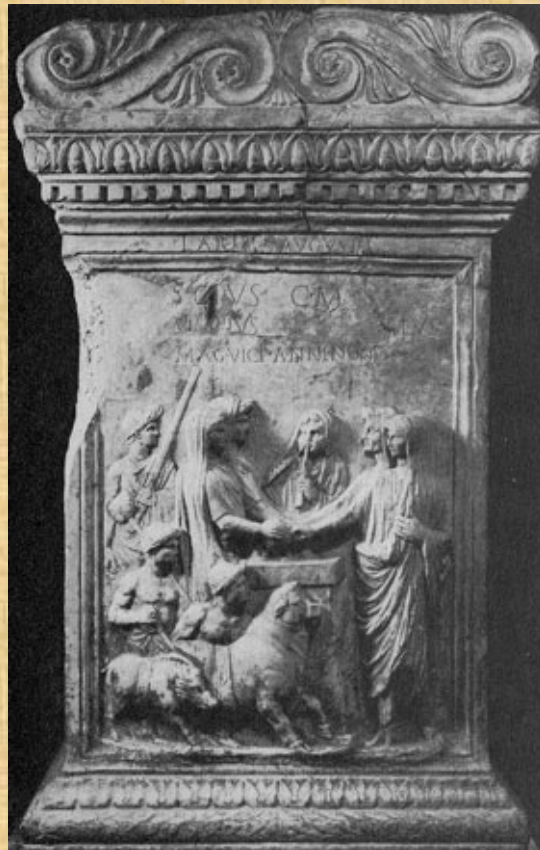


## 2. 2-3 AD Augustan compital altar

front side – a scene of sacrifice – *magistri vici* are pouring the libations while the victims (a pig for *Lares* and a bull for Genius) are being led by two *victimarii*, there is also the *lictor* and the flute player

back: three *ministri* are receiving stauettes of the *Lares* from a man in toga, taller than them, *velato capite*. He must be Augustus himself, accompanied by the princes Gaius Caesar and Lucius Caesar.

Identification: the person offers the statuettes of the Lares only, and not the one of his own Genius.



### 3. The Sorrento base, late Augustan, after 12 BC

- Reference: the state religion, divine ancestors of the Julian family and Augustus' personal protector - Apollo

The primary side: the Vestal Virgins in procession towards a seated Vesta. In the background – a Ionic portico and a round shrine, continues to the short side

The short side: Augustus' house identified by the *corona civica* – Mars Ultor, Amor, Venus (?), Genius

The other short side: Diana, Apollo and Leto

The back side: Cybele with her lion and a dancing male figure (traditional in her cult)



**The seated figure holding *cornucopia*** in the middle – *Genius* (only divinity with this attribute), heroically semi-nude and youthful, probably *Genius populi Romani* (problem – usually grouped with Dea Roma or *Genius senatus*, not Mars or Venus)

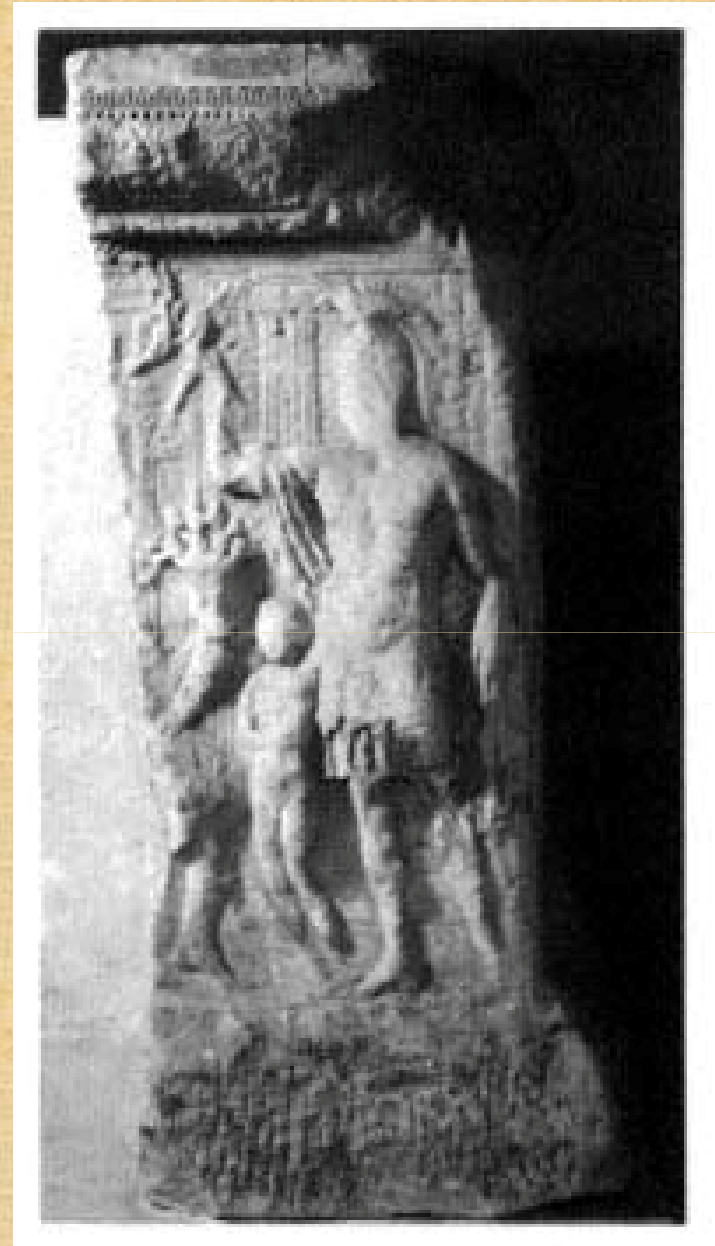
Result: these two *Genius populi Romani* and *Genius Augusti* started being mixed up, indistinguishable without an inscription

Augustus and later emperors took over and exploited this figure.

A preparatory step by Augustus or by his supporters towards his *Genius* worship.

Continuity in iconography - innovation easier to accept – a good strategy .

Other preparatory step – *Genius* received a bull as a sacrifice, previously bloodless.



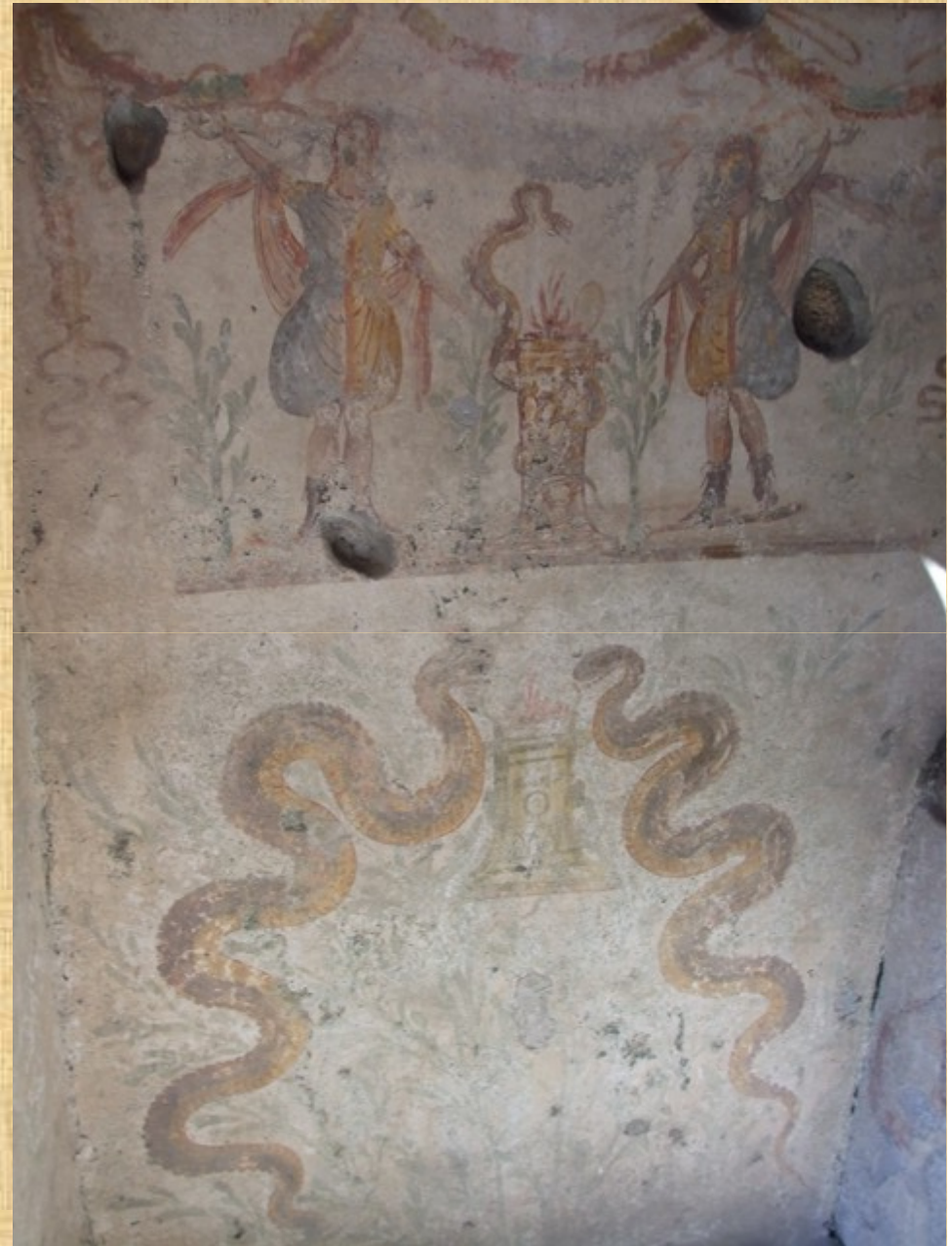
*Lararia in Pompeii*

– decoration influenced by iconography of the Augustan compital cults

*Lares* – depicted with flanking laurels (reflecting laurel trees planted outside Augustus' house)

- laurels taken after mechanically – without clear knowledge (four laurels)
- presumably this is the typical way how imperial imagery entered the iconography of domestic cults

**The basic meaning of the imperial cult in the private sphere** – integration of all citizens of the Roman empire, who, through the cult of the emperor, shared the same identity.



## PROVINCIAL AND MUNICIPAL LEVEL

– no evidence that he was averse

*Municipal cults* – no prohibition

*Provincial cults* – insisted that Roma was worshipped with him in the same temple

Epigraphic documentation – the cult of the Genius of Augustus already existed during his lifetime (in provinces, no question, in Rome – more conservative approach)

### 1. *Daily text on papyrus from Oxyrhynchus*

The Oxyrhynchus Papyri – a numerous group of manuscripts discovered by archaeologists at an ancient rubbish dump near Oxyrhynchus in Upper Egypt.

date: from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD.

thousands of Greek and Latin documents, letters and literary works

#### *Poxy 12, 1245*

The text is an old document, brought to light as waste paper, bearing an oath

*“in the name of Caesar [=Augustus], son of a god”.*

2. *Official epigraphic document*

a decree issued in 9 BC by Paullus Fabius Maximus, proconsul of Province Asia  
found at Priene

important innovation: a new year calendar for the province, starting on the day of Augustus' birthday (September 23<sup>rd</sup> )

*OGIS [Orientis Graeci inscriptiones selectae] 458*

a) Augustus' birth is a sign of divine providence: for this reason all the virtues are in him at the highest degree

b) Augustus is the saviour of humanity, who put an end to war and restored peace, excelling all the preceding benefactors and leaving no possibility to the future ones to excel him

c) As the day of Augustus' birth marked for the world the beginning of the benefits that Augustus would have brought, Paullus Fabius Maximus decides such an extraordinary innovation: the change in the starting of the new year.

### The temples of the *veneratio Augusti*:

- 56 dedicated to the first emperor Augustus
- of them, 37 were built during his lifetime
- in Italy – 16, 7 surely built in his lifetime, only one is surely posthumous (Nola).
- The municipal cults in Italy: the living emperor rather than on the Divi
- in the city of Rome – no temple dedicated to Augustus during his lifetime
- civic priests all over Italy – flamen (sacerdos)
- the temples are designed in the same way as the temples of the traditional gods, so that it is impossible to distinguish them if lacking in iconographic apparatus (statues, relieves) or in epigraphic texts

**The emperor as an object of cult had a great importance for the political cohesion of the Empire.**



## **The Temple of Augustus and Livia (Temple d'Auguste et de Livie), Roman temple, Vienne, France**

Built: 20 BC – 10 BC, restored in the 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD, rededicated to Livia by Claudius

description: a hexastyle, prostyle porch, 14.25 x 23.85 m

- well-preserved: incorporated into a church in about the 5<sup>th</sup> c. AD, restored in 19<sup>th</sup> c.



## The Temple of Augustus, Pula, Croatia

Built: between 2 BC and his death in 14 AD

-under Byzantine rule – converted into a church, later used as a granary, hit by a bomb in WWII, much of the structure rebuilt

- description: tetrastyle prostyle porch, Corinthian columns, 8 x 17.3 m, decorated frieze

- Part of a triad – the Temple of Augustus, larger central temple (not preserved), the Temple of Diana (only the back side of the temple has survived – incorporated into the Communal Palace)

- dedication:

**ROMAE · ET · AUGUSTO · CAESARI · DIVI · F ·  
PATRI · PATRIAE**

*Roma and Augustus Caesar, son of the deity,  
father of the fatherland*



#### 4. THE IMAGES

Used art in the service of his political and social ideology

The emperor and his family – immortalized in individual portraits and in family groups

Standardization of the image of the living ruler

Four themes in Augustan art and architecture – victory, peace, prosperity and divine descent

To tell such a complex course, Augustus chose two different communication strategies:

##### **Visual language:**

e.g.:

The Forum of Augustus

Ara Pacis

The Belvedere Altar

Gemma Augustea

##### **Textual language:**

*Res gestae* – written in the first person, narrating his own life at the service of the Senate and the *Populus Romanus*, known fragmentary epigraphic texts:

- Original - bronze plates - Mausoleum Augusti
- fragmentary copies in greek and latin - The Temple of Augustus and Rome at Ancyra in Galatia
- fragments of the greek version - large podium of a sculptural group representing Augustus and his family, near Apollonia (Uluborlu)
- fragments of the Latin text - propylaeum erected at Psidian Antiochia

## **Portraits**

Always youthful – Apolline image of youthful radiance – Apollo, personal god, the portraits are products of centrally chosen types

- a) Arles type – mourning, 37 BC, bearded
- b) The Actium type – determined military man, two deep vertical lines, full head of curls set in relative disorder (Musei Capitolini)
- c) The Primaporta type – Primaporta, Via Labicana – capite velato – no deep vertical lines, also for Corinth and Samos – stressing his aspect of a pious Roman
- d) The Forbes type – or the Ara Pacis type – hair brushed to one side



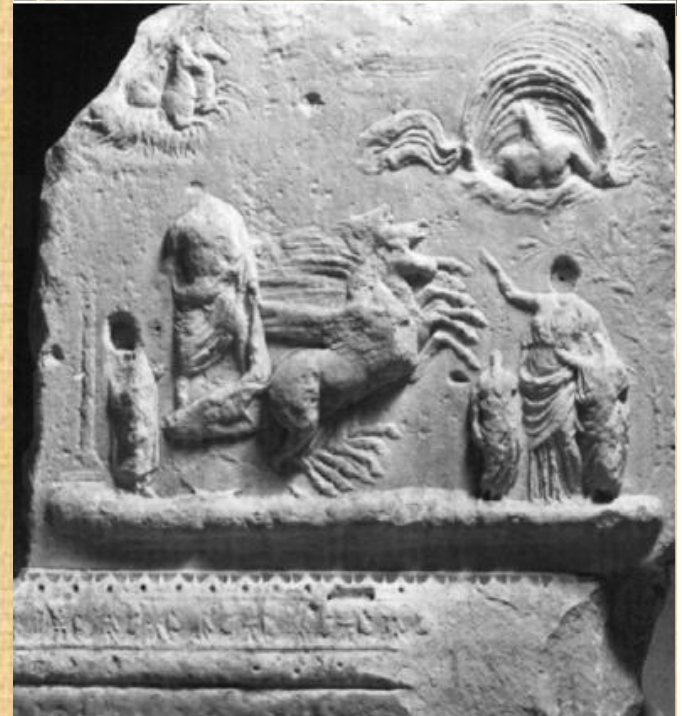
## THE BELVEDERE ALTAR

Summarizes Augustus' political ideology, social laws and religious beliefs

The front side: a rocky (Palatine) setting with a pair of laurel trees (Augustus' house) flanking a flying Victory who is setting an inscribed shield on a pillar.

Inscription: refers to Augustus as *pontifex maximus*

The back side: a chariot scene with the chariot drawn by four horses that rise from the horizontal groundline, the chariot holds a seminude male figure with a mantle, a woman with two small boys are in front of the chariot. In the sky there are *Caelus* and the horses of the sun god. The scene is the *apotheosis* – Julius Caesar, Augustus or Romulus. The male to the left – Tiberius or the senator Julius Proculus. The woman on the right is Livia, Julia or Venus. The two boys are Gaius and Lucius Caesar (or two children of Romulus and his wife Hersilia).



Another side: Helenus and Aeneas' discovery of the sow of Lavinium

The last side: Augustus' presentation of *lares* statuettes to the attendants of the street superintendents or *vicomagistri* and this altar

meaning: Augustus is Aeneas' successor, he guided Rome under the protection of his divine father and protector, Apollo. Augustus' hopes for the future which lies in his two young heirs. Julius Caesar apotheosis is an early articulation of the divine claims of Augustus' household to monopolize Rome's military responsibilities.

- the assimilation of divine and human households





GEMMA  
AUGUSTEA  
Two-layer  
sardonyx: white  
the upper, brown  
the lower.

Wien, KHM,  
Antikensammlung,  
Inv. No. IXa 79.

Subject: Augustus  
receives Tiberius  
and Germanicus  
after the victory  
upon Pannonia and  
Dalmatia.

AD 9/10-12.



**Gemma Augustea  
backside**

- gold and silver
- manufactured in the court ateliers of Rudolph II in Prague, beg. 17<sup>th</sup> century
  
- known since 1264
- until 1533 – Toulouse
- after 1591 – Venice
- 1619 Vienna





6 AD – Tiberius led war against uprised Pannonians, which ended with the participation of Germanicus in 9 AD. Reditus is depicted – victorious return.

1 – missing togatus, 2 – Tiberius, 3 – Victory, 4 – biga, 5 – horse, 6 – Germanicus, 7- goddess Roma, 8 – astrological device, 9 – Augustus as Jupiter, 10 – eagle, 11 – Oikoumene, 12 – Saturnus, 13 – Tellus, 14 and 15 - children



A scene of victory – the erection of a trophy

16 – a shield with a scorpion, 17 – Romulus=Quirinus, 18 – horseman, 19 – sitting barbarian woman, 20 – chained barbarian, 21 – Mars, 22 and 23 Castor and Polux, 24 - Diana, 25 – Mercury, 26 – kneeling barbarian, 27 – barbarian woman

## Augustus and the imperial cult

### State cult

- avoided direct deification
- became god after death

### Municipal and Provincial cult

- insisted Roma was worshipped with him
- political cohesion of the Empire
- Vienne, Pula

### Private cult

- no restrictions
- reorganized the administrative system – vicus
- relief decorated altars
- Genius
- integration of all citizens of the Roman empire – shared the same identity

### Communication strategies

*Visual language* – The Forum of Augustus, Ara Pacis, the Belvedere Altar, Gemma Augustea  
*Textual language* – Res Gestae

