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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS IN HISTORY: THE EMPEROR AUGUSTUS

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Abstract

While the term 'strategic communications' was coined in the early 21st century, the core tenets of strategic communications have been employed by political actors throughout history. This article demonstrates that strategic communications aptly describes the Roman emperor Augustus' methods for articulating and advocating his conception of a new world order. Through policy, law, art, architecture, religion, and poetry, presented to both a domestic audience in Rome and an external audience in the provinces, Augustus sought to establish a stable political model and to emphasise his role as a peacemaker. This took place in a contested communications environment, following a century of intermittent civil war waged across the Roman empire

from provincial battlefields to the heart of the Senate. Augustan poetry not only communicated Augustus' key messages to his contemporary audiences, but also left a legacy that informs our modern understanding of the Roman empire.

INTRODUCTION

When Augustus became the first emperor of Rome—an unprecedented achievement in Rome's hitherto republican political system—he consolidated his sole rule by communicating to audiences near and far simple but compelling messages that associated peace and political stability with himself and his family as an established institution of power. Through this series of messages, conveyed through a variety of media, including architecture, the religious calendar, and poetry, he created a legacy that has come to be historically accepted as the symbolic representation of the Roman empire. This article will argue that Augustus' lasting reputation was the result of effective strategic communications, which not only successfully communicated his message to contemporary audiences, but also conveyed his legacy to subsequent generations through the creative and enduring medium of poetry.

'Strategic communications' is a 21st century term, and the study of this field has gained ever more traction in the last twenty years, but so far there has been a limited exploration of historical precedent for strategic communications. By interrogating the seismic events of the Augustan period from a communications perspective, this article will also address a gap in the literature from the classical tradition on the subject of Augustan culture. While there is a general consensus among modern academic views of Augustan culture that poetry was part of a coordinated cultural strategy, there has been very little analysis of the effect this strategy had on its intended audiences.[1] By applying strategic

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1 Duncan Kennedy, '"Augustan" and "Anti-Augustan": Reflection on Terms of Reference' in Anton Powell, *Roman Poetry and Propaganda in the Age of Augustus* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1992), p. 35; Greg Woolf, 'Provincial Perspectives' in Galinsky, p. 127; Alessandro Barchiesi, "Learned Eyes: Poets, Viewers, Image Makers" in Karl Galinsky (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 281; Jasper Griffin, 'Augustan Poetry and Augustanism' in Galinsky, p. 319; Karl Galinsky, 'Virgil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as World Literature' in Galinsky, p. 340.

communications theory to Augustan poetry, this article seeks to define the message Augustus intended to communicate, to explore how he conveyed that message through poetry, and to analyse how his target audiences understood his message and what role this played in shaping their mindset and behaviours.

The article also responds to the call made first by Fernand Braudel and later by Ned Lebow for a historian's view of the social sciences.[2] In his seminal essay from 1960, 'History and the Social Sciences', Braudel draws parallels between the compartmentalisation of academic fields and trends in history writing: political scientists' views of history are measured in days,[3] whereas Braudel seeks to identify social patterns across centuries. Braudel initiated a discussion about long-term trends, themes, narratives, and cycles within the social sciences, drawing together both history and social science in an exploration of underlying theory. A recent response to this call can be found in Lebow's theory of 'inefficient cause',[4] in which he confronts the temptation to frame reasons and causes in a pattern that builds to a specific political turning point or decision, thereby rejecting the trap of a teleological explanation of cause and effect.[5] Instead, Lebow considers the multiple and connected layers of cause that underpin any event in international relations. The development of a 'causal map'[6] will necessarily draw on multiple connected disciplines, creating a framework for understanding in the kind of broad perspective advocated by Braudel. Like Braudel, Lebow calls for 'the historian's art' to complement 'the social scientist's conceptual rigour'.[7] In a similar vein, Herbert Blumer builds on the work of George Herbert Mead in defining societal structure in terms of symbolic interactionism, characterising actions, both individual and collective, as the result of

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2 Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein, 'History and the Social Sciences: The Longue Durée', *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* Volume 32 Nº2 (2009): 171–72; Richard Ned Lebow, *Constructing Cause in International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 68.
3 Braudel, 'History and the Social Sciences', p. 176.
4 Lebow, *Constructing Cause,* p. 5.
5 Ibid., p. 65.
6 Ibid., p. 66.
7 Ibid., p. 68.

the making of meanings and the transference of communications between individuals and across groups.[8]

In a short-term, snapshot view, balances of power may be characterised along an axis of threat or coercion, such as those proposed by Thomas Schelling and Joseph Nye,[9] but a more nuanced, holistic, and long-term view is required when analysing the shaping of discourse, which the school of strategic communications helps to examine. Both Lebow and Blumer take the long view in their models of inefficient cause and symbolic interactionism, as they trace the formation of meaning through a layered series of interdependent interactions. Discourse is shaped through the creation and fostering of symbols that carry meaning and are transmitted, understood, and formed anew across multiple generations— what Braudel would call the *longue durée*.[10] As a holistic discipline, strategic communications considers elements of meaning-making in the effort to appreciate and characterise long-term strategy. It is this long-term model of meaning-making that will be applied here to the historical context of Augustan Rome and to the discourse shaped by Augustan art, architecture, and in particular, poetry, all of which were mechanisms for structuring and transmitting messages across Roman society.

In the 1st century BC, poetry was as much a hammer used to shape society as it was a mirror that reflected it.[11] Poetry was the primary popular form of storytelling and commanded audiences and readers across the Roman empire. Augustus leveraged poetry together with other communicative methods, embedding a new idea of Roman identity within existing cultural identities and building on these ideas to create an attractive conception of an imperial power framework that could appeal to both the core and peripheral audiences of the Roman empire.

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8 Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 2–12.
9 Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (Hartford: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 1; Joseph S. Nye Jr, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009), p. 2.
10 Braudel, 'History and the Social Sciences', pp. 171–74.
11 Zenia Duell, 'Mirrors and Hammers' in L. Haiden (ed.) *The Future is Now* (Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2021).

This article examines three Augustan poets, identifies the audiences with which their poetry resonated, and invokes the principles of strategic communications to evaluate their effectiveness. More than any other symbolic action of the era, poetry continues to communicate Augustus' messages of political stability to modern audiences.

HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK

Perhaps the clearest performance indicator for the effectiveness of Augustus' strategic communications is that still today the Roman empire needs no introduction. Mention of the name immediately conjures up images redolent with clear branding: red tunics, eagle-shaped standards, great buildings with columns, and letters carved in stone in the now archetypal font. However, until 31 BC the concept of a Roman emperor was anathema to the idea of Rome.

The city of Rome was purportedly founded on 21 April 753 BC,[12] and, according to legend, the first king of Rome was Romulus. There followed several generations of kings, who began the process of expanding Rome's territory and sphere of influence, conquering areas in the immediate vicinity.[13] According to the Roman historian Livy, the rule of kings ended with Lucius Tarquinius Superbus [Lucius the Proud], whose son disgraced the ruling family and destroyed alliances that had been built among the powerful families of Rome when he raped Lucretia, the wife of a Roman general.[14] In the political outrage that followed, the Tarquinius family was driven from Rome by a faction led by Lucius Junius Brutus, and the Roman Republic was established. The Romans were proud of this new political model: the Republic took great pains to stress that sole rule was not to be tolerated, except as a temporary measure in specific circumstances.

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12 As Henry Sanders explains, this date was pure guesswork on the part of ancient authors. Henry A. Sanders, 'The Chronology of Early Rome', *Classical Philology* Volume Nº3 (July 1908): 316–29; The historian Varro settled on this date, working backwards from known later dates in Roman history, and this particular date became universally accepted as the foundation date of Rome, both by Romans and by current historians. The birthday of Rome was celebrated on 21 April each year together with a shepherd's festival, the Parilia. See Ovid, *Fasti*, translated by A.S. Kline (Online: Poetry in Translation, 2004), Book IV.
13 Timothy B. Lee, '40 Maps that Explain the Roman Empire', Vox, 19 August 2014.
14 Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita,* Volume I: Book 1, translated by B.O. Foster (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1919), 1: 57–60. The Rape of Lucretia is a popular image in Renaissance artwork. The story was also romanticised by William Shakespeare in his poem, *Lucrece*.

The political model of the Republic operated on the basis of elected officials, called senators, chosen from among a particular class of Roman men (only those who had a certain level of income or property). The senators were tiered according to responsibility:
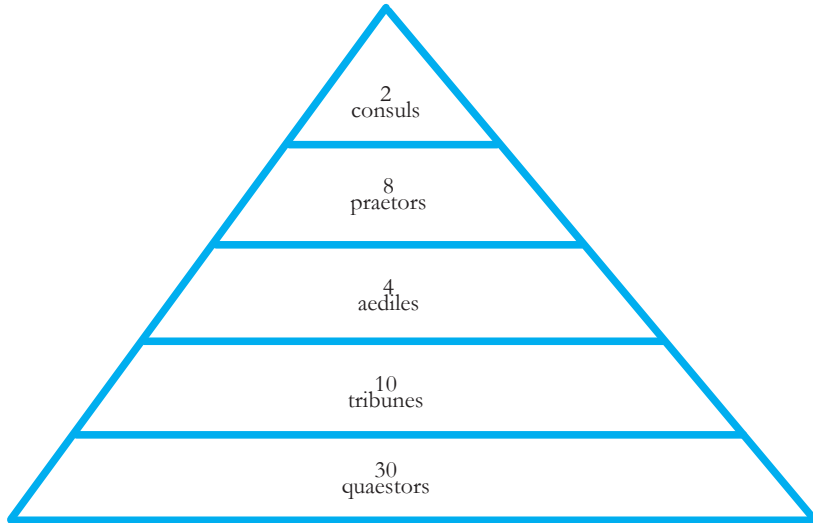

Figure 1. Roles within the Roman senate

At the top of this pyramid of responsibility were the consuls. Two consuls were elected each year so they could hold each other to account, so that power could not, in theory, be concentrated in a single, perpetual ruler. However, in a time of political or military emergency, a 'dictator' could be elected from among the senators, who would be given specific decision-making powers for a limited period of time in order to combat a particular crisis.[15] (In Latin 'dictator' simply means 'one who speaks' and in that period the term was free of the pejorative meaning with which it is now associated.)

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15 Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita,* 2: 18.

Figure 2. Roman territories in the early Republican period[16]

This system worked effectively for four hundred years, during which time the empire expanded significantly.

This expansion was due in part to the involvement of Rome in the wars of succession that followed the death of Alexander the Great.

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16 Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'The Roman Republic'. [Accessed 21 August 2021]

His conquests had created the Greek/Macedonian empire, stretching from the Aegean to the Ganges, subsuming the entire Persian Empire, Egypt, Afghanistan, and even parts of India into his area of administration, the centre of which was the ancient Mesopotamian city of Babylon. With his military conquests came cultural conquests: Alexander founded approximately twenty cities named after himself throughout the empire, several of which still bear his name today.[17]
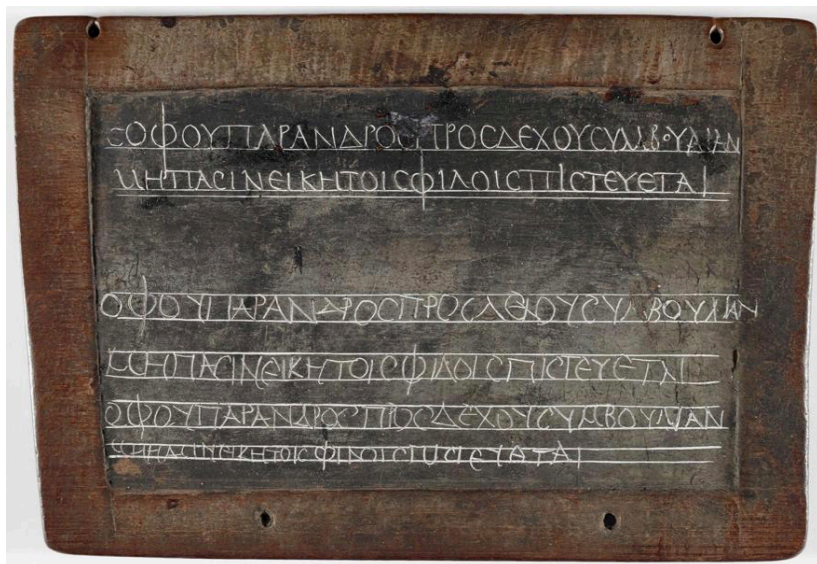

Figure 3. A child's writing tablet from the 2nd century AD in Egypt [18]

These new cities were designed in the Greek style, with grid planning for houses and streets and the amenities unique to Greek culture: theatres, libraries, gymnasia, and public baths. Eventually, existing cities adopted this design and a cultural revolution spread across the area known as the

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17 Alexandria in Egypt is the most obvious of the surviving Alexandrias, but Iskenderun in Turkey is Alexandria in modern Turkish, and Kandahar in Afghanistan is an Afghan rendition of the name.
18 A writing tablet found in Egypt in the 2nd century AD shows an exercise completed by an Egyptian schoolchild. The writing is in Greek. British Library, Wax diptycha or writing tablets, forming a schoolboy's exercise-book, [shelfmark Add MS 34186].

Near East. Persian actors performed Greek plays in theatres in Seleucia,[19] Egyptian schoolchildren learned to spell in Greek in Alexandria, and Central Asians played Greek discus games in gymnasia at Ai Khanum.[20] This cultural revolution is known as Hellenisation.

After Alexander the Great's death in 323 BC, his generals divided the empire among them. There followed a series of wars in which rival generals (the *Diadochi* or 'Successors') sought to protect their spoils from the others. Rome, meanwhile, had developed a reputation for having a powerful fighting force, and several of these Successors enlisted Roman mercenaries in their wars, or looked to Rome as a neutral political arbitrator.[21] The fledgling Roman empire was able to leverage this power in the Near East, and gradually accumulated territory, allies, client kings, and political influence across the Near East and Persia.[22] At the same time, it was expanding its influence northwards into the Alps and Gaul (France and Northern Italy), westwards into Spain, and southwards into North Africa, which was largely administered by the powerful Carthaginian empire.

The Romans were not yet able to offer these conquered lands the kind of cultural revolution Alexander had launched, but they could serve their provinces as a guarantor of security and as an arbitrator of international disputes. Rome had both the political and military power to leverage its influence throughout the wider Mediterranean world.

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19 The Greek biographer Plutarch writes that when the Roman general Crassus was captured and killed on a campaign against the Parthian Empire, he was beheaded and his head was used as a prop in a performance of Euripides' play *Bacchae*, performed at Seleucia near modern-day Baghdad. Plutarch, 'Crassus' in *Parallel Lives*, translated by Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge, MA and London: Loeb Classical Library, 1923), section 33. This evidence reveals that Greek plays and performers were still popular in Mesopotamia several hundred years after the dissolution of Alexander the Great's empire.
20 The excavation of the ancient city of Ai Khanum in Afghanistan revealed a gymnasium, designed in the Greek style but with wider proportions more suitable for the Central Asian climate. Paul Bernard, 'The Greek Colony at Ai Khanum and Hellenism in Central Asia' in Fredrik Hiebert and Pierre Cambon (eds) *Afghanistan: Crossroads of the Ancient World* (London: British Museum Press, 2011), pp. 89–90.
21 Graham Shipley, *The Greek World After Alexander, 323–30 BC* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000)*,* pp. 370–97.
22 Vickie Sullivan, 'Alexander the Great as "Lord of Asia" and Rome as His Successor in Machiavelli's *Prince*', *The Review of Politics* Volume 75 Nº4 (2013): 517.

Figure 4. Rome and the Successor Kingdoms[23]

In the 1st century BC, a series of civil wars that started in Rome, caused by competing factions within the senatorial system, played out across the entire empire. These civil wars culminated with the victory of Gaius Julius Caesar's faction, and Caesar declared himself dictator for life. For many of the other powerful senators in Rome, this was a step too far towards the monarchical system that had ended when Brutus drove the Tarquinii out in 510 BC.[24] The tension was further exacerbated when Caesar's friend and political ally, Marcus Antonius (Mark Antony), crowned Caesar with a diadem during a religious celebration.[25] In March of 44 BC, Marcus Junius Brutus, a direct descendant of Lucius Junius Brutus, led a coup in the senate in which Caesar was assassinated. This led to a second civil war between two factions: the pro-Republic faction of Brutus, and the pro-Caesar faction led by Mark Antony.

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23 Lee, Timothy B., '40 Maps that Explain the Roman Empire', *Vox,* 19 August 2014.
24 Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 55.
25 Ibid.

Caesar had died without a legitimate male heir, but in his will, he adopted his great-nephew Gaius Octavius Thurinus (Octavian) as his son. It was into this tense political environment, wracked by civil war, that the eighteen-year-old Octavian entered following Caesar's assassination. Octavian immediately adopted the surname Caesar, in order to promote his legitimacy as Caesar's heir. He saw political advantage in creating an alliance with Mark Antony, Caesar's closest friend and supporter and leader of the pro-Caesar faction in the senate. To their alliance, Antony and Octavian added a senator called Marcus Aemilius Lepidus. This alliance was known as the Second Triumvirate;[26] Octavian, Mark Antony, and Lepidus divided administration of the provinces between them. Octavian took over Italy, Antony claimed Gaul and the East, while Lepidus received the provinces in Africa. Octavian further cemented the alliance with Antony by arranging a marriage between Antony and his elder sister, Octavia.

The combined power of this Triumvirate enabled the pro-Caesar faction to defeat Brutus' army at the battle of Philippi in Greece. However, after their mutual enemy had been destroyed, the Triumvirate eventually disintegrated. Mark Antony embarked on an ambitious campaign against the kingdom of Parthia (modern day Iraq/Iran). In order to accumulate the resources to launch his campaign, Mark Antony forged an alliance with the wealthy and powerful Queen of Egypt, Cleopatra. There is clear evidence that this was much more than a political alliance: Antony did not attempt to deny that he was the father of Cleopatra's twin children.[27]

Octavian spun Mark Antony's relationship with Cleopatra to his political advantage. When Antony requested reinforcements from the west for his expedition against Parthia, Octavian sent his sister, Mark Antony's wife, with just 10% of the troops requested. Antony was disappointed: he accepted the troops, but dismissed Octavia, returning instead to Cleopatra. Octavian used this snub to whip up a sense of outrage in Rome, painting Octavia as the virtuous wife and Cleopatra as an

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26 The First Triumvirate had been the alliance between Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus (60–53 BC).
27 Martin Goodman and Jane Sherwood, *The Roman World: 44 BC–AD 180*, (London: Routledge, 1997)*,* p. 37; Syme, *The Roman Revolution,* p. 261.

untrustworthy foreign homewrecker;[28] he also delegitimised Antony's cause by implying a loss of agency. When the relationship between the two men had been strained to breaking point, Octavian was able to use this sense of outrage to initiate a war against Anthony, presented to the public as a Roman war on Egypt and Cleopatra, rather than yet another civil war. It was political semantics, but to a domestic audience that had suffered many years of bloodshed already, it was important for Octavian to communicate that he would be a different sort of leader, so he framed his homegrown opponent as the 'other'.

The rivalry came to a head at the battle of Actium in 31 BC. Octavian's forces, led by his right-hand man and experienced naval commander Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, defeated the combined forces of Antony and Cleopatra. Cleopatra fled to Egypt and Mark Antony followed. Their subsequent suicides are recounted in the works of the Greek biographer Plutarch and the historian Cassius Dio.[29]

The fact that only one bust of Antony remains, created in the century after the Battle of Actium, suggests that Octavian was successful in destroying all evidence of support for his political rival. Octavian's narrative regarding Cleopatra was already embedded in the Greco-Roman orientalising tropes that characterised the East (including Egypt) as effeminate, gluttonous, and sexually liberal.[30] The leaflets, speeches, and campaigns produced by Octavian in the third decade BC have now been lost, but evidence from Roman historians attests to the fact that Octavian synonymised Cleopatra with Roman stereotypes of the East, reifying and conceptualising her as an enemy who was both real and abstract.[31]

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28 Syme, *The Roman Revolution,* pp. 265 and 275.
29 Plutarch, '*Antony',* in *Parallel Lives*, pp. 77–87; Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, translated by Earnest Cary (Harvard: Loeb Classical Library, 1914–27)*,* p. 50.
30 Maria Wyke, *The Roman Mistress: Ancient and Modern Representations*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 213; Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy*, Oxford Classical Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 1 and 50.
31 Wyke, *The Roman Mistress,* pp. 223 and 228, drawing on Suetonius, *Augustus* 17. See also C.B.R. Pelling, 'The Triumviral Period' in A.K. Bowman, E. Champlin, and A. Lintott (eds) *The Cambridge Ancient History* [2nd edition] Volume X: *The Augustan Empire, 43 BC–AD 69* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 41–46.
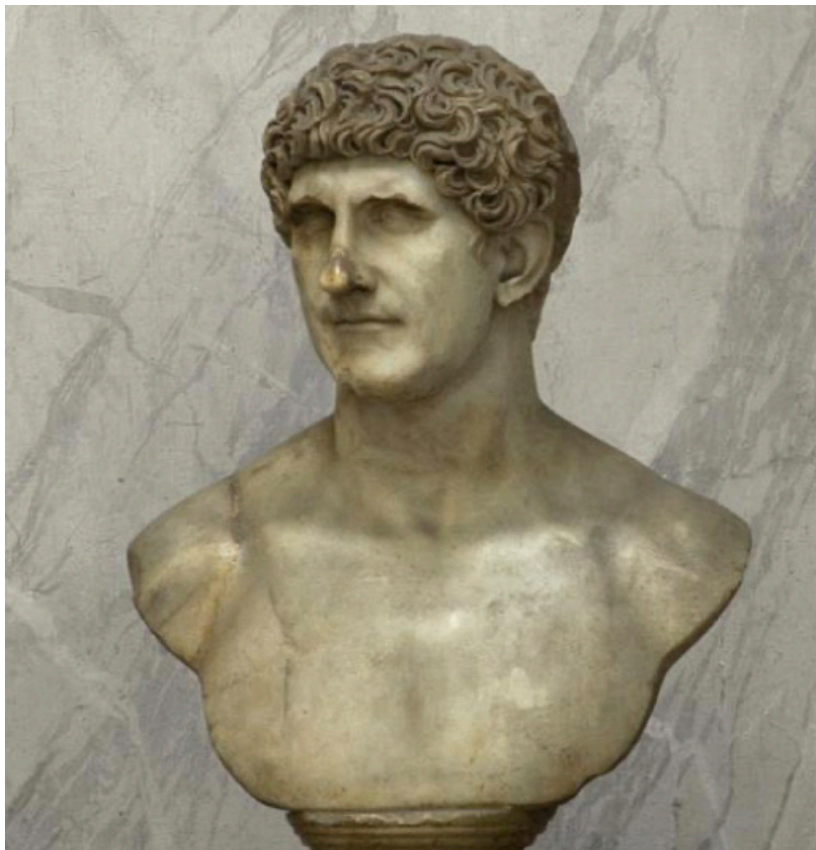
Figure 5. Bust of Mark Antony in the Vatican Museum, from the Flavian period[32]

He also communicated his characterisation of Cleopatra very tangibly in the Roman forum. In 44 BC, Julius Caesar placed a golden statue of Cleopatra in the Temple of Venus; historians have conjectured that Octavian placed images of his wife Livia and his sister Octavia,

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32 Sergey Sosnovskiy, photo credit, public domain, Wikimedia Commons jpg file: <u>Marcus Antonius marble bust in the Vatican Museums</u>. [Accessed 21 August 2021]

portrayed as perfect Roman matrons, next to Cleopatra's statue in the temple so that the Roman public could directly compare these rival ideas of womanhood.[33]

Following the Battle of Actium, Octavian returned to Rome the undisputed, unrivalled holder of political power.[34] However, Octavian was careful not to fall into the same trap as his adoptive father in overtly claiming absolute monarchy but instead kept the consular system in place. In theory, Rome was still operating as a Republic, but in reality, it was universally understood within the political body of Rome that decision-making power lay with a single person. Already from 38 BC, Octavian had adopted the title *imperator*, meaning 'military commander' in Latin, and it is from this word that we get the English word 'emperor'. In 27 BC the Senate voted him several other titles: *Augustus, princeps,* and *pater patriae*.[35] *Augustus* has a very particular meaning in Latin; translated as 'venerable' the word also carries connotations of religious reverence and piety,[36] and of social and political elevation. *Princeps* is the root of the English words 'prince' and 'principate', and literally means 'first'—here in the context of 'first among equals'. Octavian, or as he may now be titled, the Emperor Augustus, was carefully treading the line between political leader and monarch. These titles acknowledged his hegemony but did not compromise the essence of the Republic. *Pater patriae* means 'father of the fatherland' and acknowledged his status as the leader who brought an end to civil war. Augustus was building an image of himself as a fatherly figure, concerned for the welfare of the whole Roman people, not just his own political status.

Aesthetic Framework

After almost a century of civil war, Augustus had created a form of political stability. But it was fragile, and it was a hegemonic system—such as the Romans had violently rejected five hundred years earlier following

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33 Wyke, *The Roman Mistress,* p. 218.
34 Goodman and Sherwood, *The Roman World,* p. 38.
35 Gregory Aldrete, 'Unpacking the Titles of Augustus: Wordplay and Double Meanings', *The Great Courses Daily,* 21 October 2019.
36 Ibid.

the actions of Tarquinius. Entrenching this hegemonic political system would require a re-evaluation of what it meant to be Roman.[37] The following section will outline how Augustus set about constructing and communicating this new identity, this new set of values, this new world order,[38] to his domestic audience in Rome and to his audiences in the wider empire.

DOMESTIC AUDIENCE

The architectural landscape of the city of Rome was a cacophony of statements of power, erected by and for elite viewers.[39] Paul Zanker describes the fierce competition for visual supremacy as an echo of political jostling for power among the Roman elite during the late Republican period.[40] The city was also, in many ways, a graveyard of painful memories from the civil wars: the senate house itself went up in flames after the assassination of Julius Caesar, and the *rostrum*—a platform made of the bows of ships that sailed in the Battle of Antium in 338 BC—was used to display the hands and head of Cicero after he was murdered on the orders of the Second Triumvirate.[41] Augustus aimed to replace 'the memory of the violent changeability of the political and social conditions of the last decades of the Republic' with an ideology that appealed to 'notions of continuity, stability, fixity'.[42]

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37 Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Augustan Rome* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), p. 1.
38 Ibid.
39 Stephen H. Rutledge, 'Conflict, Culture and Concord: Some Observations on Alternative Memory in Ancient Rome' in Galinsky and Lapatin (eds) *Cultural Memories in the Roman Empire* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2015), p. 225.
40 Paul Zanker, <u>*The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*</u>, translated by Alan Shapiro (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988), p. 11.
41 Wallace-Hadrill, *Augustan Rome,* p. 55.
42 Philip Hardie, 'Augustan Poets and the Mutability of Rome' in Anton Powell (ed.) *Roman Poetry and Propaganda in the Age of Augustus* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1992), p. 61.

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Figure 6. The Theatre of Pompey, where Julius Caesar was assassinated[43]
Now the Largo di Torre Argentina—a cat sanctuary

In order to consolidate his own position of authority within this competitive landscape, Augustus set out to redesign Rome, reconstructing its identity in both time and space, and making the identity of Rome synonymous with himself as emperor, and his family as the guarantee of a continuation of that identity. As John Storey points out, 'hegemony involves […] a consensus in which a social group presents its own particular set of interests as the general interests of society as a whole […] this works in part through the circulation of meanings'.[44] Before Augustus' claim to sole power, the Senate had sought to represent the interests of the people of Rome through their slogan SPQR—*Senatus Populusque Romanus,* meaning 'the Senate and the People of Rome' (although the reality, of course, was that much of Roman society—proletariats, slaves, and women—had no say in political matters). Julius Caesar, on the other hand, as dictator for life, sought to position himself above the Senate. When this was demonstrated by Antony crowning him with a diadem,

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43 Buckley, Julia, 'Site Where Julius Caesar was Killed to Open to Tourists in 2021', *Conde Nast Traveler,* 22 February 2019.
44 John Storey, *Culture and Power in Cultural Studies: The Politics of Signification* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 6.

his position became unacceptable for the rest of the Senate, who saw themselves as the gatekeepers of the social order. Augustus, however, did not seek to override this social order but rather positioned himself within it. He circulated messages within his domestic audience through a series of symbolic acts that became embedded in the daily activities of the elite community of Rome, 'saturat[ing] the social with meanings that support[ed] the prevailing structures of power'.[45] By establishing himself as an inextricable part of the existing communications landscape, rather than in opposition to it, he immunised himself from competing messages. One of the ways he achieved this was through a coordinated programme of public buildings.

According to the historian Suetonius, Augustus claimed to have 'found [Rome] a city of brick, and left it a city of marble'.[46] While this is certainly a sweeping statement, it was 'more than a mere metaphor', as Galinsky attests.[47] During Julius Caesar's dictatorship, new marble quarries opened up at Carrara, providing Rome with a plentiful supply of cheap, local marble—a supply of which Augustus made full use.[48]

Augustus not only redesigned the traditional Roman forum to reflect the presence and values of his own family,[49] but also added another forum of his own design to this focal public space. The new forum was frequented primarily by the Roman elite—in fact, the firewall Augustus erected at the back of his forum separated it physically from the seedy Subura district, which was associated with the lower classes.[50] As a space for the elite, Augustus' forum had both practical and ceremonial functions. At the end of the forum was a temple to Mars *Ultor*—the Avenger—which Augustus had vowed to dedicate following the defeat of Julius Caesar's assassins, thanking Mars for 'revenge' against his adoptive father's

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45 Ibid., p. 7.
46 Suetonius, *Augustus,* 28.
47 Karl Galinsky, *Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 97.
48 Wallace-Hadrill, *Augustan Rome,* p. 50.
49 The temple to the deified Julius Caesar became the axis of the forum, flanked by the two largest public administrative buildings, the Basilica Julia and Basilica Aemilia, both named after Augustus' adopted twin grandsons, Gaius and Lucius. The neighbouring temple of the twin gods Castor and Pollux was also a nod to the imperial twins. See Wallace-Hadrill, *Augustan Rome,* pp. 53–55.
50 Rutledge, 'Conflict, Culture and Concord', p. 226.

murderers. The dedication reinforced his personal narrative, positioning him as the heir of Julius Caesar and as the divinely ordained protector of the Roman state as a whole.

The forum also served as a museum that portrayed Augustus in the context of Roman history. The central plaza of the forum, in front of the Temple dedicated to Mars, showcased a statue of Augustus in a four-horse chariot—a symbol of triumph; porticoes on either side of the plaza were filled with a series of statues of Roman leaders. Two semi-circular rooms on either side of the porticoes housed statues commemorating Rome's mythological heroes, whose story would be related in full by the poet Virgil in an epic poem commissioned by Augustus. While these images, and the message of teleology that they communicate, are clearly targeted at elite educated viewers with enough knowledge of history to be able to 'interpret cultural material',[51] Stephen Rutledge acknowledges that this visual display must have also communicated a general impression of power to the lay viewer. As Zanker outlines, 'never before had [the viewer] encountered such an extensive, fully integrated set of images'[52]—the messages were simple, clearly defined, drawn from a limited selection, and repeated on every possible occasion,[53] so that 'even the uneducated viewer was indoctrinated in the new visual program'.[54] James Farwell emphasises the importance of consistency of message in strategic communications:[55] nowhere is consistency more clearly demonstrated than in Augustus' forum.

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51 Ibid., pp. 225–26.
52 Zanker, *The Power of Images*, p. 112.
53 Ibid., p. 113.
54 Ibid., p. 112.
55 James P. Farwell, *Persuasion and Power: The Art of Strategic Communication* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012), p. xviii.
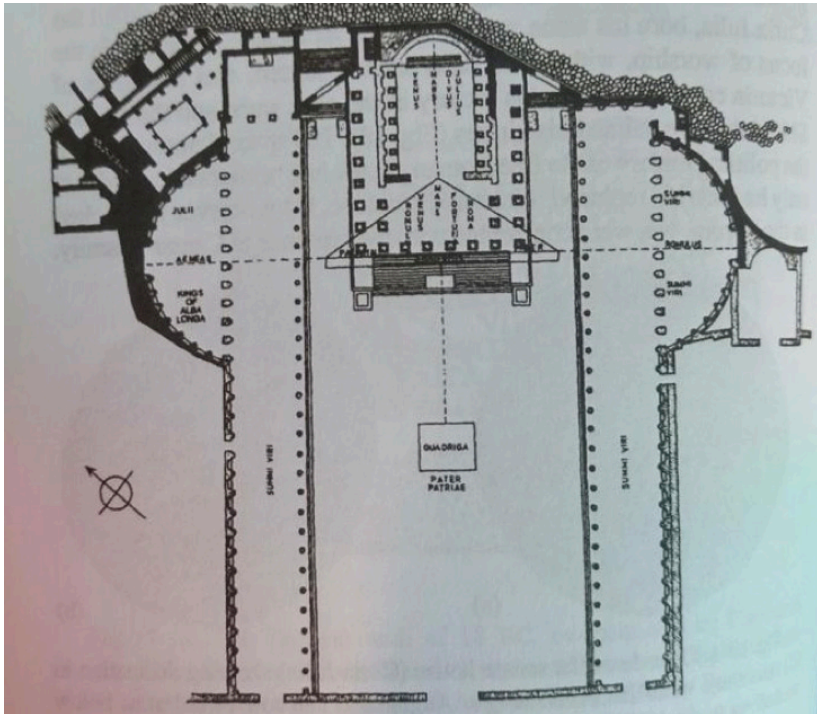
Figure 7. Plan of the Forum of Augustus, with iconographic programme[56]

Augustus was keen to emphasise that he brought peace after a long period of civil war: the *Pax Romana* was equally the *Pax Augusta*.[57] As an architectural expression of this message, Augustus erected an Altar of Peace, or *Pax*, within the Field of Mars, or *Campus Martius*—a marshy area of Rome used for military drills. While some Republican-era buildings already stood in this area, Augustus' decision to fill an ostensibly military space with new programmatic architecture commemorating himself and his family communicated to his domestic audience that the emphasis had changed from war to peace, from conflict to stability.

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56 Wallace-Hadrill, *Augustan Rome*, p. 50.
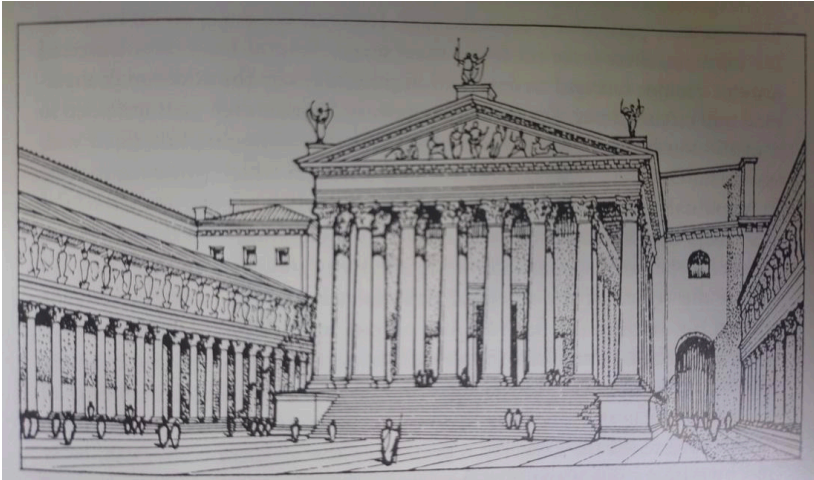57 Galinsky, *Augustan Culture,* p. 228.

Figure 8. Artist's impression of the Forum of Augustus[58]

The Altar itself was placed in the Field of Mars with mathematical precision in relation to an Egyptian obelisk, imported from Egypt after the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra. On 23 September, Augustus' birthday, the shadow of the obelisk would function as a giant sundial, pointing directly towards the centre of the Altar of Peace.[59] The message was subtle but clear: the conquest of Egypt led to the establishment of peace, and both were achieved by Augustus. As both Galinsky and Zanker describe in detail, the artwork adorning the Altar of Peace is much softer in style; images of family life in Rome are woven in among depictions of religious processions and scenes of the natural world.[60] The overwhelming impression is one of wholesome plenty. Galinsky demonstrates that the messages on the Altar of Peace were appreciated by a variety of audiences: while a full understanding of the programmatic art, its borrowed artistic styles and mythological contexts, would require

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58 Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, pp. 225–26.
59 Ibid., p. 146.
60 Ibid., pp. 141–55; Zanker, _The Power of Images_, pp. 118–23.

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an 'exceptionally high level of education',[61] motifs from the Altar of Peace can also be found on the funerary reliefs of middle-class families,[62] showing that the messages communicated by the Altar filtered through to multiple levels of society. The religious processions depicted on the altar reflected the daily activities of the senatorial elite; even without a strong understanding of artistic references, these depictions would have largely resonated with the population of Rome.[63]

Augustus' impact on the physical and artistic environment was literally monumental. As well as commissioning these new buildings, Augustus repaired some of the old Republican buildings, thereby inserted himself and the imperial family into the very fabric of Rome's architectural environment and redesigning the landscape so that his own constructions were in positions of prominence. In this way, he positioned himself at the teleological culmination of Roman history, a history characterised by war that had concluded with him, and with peace. Not only was Augustus signalling a new world order, but he was also signalling the 'end of history'.[64] His architectural programme would be repeated, elevated, and ultimately immortalised in an epic poem by Virgil, commissioned by Augustus himself, which will be further explored in the next section of this article.

Another way in which Augustus embedded himself and the imperial family into social meaning and Roman identity was in the very measurement of time itself. While the Roman calendar had months, it did not divide those months into weeks, so there was no concept of a working week and a weekend. Instead, days of rest were determined by religious festivals,[65] documented in calendars known as *fasti*. Julius Caesar had already reformed the calendar during his dictatorship, renaming the month of *quintilis* after himself [July]; Augustus named the following

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61 Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, p. 150.
62 Ibid. The motif of a group of adults with a child tugging at the mother's dress appears for the first time on the Altar of Peace and is repeated regularly on funerary monuments thereafter.
63 Zanker, The Power of Images, p. 123.
64 In the same way that Francis Fukuyama saw Western liberal democracy as the pinnacle of human government at the end of the Cold War, so Augustus was portraying his sole rule as the pinnacle of Roman government. Fukuyama, Francis, 'The End of History?', *The National Interest*, N°16 (1989): 4.
65 Sarah Bond, 'The History of the Birthday and the Roman Calendar', *Forbes,* 1 October 2016.

month, *sextilis* after himself [August]. He also incorporated imperial anniversaries and celebrations of himself and his family into the calendar of religious celebrations—an act Andrew Wallace-Hadrill describes as 'a positive invasion, a planned and systematic act of intrusion which has the cumulative effect of recasting what it meant to be Roman'.[66]

Archaeological evidence from the Augustan period, and from the reign of his successor Tiberius, shows that the reform of the Roman calendar was successful in consolidating Roman identity. During these periods, there is a proliferation of calendars inscribed in marble, as opposed to being painted on walls, which suggests a sense of certainty about the longevity of the calendar.[67] Given the close relationship between power and time as outlined above, a calendar set in stone is a direct reflection of political stability. Inscribing the *fasti* became an act of competitive flattery: 'to inscribe the Roman calendar was a statement of loyalty to the Roman system, and acknowledgement of the Emperor as a central figure of that system'.[68]

This message even filtered through to slaves and freedmen. An inscription at Antium was erected by slaves of the imperial household who had set up a *collegium,* the ancient equivalent of a workers' union. The inscription shows not only the monthly calendar, recording religious and imperial festival days, but also lists the slaves who held office in the *collegium* that year.[69] Thanks to this artefact, we know that Eros *glutinator* [the man who glued papyrus scrolls together], Dorus *atriensis* [the doorman], and Anthus *topiarius* [the gardener] were proud to take their places in the record alongside Rome's political system, the imperial family, the religious cycle, and the marking of time itself.[70] Using Storey's terminology, this demonstrates a clear investment by 'subordinate groups' in the 'values [and] ideals' that 'incorporate them into the prevailing structures of power'.[71]

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66 Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, quoted in D.C. Feeney, '*Si licet et fas est:* Ovid's *Fasti* and the Problem of Free Speech under the Principate' in Anton Powell (ed.) *Roman Poetry and Propaganda in the Age of Augustus,* Chapter 1 (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1992), p. 5.
67 Wallace-Hadrill, '*Mutatas Formas:* The Augustan Transformation of Roman Knowledge' in Galinsky*,* p. 60.
68 Ibid.
69 Wallace-Hadrill, '*Mutatas Formas',* p. 61.
70 Ibid.
71 Storey, *Culture and Power*, p. 7.
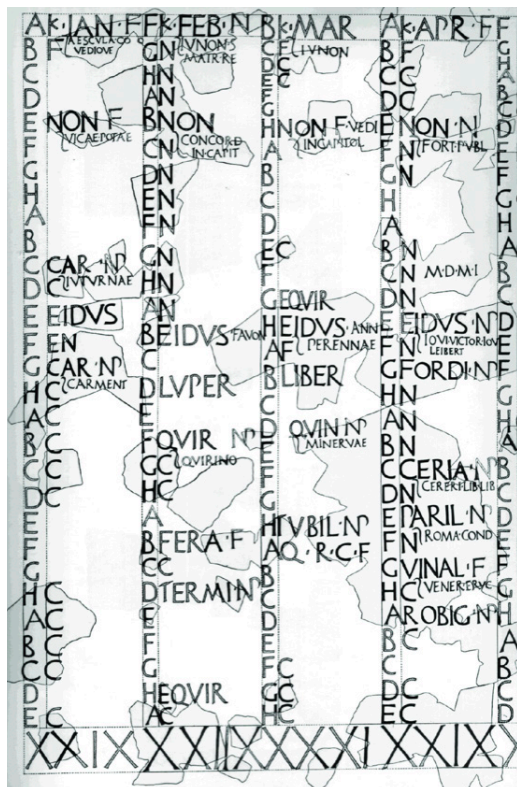
Figure 9. Inscription of Fasti from Antium[72]

EXTERNAL AUDIENCE

Elsewhere in the empire Augustus faced communicative challenges of another kind. The provinces, particularly those in Egypt and Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey and Syria), had a well-established tradition of venerating imperial rulers as gods. Asia Minor had been the historical playground of several successive empires, so the people there were

72 Erdkamp, Paul (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 476.

accustomed to venerating a succession of sole rulers. For inhabitants of the provinces to feel they were a valued part of the Roman Empire, Augustus needed to communicate his hegemony in terms familiar to them. To accomplish this, he supported the establishment of an imperial cult. S.R.F. Price argues that, for the cities of Asia Minor, the imperial cult was 'the one model that was available to them for the representation of a power on whom the city was dependent which was external', and yet still familiar to the distinct and complex culture of the cities in question.[73] Prior to the Augustan age, cities such as Aphrodisias in Asia and Chios in Greece set up cults to the goddess Roma, a personification (or deification) of the power of Rome.[74] There are no recorded dedications, however, to the Roman Senate,[75]—an indication that their robust identity as a collective deliberative body was not something that translated easily into a tradition of cultic homage.

During the civil wars, Mark Antony had fostered positive alliances with many major cities and regional powers in Asia Minor and the Levant, and many of these same cities and powers allied themselves with him and Cleopatra against Octavian in the civil war that ended with the Battle of Actium. After Octavian emerged as the victor, many of these regional powers sought to foster positive relationships with Octavian. One way to achieve this was by naming new cities after the new emperor.

King Herod of Judea, for example, transferred his allegiance to Octavian, founded a shrine to the emperor, and built a city around it. Herod named the city *Sebaste,* the Greek equivalent of 'Augustus'; today the city is known as Caesarea.[76] King Juba of Mauretania (modern-day Algeria) did the same—today this city is called Cherchell, a name derived from its ancient title, Caesarea.[77] The proliferation of Caesareas across the ancient world as Augustus solidified his power matches the effect

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73 S.R.F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 29.
74 Ibid., p. 41.
75 Ibid.
76 Josephus, *The Jewish War,* Volume I, translated by H. St. J. Thackeray (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), 1: 40; Woolf, 'Provincial Perspectives', p. 112.
77 Woolf, 'Provincial Perspectives', p. 112.

of Hellenisation following Alexander the Great's establishment of his eponymous cities. However, a key difference is that Alexander founded his cities by conquest and decree, whereas Herod and Juba named their cities because they were attracted to and incentivised by the new Roman power and identity.

While Augustus faced a clear communications challenge with his domestic audience, walking a fine line between monarch and 'first among equals', in the Greek-speaking provinces his status as sole ruler was much easier for audiences to process, given their cultural background. Through the imperial cult, Augustus supported and encouraged their engagement with him as the representative and embodiment of Roman power, to which they were subject.

There is, however, one message Augustus communicated equally to both his domestic and external audiences. An inscription known as the *Res Gestae,* literally 'things that have been accomplished', was discovered in Ancyra (modern-day Ankara) and published by archaeologist Theodor Mommsen in 1883. Inscribed in both Latin and Greek, *Res Gestae* is Augustus' own account of his path to power, written towards the end of his life (the inscription records that he wrote it at the age of seventy-six).[78] Several versions of the inscription have been discovered in various locations in Central Anatolia and the historian Suetonius records that Augustus had these *Res Gestae* inscribed in bronze letters and affixed to his mausoleum, which was located in the Field of Mars.[79] This is evidence that Augustus broadcast the same carefully curated account of his own achievements across the empire. The key messages within the text reveal much about what he wanted to convey to these audiences and to later generations. Augustus heavily emphasises the idea of peace and his responsible use of public money while making 'calculated omissions' of some of the less glorious events in the civil wars. [80]

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78 *Res Gestae,* 35.
79 Suetonius, *Augustus,* 101.4.
80 Suna Guven, 'Displaying the Res Gestae of Augustus: A Monument of Imperial Image for All', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* Volume 57 Nº1, (Mar 1998): 30.

Poetry

Like the *Res Gestae,* Augustan poetry communicates Augustus' messages to both domestic and external audiences. The *Res Gestae* may have functioned as a clear mission statement, but, as the next section will explore in greater detail, poetry was more effective in reaching multiple audiences and over a longer period of time. This is because, throughout the ancient world, poetry and the reading of poetry was not a linear communication but rather a responsive engagement in storytelling. As Raymond Williams observes, hegemony must be 'continually renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, altered, limited, challenged.'[81] The next section will outline which poets and poems were at the centre of Augustan discourse, and what effects their poetry had on contemporary domestic and external audiences.

This section will focus on three poets: Publius Vergilius Maro (Virgil), Quintus Horatius Flaccus (Horace), and Publius Ovidius Naso (Ovid). These three are widely accepted as the 'great poets' of the Augustan age and, as this article will demonstrate, their work had the greatest effect on both contemporary and future audiences.

As Stephen Hinds and Stephen Rutledge have established, the Augustan reading public was far from monolithic.[82] Much of the discourse promoting the Roman identity that Augustus established and catalysed was communicated successfully on multiple levels to audiences with varying degrees of education.[83] Basic messages in art, for example, could be understood simply through observation; architecture could convey meaning through its sheer scale. Whilst evidence of ancient graffiti in Pompeii demonstrates that there was broad basic literacy in the Roman empire,[84] poetry of the kind that Virgil, Horace, or Ovid were writing would have been consumed by those with an advanced education and

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81 Raymond Williams and Eric Mottram, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 122.
82 Stephen Hinds, 'Generalising About Ovid' in A.J. Boyle (ed.) *The Imperial Muse: Ramus Essays on Roman Literature of the Empire, To Juvenal Through Ovid* (Victoria, AU: Aureal Publications, 1998) p. 26; Rutledge, 'Conflict, Culture and Concord', pp. 225–29.
83 Galinsky, *Augustan Culture,* p. 228.
84 Willian Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 175 and 196.

a high level of literacy. Horace himself attests that he wrote for the 'discerning few'[85]—but those few had significant influence.

Virgil

Virgil was born in 70 BC, in the rural Italian town of Mantua. He lived through the civil wars, and much of his early poetry reflects the horror and disruption of the conflict. His *Fourth Eclogue* expresses a 'yearning for peace and tranquillity after decades of civil wars'.[86] In 39 BC, Virgil was patronised by Maecenas, a senator and close friend of Augustus. In approximately 31 or 32 BC, Maecenas, most likely in response to a request from Augustus, commissioned Virgil to write an epic poem. While the exact terms of the original brief from Maecenas are not known, it seems apparent that Virgil was under pressure to write something that would glorify Augustus.[87]

The way Virgil took on this brief, and the poem produced as a result of it, is remarkable. Instead of writing a panegyric to Augustus and overtly placing him at the centre of the poem, Virgil traces back the origins of the Roman people to Aeneas, a figure in Homer's *Iliad*. In so doing, Virgil creates direct connections between his own poetry and that of the established epic poetry, between Greek history and Roman history, between mythology and reality. In his opening line, *arma virumque cano,* 'I sing of arms and a man',[88] Virgil links the opening lines of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The former concerns war (arms), the latter traces the journey of a single man. Throughout the *Aeneid,* Virgil's poetic imagery echoes and complements the iconography established on Augustus' buildings, such as the programmatic statues of Roman mythological heroes in the Forum of Augustus. In a particularly profound passage,[89] which describes a shield made for Aeneas by the smith-god Vulcan (another direct echo of Homer's *Iliad,* in which Achilles has a shield

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85 Horace, *Satires,* 1.10.73–90 in *Satires. Epistles. The Art of Poetry*, translated by H. Rushton Fairclough, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926); Galinsky, *Augustan Culture,* p. 325.
86 Galinsky, *Augustan Culture,* p. 91.
87 Griffin, 'Augustan Poetry and Augustanism', p. 315.
88 This line is endlessly quoted and paraphrased today. The title of Thomas Schelling's book, *Arms and Influence,* is an example of such a paraphrase.
89 Virgil, *Aeneid,* 8.626–731.

made for him by the Greek smith-god Hephaistos),[90] the iconography on the shield charts key moments in Roman history, culminating with Augustus.

Virgil's poetic rendition of this teleological historiography is also rooted in the literary traditions of the wider Greco-Roman world. As early as the 2nd century BC, during Rome's ongoing wars with Carthage, the Greek historian Polybius charted Rome's rise to power through the various wars of the Hellenistic Age. To him, Rome's hegemony in this contested political environment seemed inevitable.[91] Another Greek historian, Dionysius of Halicarnassus,[92] writing during Augustus' lifetime, composes a *History of Archaic Rome* in which he charts the teleology of Rome's political dominance. While Dionysius' pro-Roman stance was not uncontested during his period,[93] the effect of his narrative, which was widely read in the Roman empire,[94] was to place Rome in relation to the Greek system of chronology, effectively legitimising Roman civilization in the accepted Greek historical canon.[95] Virgil's epic poem follows on from Greek mythology, thereby including the Romans in the Greek cultural canon; this nod is reciprocated by Greek writers seeking to explain their own place within a world order dominated by Roman power. In the Temple of Mars *Ultor*, Augustus wove himself into global history through the messages conveyed in his art and architecture; in the *Aeneid,* Virgil wove Augustus, synonymous with Roman power, into the broader narrative of pan-Mediterranean history.

By linking Roman epic with Greek epic, Virgil is tapping into 'broader trends of Mediterranean history' and historiography,[96] and inviting the Greek world to see themselves as part of the Roman narrative. This worked to bring the empire closer together, allowing different cultures

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90 Homer, *Iliad*, 18.468–617.
91 Andrew Erskine, 'Making Sense of the Romans: Polybius and the Greek Perspective' in *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne*, Supplément Nᵒ 9 (2013): 125.
92 Halicarnassus is modern-day Bodrum, Turkey.
93 Emilio Gabba, *Dionysius and 'The History of Archaic Rome'*, Sather Classical Lectures Nᵒ 56 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 41.
94 Ibid., p. 213.
95 Ibid., p. 199.
96 Woolf, 'Provincial Perspectives', p. 116.

to buy into the Roman identity.[97] Virgil's *Aeneid,* although left unfinished at his death, became a classic in its own time. It was used as a textbook in schools across the ancient world, where pupils of both sexes learned Latin by writing and reciting this epic teleological poem. The *Aeneid* became the entrance ticket to Roman trade networks and political office; for many subsequent generations, the Roman way of life was entered into on Augustan terms. Farwell writes of the importance of terminology in conveying effective consistent communications.[98] Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan evaluated the power of different media for conveying effective messages.[99] But even more fundamental is the power of a *lingua franca* to mould communications and render the intended message inescapable. This is what the *Aeneid* achieved for Roman identity.

Influence of Virgil's text has been found as far from the epicentre of Rome as Hadrian's Wall. In 1986, a wooden writing tablet from the 2nd century AD was discovered at Vindolanda on Hadrian's Wall, preserved in the anaerobic mud. It is a birthday party invitation written by Claudia Severa to her friend, Sulpicia Lepidina. A line in the invitation echoes a line of the *Aeneid,*[100] demonstrating that even a woman living in this remote outpost of the Roman empire was familiar with the epic poem more than a century after its publication.

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97 In his study of the Roman provinces, Greg Woolf outlines multiple ways in which provincial elites bought into Roman identity, including consuming Roman food, buying Roman tableware, and educating their children using Latin texts. Woolf, 'Provincial Perspectives', p. 124.
98 Farwell, *Persuasion and Power,* p. 58.
99 Harold Innis, <u>*Empire and Communications*</u> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950), p. 7; Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (Routledge Classics, 1964), p. 7. See also Graeme H. Patterson, *History and Communications—Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan: The Interpretation of History* (Toronto, Ontario; Buffalo, New York; London, England: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 4.
100 Judith Hallett, 'The Vindolanda Letters from Claudia Severa' in Churchill, Brown, and Jeffrey (eds), *Women Writing Latin: Women Writing Latin in Roman Antiquity, Late Antiquity, and the Early Christian Era* (Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), p. 95. The deeply affectionate language Claudia uses to address her friend echoes the language used in Virgil's Aeneid (4.8 and 4.31) to characterise Dido's relationship with her sister, Anna. Hallett also draws out phrasing reminiscent of the poetry of Catullus and Sappho (pp. 94–95), indicating that Claudia was well-read in Latin and Greek poetry.
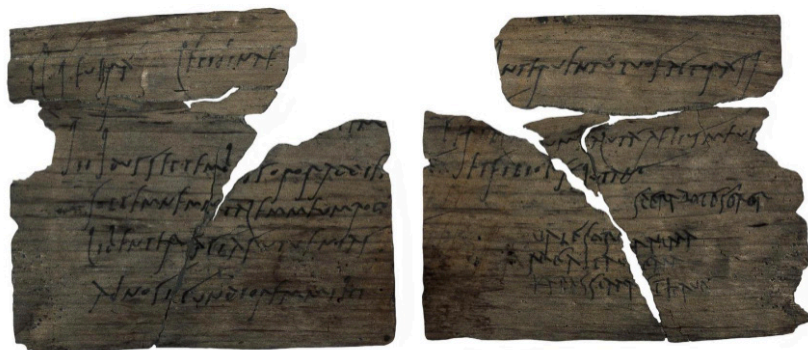
Figure 10. Birthday Party Invitation[101]

Horace

Horace joined the circle of Maecenas in the 30s BC, having previously fought on the side of Brutus in the civil war. This, however, did not appear to have negatively impacted his career; the surviving correspondence between him and Augustus points to a close relationship between the poet and the *princeps*. The letters are written in a 'bantering tone'. Augustus jokingly references Horace's ample belly, and at one point he even offers him a position as his private secretary—an offer Horace politely refuses.[102] This close relationship is apparent in the tone and quality of Horace's poetry. Ronald Syme dismisses Horace as 'safe and subsidised in Rome',[103] and as Anton Powell observes, the deadlier word there is 'safe'.[104] Duncan Kennedy describes Horace's *Satires* as 'mild and reassuring' in tone, containing 'unremarkable received wisdom'—'an integrational text *par excellence'*.[105] However, as Kennedy also notes,

101 British Museum, 'Wooden Writing-tablet from Vindolanda: birthday invitation to the commander's wife', 'Tabl. Vindol. 291', Item Nº 85.057, Museum Nº1986,1001.64.
102 Galinsky, *Augustan Culture,* p. 235; Horace, *Epistles,* 2.1.250–51; see also Kirk Freudenburg, '*Recusatio* as Political Theatre: Horace's Letter to Augustus', *The Journal of Roman Studies* Volume 104 (2014): 123 and Phebe Lowell Bowditch, *Horace and the Gift Economy of Patronage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001)*,* p. 166.
103 Syme, *The Roman Revolution,* p. 459.
104 Anton Powell, 'The *Aeneid* and the Embarrassments of Augustus' in Powell, p. 142.
105 Kennedy, '"Augustan and Anti-Augustan", p. 33.

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this tone is reflective of a political environment in which the politically ruthless Octavian was being transformed into the moral authority of Augustus, *pater patriae,* the father of the fatherland.[106]

Horace's poetry played an important role in reinforcing Augustus' orientalising narrative around the Battle of Actium. As Wallace-Hadrill observes, this battle was at the heart of the 'emotionally charged symbols' and 'basic values' on which Augustus based his new narrative of dominance.[107] In his *Odes,* Horace never names Antony or Cleopatra, but is unmistakeably referring to the Egyptian queen in *Ode* 1.37, when he caricatures her as a doom-laden monster [*fatale monstrum*]*,* drunk on wine and her own inflated sense of power [*mentemque lymphatam Mareotico; fortunaque dulci ebria*] and surrounded by effeminate men [*contaminato cum grege turpium morbo virorum quidlibet inpotens*]. The poem begins with an oft-quoted line *nunc est bibendum, '*now is the time for drinking', a reference to the relief and celebration now permitted to the Roman people following the defeat of their abstract feminine Egyptian enemy. This negative and nameless impression of Cleopatra is further reinforced by another Roman poet, the love elegist Propertius, who again characterises her as perpetually inebriated,[108] and echoes the Roman relief and celebration following her defeat and death.[109]

Horace also plays a pivotal role in Augustus' restructure of Roman time. In 17 BC, Augustus organised the celebration of the *saeculum.* As Denis Feeney explains, a *saeculum* corresponds to modern ideas of a century, but in the Roman world it was associated with a generation, one hundred years being thought to be the maximum possible lifespan.[110] The *saeculum* was celebrated approximately every hundred years and had deep religious significance—the ritual celebration commemorated the previous hundred years while looking forward to the next and asking the gods

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106 Ibid.
107 Wallace-Hadrill, *Augustan Rome,* p. 1.
108 Propertius, *Elegies,* 3.11 in <u>*The Elegies: Book IV*</u>, translated by A.S. Kline (Online: Poetry in Translation, 2008).
109 Ibid., 4.6.
110 D.C. Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar: Ancient Time and the Beginnings of History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), p. 145.

to bless the coming generation.[111] The three-day event culminated in the performance of the *Carmen Saeculare,* the anthem of the celebration, which Augustus had commissioned Horace to write. The 'secular hymn' emphasises the key Augustan themes of peace, stability, and longevity,[112] but is also an important mechanism for setting out Augustus' new moral legislation. His laws brought certain matters that had previously been considered private into public consideration. The laws mandated marriage by a certain age and remarriage after a given period of time following widowhood or divorce, imposed penalties on the childless, forbade marriages between certain classes, and made adultery a public crime.[113] These extremely controversial reforms were in fact rejected by the senate in 28 BC, but were finally passed ten years later.[114] In becoming *pater patriae,* father of the fatherland, Augustus was effectively also assuming the role of the *paterfamilias,* the head of the household.[115] So important were these laws to Augustus that he delayed the celebration of the *saeculum* until after they had been passed.[116] The song was performed by 27 boys and 27 girls, representing the 'marital fecundity and future hope' of Rome.[117] The message to the contemporary audience would have been unmistakeable. The moral legislation, reinforced by Horace's poetry, preached a message of responsibility to the Roman people.[118]

Horace, too, became a classic in his own lifetime.[119] His work was also used as a textbook for Roman schoolchildren—a fact attested, and perhaps mocked, by a later Roman satirist, Juvenal.[120] Horace was aware of the power of his own poetry, aligned as it was with the political power of his day, and claimed his poetry might even have the power to outlast that of Augustus. In his *Carmina,* Horace writes that he has 'built a memorial more lasting than bronze'—a direct reference to the Augustan practice

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111 Ibid., p. 147.
112 Galinsky, *Augustan Culture,* p. 105: '… *aevum* in *Carmen Saeculare* [line] 68 may be a tacit allusion to the concept of *Roma aeterna,* which Horace elsewhere affirms'.
113 Laurel Fulkerson, *Ovid: A Poet on the Margins* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), p. 22.
114 Galinsky, *Augustan Culture,* p. 97.
115 Fulkerson, *Ovid: Poet on the Margins,* p. 23.
116 Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, p. 128.
117 Ibid., p. 102.
118 Horace also links morality with Roman power in *Odes* 3.6.
119 Kennedy, '"Augustan and Anti-Augustan"', p. 37.
120 Juvenal, *Satires,* 7.216–27.

of mounting gilded bronze letters on monuments as inscriptions.[121] Horace's work was instrumental in communicating Augustus' political agenda during his own historical period, and beyond.

Ovid

Ovid, born in 43 BC, was younger than the two aforementioned poets and was not patronised by Maecenas. While Horace and Virgil lived through, and even fought in, the horrors of the civil wars, Ovid was raised in a fully Augustan environment. The consequence of this is apparent in his poetry: whereas both Virgil and Horace express relief at the political stability that Augustus created, knowing the alternative, Ovid takes this stability for granted, and begins to critique it. In this way, Ovid may be seen as 'the truest product of the Augustan age'.[122]

Ovid began his poetic career by writing love poetry. His poem *Ars Amatoria,* 'The Art of Love', makes a mockery of Augustus' carefully planned architectural communicative strategy and overt promotion of family values by characterising Augustan buildings as ideal places to pick up women. He singles out the theatre and library of Marcellus, erected in memory of Augustus' nephew;[123] he points out a portico commissioned by Augustus' wife, Livia.[124] He even characterises the occasion of Augustus' military triumph as an opportunity to look out for women, and suggests chat up lines based on Augustus' military conquests.[125]

This is the very opposite of the moral message espoused by Horace in the *Carmen Saeculare,* written in support of Augustus' moral laws. While it seems to have been popular with the Roman public (*Ars Amatoria* was published in at least two editions),[126] the poem, together with an unspecified *'error',*[127] caused Ovid to be banished to Tomis, modern-day Constanta in Romania on the Black Sea coast. Augustus seems not

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121 Galinsky, *Augustan Culture,* p. 240.
122 Ibid., p. 228.
123 Ovid, *Ars,* 1.69.
124 Ibid., 1.72.
125 Ibid., 1.210–28.
126 Feeney, '*Si licet et fas est*', p. 4.
127 Ovid, *Tristia,* 2.207 in *Tristia. Ex Ponto,* translated by A. L. Wheeler and revised by G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924). This mysterious *error* has been the subject of much scholarly speculation.

to have realised that Ovid's playful, flippant poems were perhaps the most flattering reflection of the Rome he had built and the stability he had achieved:[128] by creating political certainty, Augustus had fostered an artistic environment so stable as to leave room for creativity and critique, which are expressed in Ovid's poetry. It is a flaw in his otherwise exemplary model of strategic communications—as a non-linear process, communications should leave room for response. Augustus' exile of Ovid reveals that he was threatened by Ovid's playful poetry and sends a message that his society may not have been as stable as Augustus portrays it to be. Strategic communications includes messages conveyed by actions as well as non-actions: in this situation, a non-action from Augustus would have better reinforced his strategic message of stability.

However, prior to his exile, Ovid was working on his response to Virgil's epic poem. His *Metamorphoses* charts mythology and history from creation through to his present, 'as a seamlessly interconnected series of transformations'.[129] As Wallace-Hadrill observes, 'the transformational skill with which Augustus constructed his new order […] is conceptually parallel to the processes [of metamorphosis], which Ovid loves to describe'.[130] However, the *Metamorphoses* were a product of their time in another way: the period in which Ovid was writing saw an explosion in popularity of a new art form, the *pantomime.[131]* This was a type of interpretive dance set to music, in which a single dancer/actor would mime a compilation of well-known scenes from mythology. It was particularly popular among wealthy Romans, the same audience that would be consuming Ovid's poetry. In fact, the 2nd century satirist Lucian follows Ovid's timeline of metamorphoses: he writes that a good pantomime dancer should 'know the history of the world, from the time when it first emerged from Chaos down to the days of Egyptian Cleopatra'.[132] Unlike Virgil, writing to connect Roman history and identity with its Greek

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128 Ibid., p. 20.
129 Wallace-Hadrill, '*Mutatas Formas',* p. 55.
130 Ibid. See also Fulkerson, *Ovid: Poet on the Margins,* p. 26.
131 Galinsky, *Augustan Culture,* p. 265.
132 Lucian, *De Saltatione,* 37 in *The Works of Lucian of Samosata,* translated by H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905). Lucian was from Samosata, modern-day Samsat in Turkey, now submerged under the Ataturk dam. He wrote exclusively in Greek. Lucian's work is another indication that Augustus' message became deeply embedded in the Greek-speaking provinces.

forbears, Ovid's form and style of epic are designed for a specifically and uniquely Roman audience.

Following his exile, Ovid published a series of poems that best communicate the values associated with being Roman. They are directed at Augustus and his audience back in Rome. The poems contrast the attractions of the city of Rome with the environment to which he has been exiled, on the very frontiers of Roman control. Ovid uses the language of the *Metamorphoses* in his descriptions of Tomis to characterise it as a topsy-turvy world, on the brink of descending into primordial chaos—a clear contrast with the established order of Rome.[133] It is as though Ovid, by being exposed to the 'other' (the world beyond Roman frontiers), finally sees the 'self' (Roman identity) clearly and expresses his longing for it in his poetry. As Laurel Fulkerson observes, Augustus and Rome now become Ovid's objects of desire, as opposed to the girls he once chased around Augustus' buildings in the city of Rome.[134]

In his epilogue to the *Metamorphoses,* Ovid specifically appeals to a wider readership—in contrast to Horace, who, as noted above, targeted his poetry only at the discerning few.[135] Archaeological evidence from Pompeii reveals that this was no empty boast. Wealthy homeowners in Pompeii commissioned painted artwork for the public rooms in their houses, such as the entrance hall, the dining room, and the study (where the head of the household would carry out business meetings). The proportion of wall paintings in Pompeian houses corresponds to the estimated literacy rate,[136] indicating that those who were in a position to read poetry were also in a position to commission painters and decorators for their houses. Of those wall paintings, nearly half depict scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses.*[137] One particular wealthy homeowner advertises his literary tastes, and his predilection for Ovid in particular, by displaying

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133 Sara K. Myers, 'Ovid's Self-reception in his Exile Poetry' in John F. Miller (ed.) *A Handbook to the Reception of Ovid* (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), p. 13.
134 Fulkerson, *Ovid: Poet on the Margins,* p. 18.
135 Peter E. Knox, 'Ovidian Myths on Pompeian Walls' in John F. Miller (ed.) *A Handbook to the Reception of Ovid* (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), p. 36.
136 Ibid., p. 38.
137 Ibid., p. 36.

common themes from the *Metamorphoses* such as the stories of Dionysus and Ariadne, Hercules and Omphale, and Echo and Narcissus in one part of the house, while in the adjacent rooms he has commissioned erotic scenes as a nod to Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*.[138]

CONCLUSION

This article has invoked strategic communications theory in analysing and explaining the success and enduring legacy of a key historical figure. It has demonstrated the ways in which the emperor Augustus communicated messages of peace and political stability, as well as the construction of a new morally sound Roman identity to his target audiences: the Roman elite and wider Greek-speaking empire. His strategy served to influence discourse and shape meaning across the entire empire. It changed the way in which elite Romans viewed themselves, as well as the way in which inhabitants of the wider empire perceived what it meant to be Roman. In this way, Augustus deliberately and successfully influenced discourse and shaped perception across a vast geographical area and a long stretch of time.

The article also sought to address the gap in existing literature on Augustan poetry by analysing its communicative effect and has demonstrated the palpable influence of the works of Virgil, Horace, and Ovid on Roman audiences within the context of Augustus' wider communicative strategy. However, when viewed over an extended period of time, beyond the Roman context, it becomes apparent that the communicative power of this poetry only increased, as other forms of communication deployed by Augustus crumbled away.

Horace was prescient when he wrote that he had built a monument more lasting than bronze. The bronze letters of Augustus' monuments have since been melted down and reused. The buildings he erected have either disintegrated or have been dismantled or repurposed. Yet the words of Virgil, Horace, and Ovid are still taught in schools and universities today,

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138 Ibid., pp. 41–43.

just as they were taught in schools in the Roman empire. The artistic and architectural messages of Augustus' buildings, calendars and cults have been salvaged and reconstructed by archaeologists, but the messages conveyed through poetry have remained constant.

Strategic communications seeks to shape discourse and influence outcomes. As advocated by Braudel and Lebow, a historical perspective can identify and analyse this process of discourse-shaping over a long period of time. This article has demonstrated historical precedent for strategic communications and proved its effectiveness in the *longue durée*. Particular attention has been drawn to the creative expression of strategic communications through poetry, as a form of meaning-making that has the potential to outlast other, more tangible communicative symbols.

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