



Culture, identity and power in the Roman Empire

Roman Emperor and Empire 3

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The emperor's personal appearance was also promoted through statues which were set up throughout the empire. This magnificent bronze statue of Augustus is from Athens. We may question how closely this image resembled the true appearance of the emperor but such statues created a sense of dignity which could be admired and respected by onlookers. Nor is it always possible to judge who funded such statues. Did the Athenians receive official encouragement to set up the statue, in order to place the image of the emperor in the public eye? Or was it a spontaneous gesture by Athenians who were eager to publicly express their loyalty? Whether Rome and the emperor intervened directly in this case, standard statue types were widely available. This meant that even those who'd never seen the emperor could still reproduce his likeness.

This statue of the Emperor Augustus, found in Rome, shows him with his head covered in the guise of a priest. This second statue is from Corinth. There are differences - the angle of the face, the quality of execution and in the details of the drapery. The overall impression created is very similar. Two parts of the empire were thus united by a shared image of the emperor.

The emperor's name was also promoted. The Imperial name was often connected with gifts of amenities - everything from theatres and aqueducts to defensive walls or it was inscribed on grand buildings, dedicated to the emperor as a sign of allegiance by local communities. Here at Chemtou in Tunisia are the remains of a bridge, which was dedicated to the emperor Trajan. The accompanying inscription lists his titles, reminding the inhabitants of his power and authority. It also highlights the relationship between the emperor on the one hand and the province on the other. Trajan might be in Rome but his presence was felt in Tunisia. In Athens the emperor Hadrian funded several structures including the new library complex. At the same time, Athenians were honouring the emperor in dedications on buildings like this monumental gateway. This recalls the triumphal arches found in Rome and the construction of gateways in provincial towns was often associated with members of the imperial family. These arches at the entrance to the forum in Pompeii may well have been dedicated to members of the ruling dynasty. In Thugga this monumental gateway was dedicated to Severus Alexander. The evidence of such gateways, placed at the entrance to settlements or other key locations, is a powerful indication of how a town's inhabitants aligned themselves with Rome and the emperor.

Many of the statues and buildings which recalled the emperor and stressed his relationship with the provincial towns were placed in a religious context. At Thugga the pediment of the temple to Jupiter is decorated with a relief that records the apotheosis of Antoninus Pius. The emperor is carried heavenwards to take his place among the gods. The divine descent of the emperors past and present was celebrated in specially constructed cult centres throughout the empire. Many towns such as Ephesus, in Asia Minor, had temples which were dedicated to the emperor and Rome. In Athens, during the reign of Augustus, a small round temple was built on the Acropolis. And in Britain, following the invasion, a temple was erected in Colchester. Although a later fort now stands on the site, it helps to illustrate the size and scale of the original temple which acted as an equally imposing symbol of Roman domination. Here the worship of Claudius was encouraged to promote loyalty among the inhabitants. Through buildings, statues, temples and coins, each succeeding emperor was represented to his subjects across the empire. The images helped to create an illusion of familiarity with and even accessibility to his person. So the emperor could be both physically distant yet ever present, remote but familiar, uniting the people of his provinces through the shared currency of the Imperial image.