

Public Commemoration in the Roman World:
The *Summi Viri* of the Forum of Augustus

This paper investigates a shift in the public commemoration of the past at the end of the Republic. Drawing upon the recent proliferation of memory studies, it centers on the collection of *summi viri* from the forum of Augustus. The collection has most often been seen as the ideological production of the emperor and this is, to be sure, a central part of its story. But viewing the collection more broadly, we see that it also reveals a change in the scope of public commemoration — a change from the local to the universal — at the end of the Republic.

My approach is cultural and historical, examining the logic of the collection through a close analysis of its guiding principles (as far as they can be reconstructed). Looking to associated genres and precursors, I consider its novelty. Although the collection was anchored in venerated forms, it offered a new universalizing history of Rome on stone. The Republic was reinvented as a time in which Rome's leaders undertook a long, unified and grand imperial project that culminated in the reign of Augustus.

How should we interpret this shift? Most scholars put their finger on Augustan power and the legitimizing uses of history. But this explanation does not take into account monumental precedents to the collection that shared its universalizing view of the Empire. Holding up the collection next to the theatre of Pompey, I argue that it should also be seen as a product of a wider cultural shift that began prior to Augustus in the way in which Romans imagined their empire.

Bibliography

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