

Are a Thousand Words Worth a Picture?: An Examination of Text-Based Monuments in the Age of Augustus

Augustus is well known for his exquisite mastery of propaganda, using monuments such as the *Ara Pacis*, the *summi viri*, and his eponymous Forum to highlight themes of triumph, humility, and the monumentalization of Rome. Nevertheless, Augustus' use of the written word is often overlooked within his great program, especially the use of text-based monuments to enhance his message. The *Fasti Consulares*, the *Fasti Triumphales*, the *Fasti Praenestini*, and the *Res Gestae* were all used to supplement his better-known, visual iconography. A close comparison of this group of text-based monuments to the *Ara Pacis*, the Temple of Mars Ultor, and the *summi viri* illuminates the persistence of Augustus' message across both types of media. This paper will show how Augustus used text-based monuments to control time, connect himself to great Roman leaders of the past, selectively redact Rome's recent history, and remind his subjects of his piety and divine heritage.

The *Fasti Consulares* and the *Fasti Triumphales*, collectively referred to as the *Fasti Capitolini* have been the subject of frequent debate among Roman archaeologists, such as L.R. Taylor (1950), A. Degrassi (1954), F. Coarelli (1985), and T.P. Wiseman (1990). Their interest has been largely in where the *Fasti Capitolini* were displayed after Augustus commissioned the lists' creation, rather than how the lists served Augustus' larger purposes. Many scholars also study the *Fasti Praenestini*; yet, it is usually in the context of Roman calendars generally, and Ovid's *Fasti* specifically (G. Herbert-Brown, 1994), rather than its relationship to Augustan propaganda. The *Res Gestae* is typically viewed as literary rather than monumental, taking its place alongside other nominally autobiographical works such as Caesar's commentaries or Pliny's letters. Its role as a monument is often overlooked, despite the fact that it was displayed

on bronze tablets in front of Augustus' grand mausoleum. The *Fasti Capitolini*, the *Fasti Praenestini*, and the *Res Gestae* represent different levels of Augustus' interaction with and control over the text, and taken as a group allow for a nuanced interpretation of their place within his grand scheme. I will show that these works are more than the sum of their texts, they are monuments in their own right; this monumental aspect is essential for comprehending their impact on Rome's urban topography.

A juxtaposition of these text-based monuments with select, image-based elements of Augustus' ideological program shows strong similarities; yet, this new interpretation of Augustan text-based monuments goes beyond their relationship to more traditional, visually-based media. When taken as a group unto themselves, the text-based monuments encompass several of the themes which Augustus implemented in his decades-long campaign to convince the Roman people to accept a form of government they had not seen in half a millennium: the appropriation of Rome's political and cultural history, the emphasis on Augustus' military victories, and the rebirth of a new era for Rome. Text-based monuments played a significant, and under-examined, role in expanding and adapting Augustus' ideological campaign; this combination of image and text helped secure the principate of Augustus and his successors for Rome.

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