

Art Imitates Art: How Augustus uses the Prima Porta Statue, *Ara Pacis*, and *Res Gestae*  
to Characterize Himself

Classrooms often separate teaching Ancient Rome into two separate categories: Latin language and material culture and rarely do they bridge their gap. Reading these two mediums together could provide valuable insight into the ancient world. I use an intermedial approach to link the propagandic messages from the text of the *Res Gestae* to those found on the Prima Porta Augustus statue and the *Ara Pacis*. I examine each piece of propaganda in two separate categories: material culture and text, and evaluate their respective advantages. In my conclusion I link the two based on their similar messages and describe the significance of this link. I conclude that both of these strategies work together to create cohesive, consistent message that when they are reinforced by one another becomes even more powerful. I argue that the emperor cleverly makes use of both mediums to create a sphere of influence that directly communicates with his people and posterity.

This methodology bridges the gap between material culture and text so that we can better understand each individually. Examining their relationship shows how they cohesively met the political goals of the emperor, which elucidates another layer in the power of the Augustan propagandic system. Understanding an ancient propagandic system down to its finest details helps us recognize controlling patterns in our politicians, which leads us to be more aware citizens. I argue that these two mediums contain a similar, if not identical, set of messages with overarching themes which enhance the image of the emperor and create a positive legacy. When these two agents are read in unison, we understand more accurately how the Augustan propagandic strategy was so (arguably) effective.

Both agents have their own advantages when it comes to political propaganda. The *Res Gestae* references specific people and events to direct focus to certain achievements of the Augustan regime. We infer what Augustus himself viewed as significant and, referencing historical records, understand how he manipulates facts for his legacy. Certain language choices can also allude to other themes in Augustan propaganda, such as his piety, powerful dynasty, divine heritage, humility, golden age, and harmony with the Senate. Imagery on both the *Ara Pacis* and the Prima Porta statue are to some extent open to interpretation, so the audience can either see what they want to see, or can understand these symbols alluding to multiple themes simultaneously. Both mediums work to highlight the same ideas and when the viewer receives the same message multiple times in multiple different ways, it becomes ingrained in their minds.

The *Res Gestae* is an autobiographical document where Augustus records his greatest achievements, which would eventually be placed on his own Mausoleum. The Prima Porta Augustus is a statue from Livia's villa at Prima Porta and has a breastplate depicting many mythological figures, personifications of provinces, and Tiberius receiving the Parthian standards. The *Ara Pacis* was an altar dedicated to Augustan Peace in the *Campus Martius* and contains reliefs depicting mythological figures, legendary founders of Rome, personification, religious and political processions, and images of agricultural abundance. The *Res Gestae* has its advantages in its specificity, by recording historical events such as Tiberius subduing the Pannonians. This leads the reader to think about the success of the Julio-Claudian family and simultaneously the humility of an emperor who shares credit with his associates. The Prima Porta statue continues this theme as it depicts Tiberius retrieving lost standards from the Parthians. We see a connection here where Augustus uses Tiberius as an agent in his personal success, but also sets him in the frame of a capable emperor. The *Ara Pacis* plays with this idea

differently, as it includes a relief of the Julio-Claudians in a procession of importance behind the emperor, and even behind a procession of priests. We understand that Augustus' family members are worthy to rule after him (especially Tiberius as the other mediums suggest), but Augustus is also devoted to religion; another overarching theme of his propagandic scheme.

I find communication between mediums countless times and I note numerous thematic parallels or specific connections upon further analysis. I test a different method of analysis for the Augustan regime and it yields results that unite different cultural aspects along with different areas of research within Classics. A further pursuit in this strategy could change how we understand Augustan propaganda and in turn how we understand our own political system. Although this paper only reviews one text and two works of art, the results are indicative of overall trends which can be used to analyze other forms of propaganda from Roman times, from modern times, but most specifically enhance understanding of Augustus' strategy.