

# The Buildings and the Images of the Imperial Cult



2. The birth of imperial cult under Augustus

1. **Biography**
2. **Apotheosis**
3. **The cult settlement – state, private, provincial level**
4. **The images**

Terminology:

*Apotheosis*

*Divinization*

*Consecration – consecratio*



# 1. BIOGRAPHY

Born: Gaius Octavius, Rome, September 23<sup>rd</sup> , 63 BC

Parents: Gaius Octavius and Atia (Julius Ceasar's niece)

Early training in public life

44BC – adopted by Julius Caesar

43BC – *propraetor* and *consul*

2<sup>nd</sup> triumvirate

42BC – *battle at Philippi*



42BC, January – *divi filius*

During the 30's – protection of *Apollo*

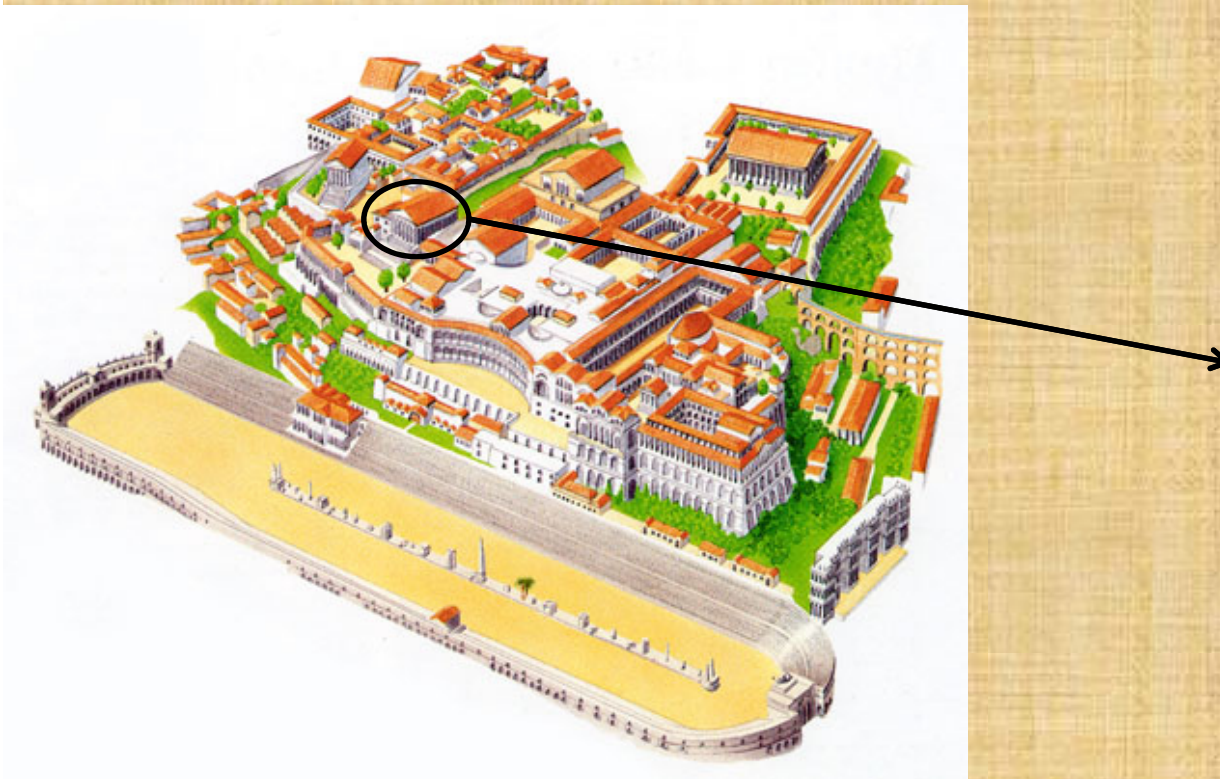
31BC – Actium

28BC – the temple of Apollo on the Palatine hill

27BC, January 16<sup>th</sup> – title *Augustus* (by *Plancus*)

-sacred places too, and those in which anything is consecrated by augural rites are called "august" (*augusta*), from the increase (*auctus*) in dignity

-Augustus





Cliepeus virtutis – for Augustus from the Senate to acknowledge his virtus, clementia, iustitia, pietas, Curia Iulia, originally gold, marble copy preserved in Arles

Apart from the title, he **received**:

- a) the right to adorn the entrance of his house with *laurel*
- b) *the corona civica*
- c) *clipeus virtutis* (hung in the *Curia Iulia*)

23 BC – *imperium*

18 – 12 BC – *Lex Iulia de adulteriis, Lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus, Lex Papia Poppaea*

12BC – *pontifex maximus*

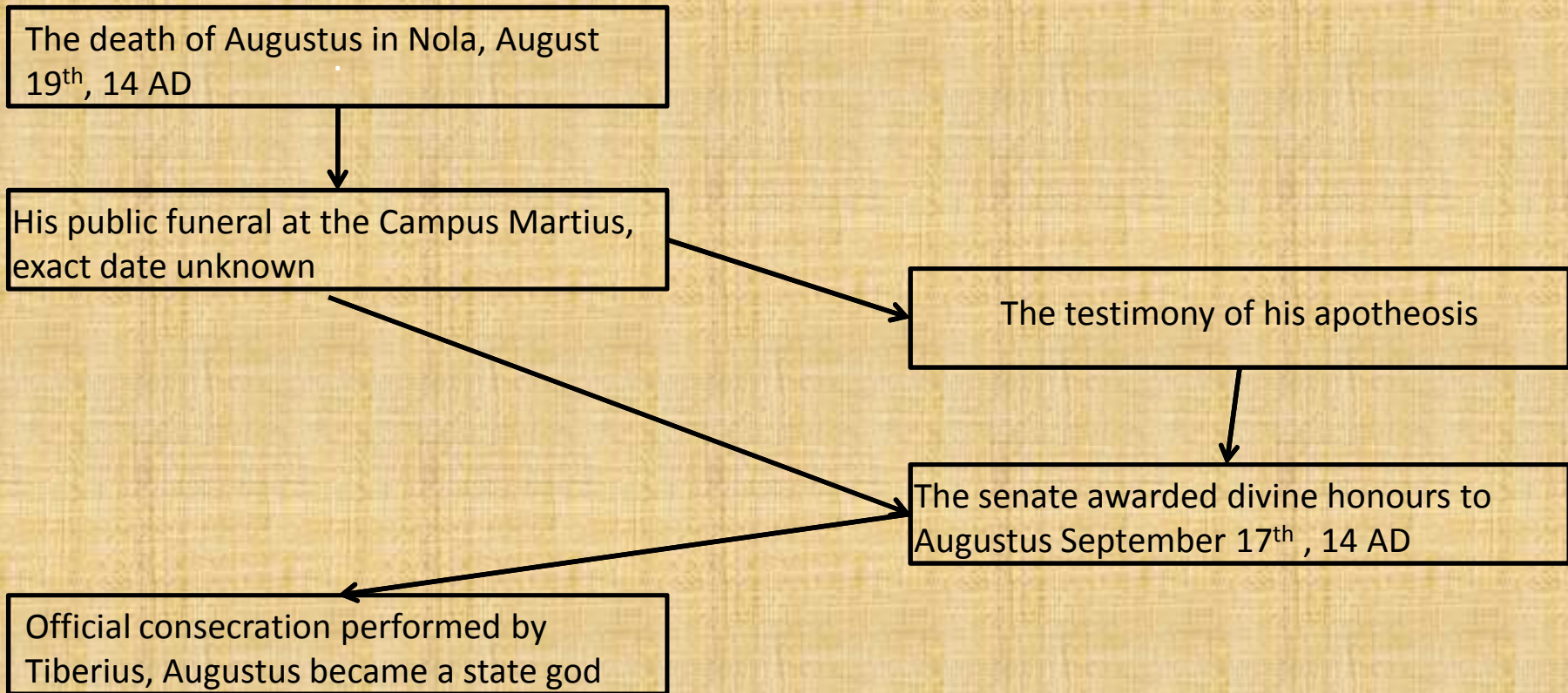
2BC – *pater patriae*

*Res Gestae Divi Augusti*

Died: Nola, 19<sup>th</sup> August, 14 AD

Succession – daughter Julia, 2<sup>nd</sup> marriage to Agrippa – two sons **Gaius and Lucius Caesar**, died Forced to adopt

## 2. APOTHEOSIS



Ruling strategy:

*Reputation*

*His genius*

*Ideology*

*Consolidating power*

*Expanding borders*



## 2. THE CULT SETTLEMENT

Caesar

Augustus

**Artists:** free to declare anything:

**Tacitus, *Annals I 10.6*** – a bit exaggerated, but gives a picture of his politics:

“No honour was left for the gods, when Augustus chose to be himself **worshipped with temples and statues**, like those of the deities, and with flamines and priests.”

**Vergil, *Aeneid VI 789-794***

“Here Caesar [=Augustus], of Iulus’ glorious seed, look at him ascending to the world of light! Watch, at last, that man, whose coming so often you listened foretold, **Augustus Caesar, son of a god** [=Divus Julius]. He brings a golden age, he shall restore old Saturn’s sceptre to our Latin land”.

**Horace, *Odes III 5. 2-3***

“**praesens divu** habebitur Augustus”

**Letters II 1, 15-17**

***Praesenti tibi* maturos largimur honores**



## ***Historians:***

### **Suetonius**

“Although well aware that it was usual to vote temples even to proconsuls, yet in no province would he accept one save jointly in his own name and that of Rome, and in the city itself he refused this honour most emphatically.”

Suetonius, Dio and other historians – **ignored private cults**

**Continuous measures** – to secure the position of the emperor:

1. Roman magistrates
2. The emperor - the triumph
3. The title *imperator*
4. 11 AD – banned honours for governors

**Different levels of the cult:**

State cult level

Municipal cults

Provincial cults

Private cults

STATE CULT

his *genius*

function *pontifex maximus* in 12 BC

his household cult public – worship of his Lares and his Genius public.

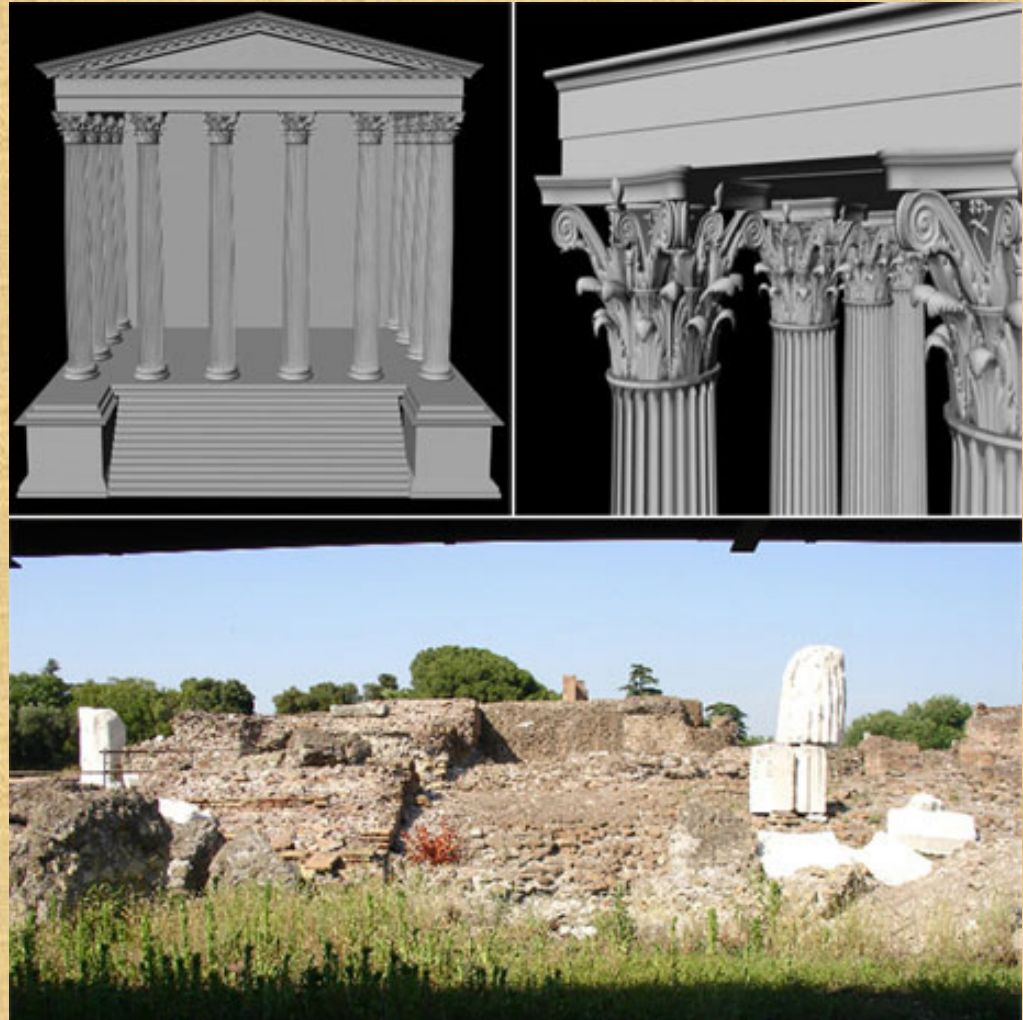


**Arguments against:**

*Literary sources*

a) *Ovidius:*

b) *Calendar from Praeneste*



c) *Birthday*

*“F(eriae) ex s(enatus) c(onsulto), q(uod) e(o) d(ie) Imp(erator) Caesar Aug(ustus) pont(ifex) ma[x(imus)] natus est: Marti, Neptuno in Campo, Apo[l]lini ad theatrum Marcelli”*

d) *Sacrifices*

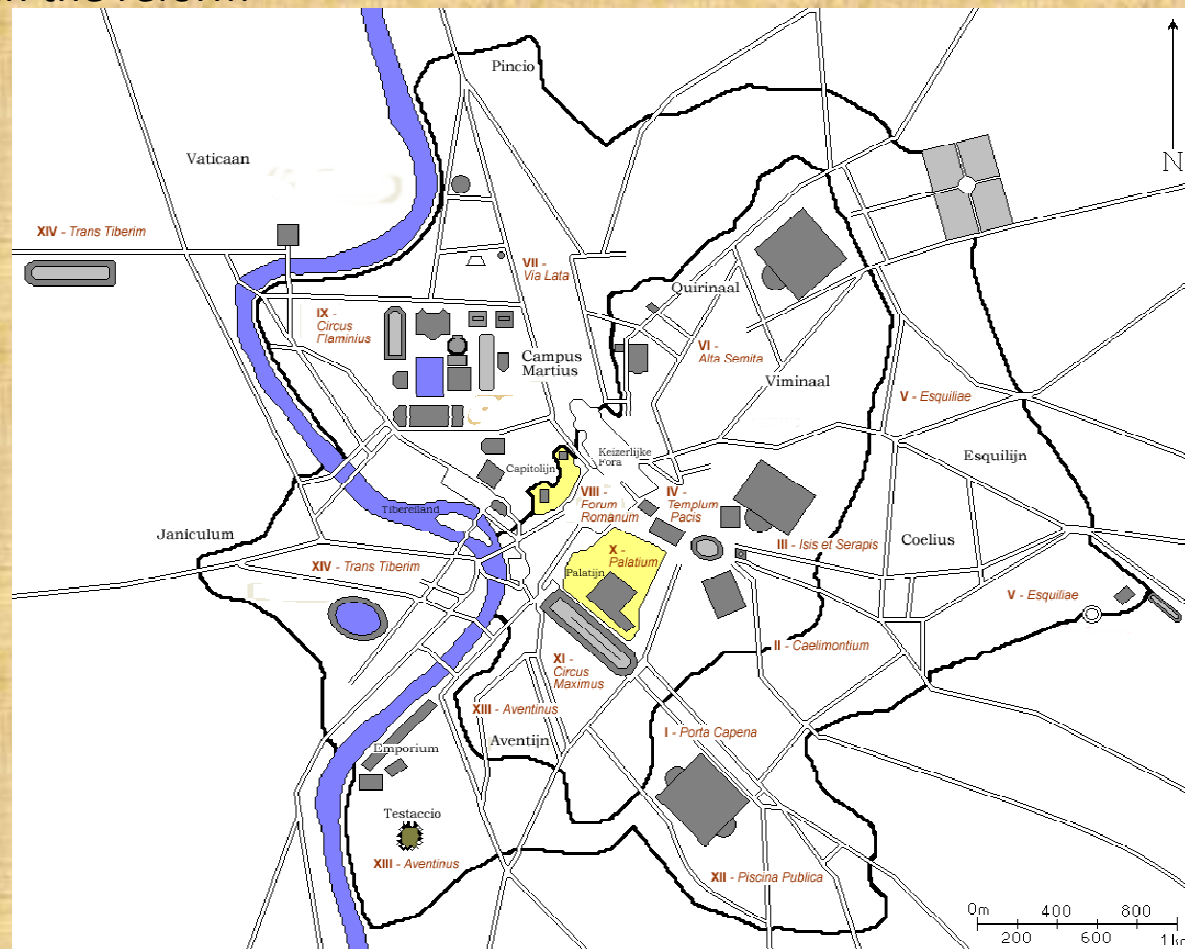
## PRIVATE CULT

7 BC – Augustus reorganized the administrative system of the city of Rome

- 14 regiones and 265 vici

Augustus intention

- strongly involved in the reform



## ***Vicus***

worshipped: Lares

run by: *magistri* of the *vicus* plus four *ministri*

public events: the festival of *Compitalia*

## ***Magistri vici***

Augustus reform – new function

Cults were financed by *magistri* - **make the position attractive**



*After the reform:*

- two lares compitales turned to Lares Augusti and Genius Augusti entered the worship

*Sacrifice:*

*Lares*

*genius*

*Genius Augusti*

- compital cults cannot be termed state cults

- *Sacra publica*

- Augustus stays conservative also in the compital cults

Inscribed relief-decorated altars

1. 7 BC – Augustan compital altar





2. 2-3 AD Augustan compital altar



### 3. The Sorrento base, late Augustan, after 12 BC

- Reference: the state religion, divine ancestors of the Julian family and Augustus' personal protector - Apollo



## The seated figure holding *cornucopia*

Result: these two *Genius populi Romani* and *Genius Augusti* started being mixed up, indistinguishable without an inscription

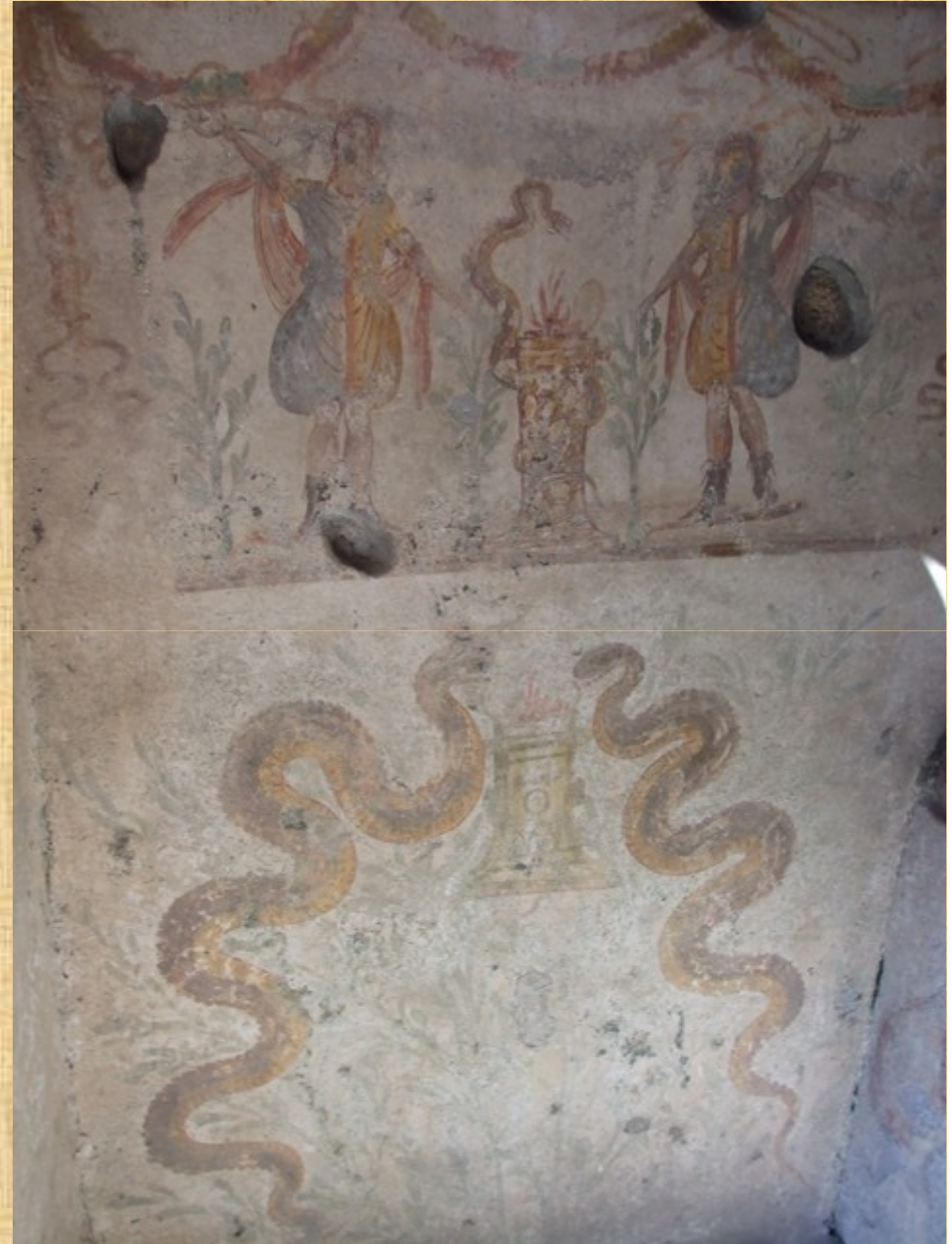
- Continuity in iconography
- Other preparatory step – *Genius* received a bull



*Lararia in Pompeii*

*Lares*

**The basic meaning of the imperial cult in the private sphere**



## PROVINCIAL AND MUNICIPAL LEVEL

*Municipal cults*

*Provincial cults*

### Epigraphic documentation

#### 1. *Daily text on papyrus from Oxyrhynchus*

*Poxy 12, 1245*

The text is an old document, brought to light as waste paper, bearing an oath  
*“in the name of Caesar [=Augustus], son of a god”*.

2. *Official epigraphic document*

a decree issued in 9 BC by Paullus Fabius Maximus, proconsul of Province Asia  
found at Priene

*OGIS [Orientis Graeci inscriptiones selectae] 458*

a) Augustus' birth is a sign of divine providence

b) Augustus is the saviour of humanity

c) As the day of Augustus' birth marked for the world the beginning of the benefits

The temples of the *veneratio Augusti*:

- 56 dedicated to the first emperor Augustus
- of them, 37 were built during his lifetime
- in Italy – 16, 7 surely built in his lifetime
- in the city of Rome
- civic priests all over Italy – flamen (sacerdos)

**The emperor as an object of cult had a great importance for the political cohesion of the Empire.**

**The Temple of Augustus and Livia** (Temple d'Auguste et de Livie), Roman temple, Vienne, France

20 BC – 10 BC, restored in the 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD, rededicated to Livia by Claudius





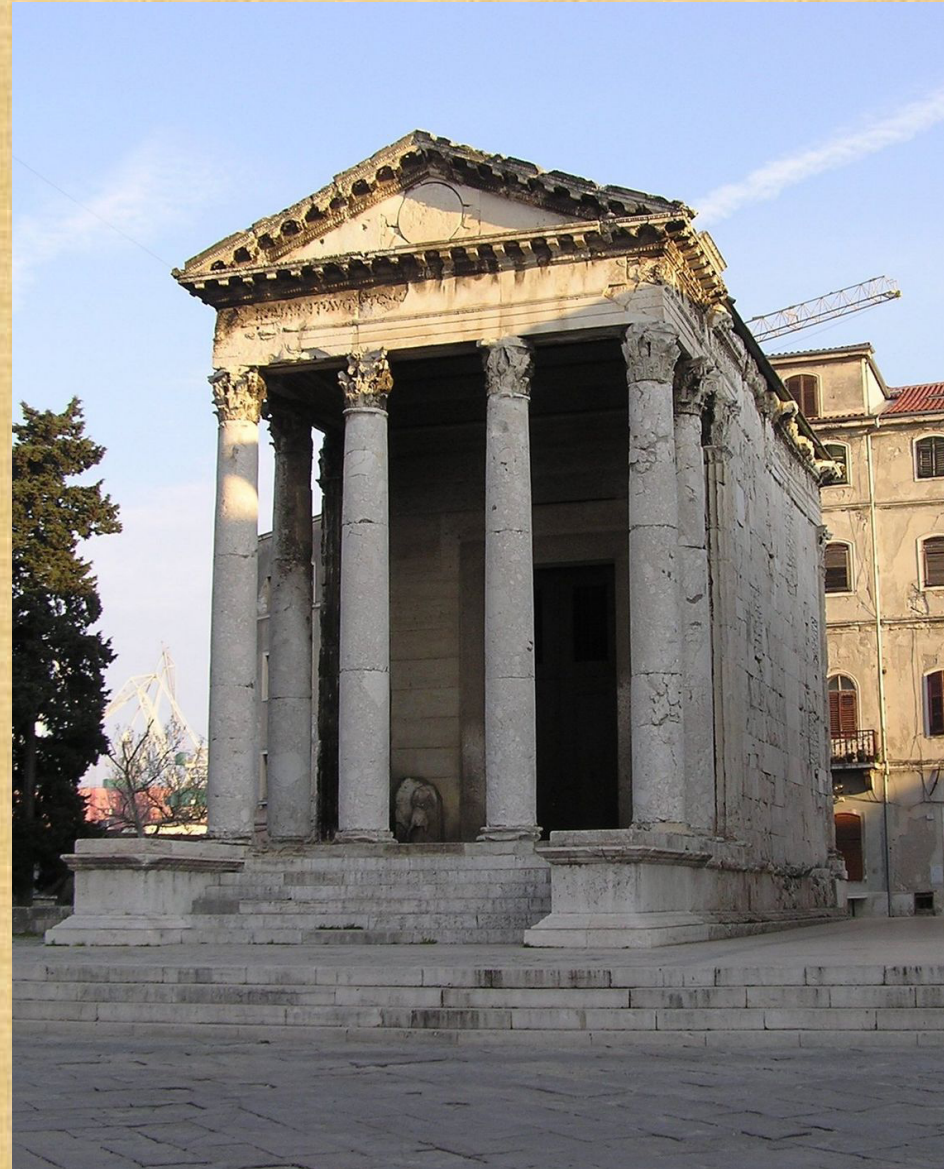
## The Temple of Augustus, Pula, Croatia

Built: between 2 BC and his death in 14 AD

- dedication:

**ROMAE · ET · AUGUSTO · CAESARI · DIVI · F ·  
PATRI · PATRIAE**

*Roma and Augustus Caesar, son of the deity,  
father of the fatherland*



#### 4. THE IMAGES

Used art in the service of his political and social ideology

The emperor and his family

Four themes in augustan art and architecture

To tell such a complex course, Augustus chose two different communication strategies:

##### **Visual language:**

e.g.:

The Forum of Augustus

Ara Pacis

The Belvedere Altar

Gemma Augustea

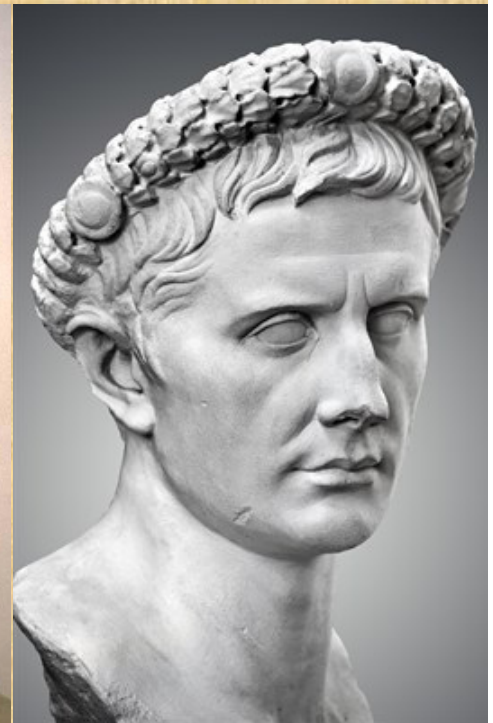
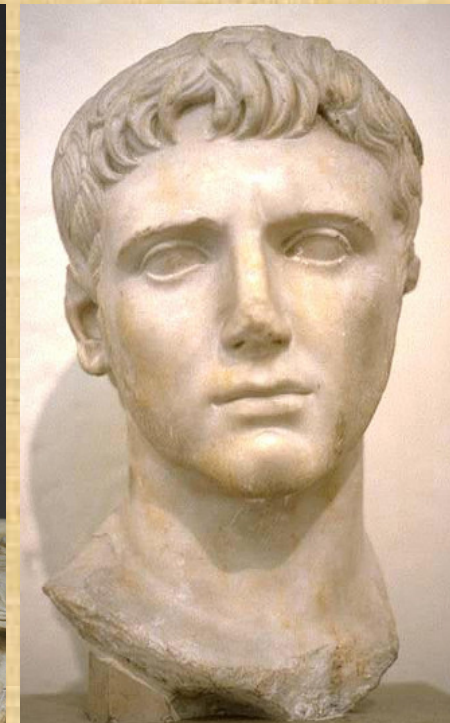
##### **Textual language:**

*Res gestae*

## ***Portraits***

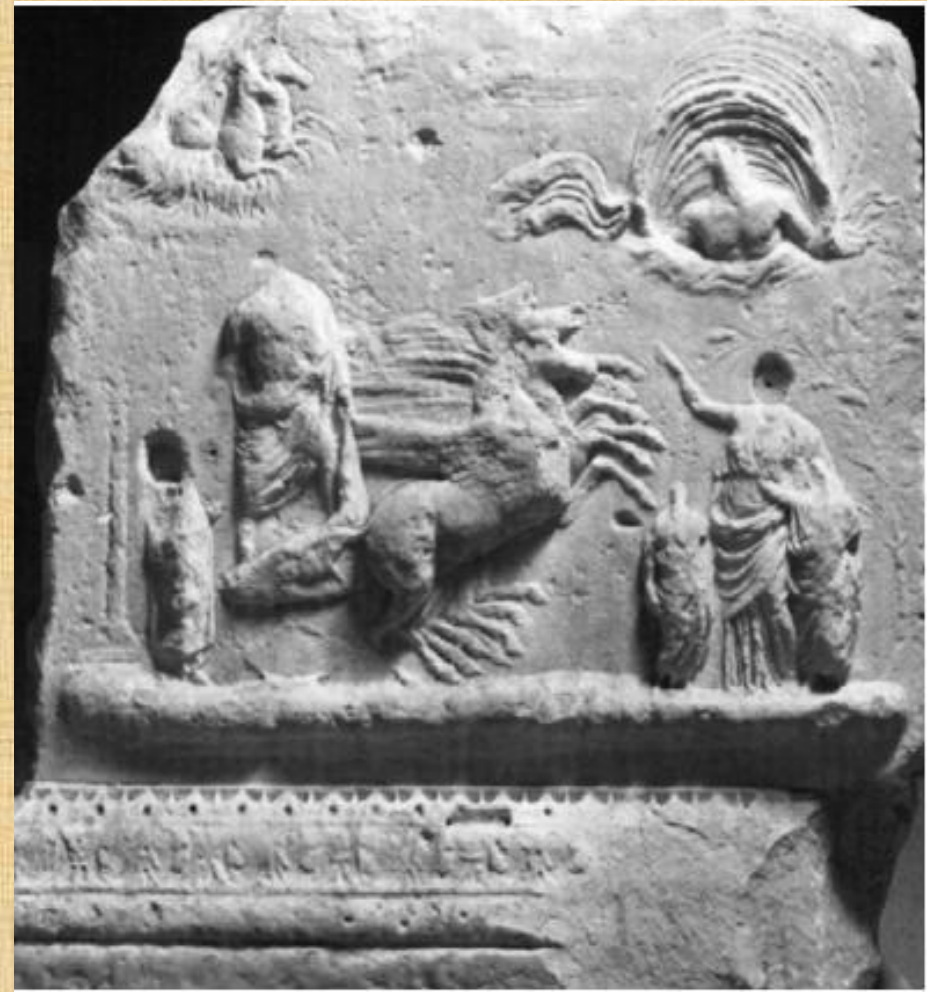
Always youthful

- a) Arles type
- b) The Actium type
- c) The Primaporta type
- d) The Forbes type



## THE BELVEDERE ALTAR

Summarizes Augustus' political ideology, social laws and religious beliefs



- the assimilation of divine and human households





GEMMA  
AUGUSTEA  
Two-layer  
sardonyx: white  
the upper, brown  
the lower.

Wien, KHM,  
Antikensammlung,  
Inv. No. IXa 79.

Subject: Augustus  
receives Tiberius  
and Germanicus  
after the victory  
upon Pannonia and  
Dalmatia.

AD 9/10-12.



**Gemma Augustea  
backside**



6 AD – Tiberius led war against uprised Pannonians, which ended with the participation of Germanicus in 9 AD. Reditus is depicted – victorious return.

1 – missing togatus, 2 – Tiberius, 3 – Victory, 4 – biga, 5 – horse, 6 – Germanicus, 7- goddess Roma, 8 – astrological device, 9 – Augustus as Jupiter, 10 – eagle, 11 – Oikoumene, 12 – Saturnus, 13 – Tellus, 14 and 15 - children





A scene of victory – the erection of a trophy

16 – a shield with a scorpion, 17 – Romulus=Quirinus, 18 – horseman, 19 – sitting barbarian woman, 20 – chained barbarian, 21 – Mars, 22 and 23 Castor and Polux, 24 - Diana, 25 – Mercury, 26 – kneeling barbarian, 27 – barbarian woman

## Augustus and the imperial cult

### State cult

- avoided direct deification
- became god after death

### Municipal and Provincial cult

- insisted Roma was worshipped with him
- political cohesion of the Empire
- Vienne, Pula

### Private cult

- no restrictions
- reorganized the administrative system – vicus
- relief decorated altars
- Genius
- integration of all citizens of the Roman empire – shared the same identity

### Communication strategies

*Visual language* – The Forum of Augustus, Ara Pacis, the Belvedere Altar, Gemma Augustea  
*Textual language* – Res Gestae

