

OXFORD

REPRESENTING ROME'S EMPERORS

*Historical & Cultural
Perspectives through Time*

edited by

CAILLAN
DAVENPORT

SHUSHMA
MALIK



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AND

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations of ancient sources and reference works referring to classical antiquity follow the conventions of the fourth edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (OCD⁴) or the three volumes of the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* (PLRE I, II, III) (where there are deviations in the abbreviation of late antique sources, we have followed the PLRE). We have also employed the following abbreviations:

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Ast. <i>Hom.</i> | Asterius of Amasea, <i>Homilies</i> |
| Aug. RGDA | Augustus, <i>Res Gestae Divi Augusti</i> |
| Braund | D. Braund (ed.), <i>Augustus to Nero: A Sourcebook on Roman History, 31 BC—AD 68</i> (London, 1985). |
| Caes. Arl. <i>Serm.</i> | Caesarius of Arles, <i>Sermons</i> |
| Calv. <i>Orat.</i> | Gaius Licinius Macer Calvus, <i>Orationes</i> |
| CIG | <i>Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum</i> |
| Crawford | M. Crawford (ed.), <i>Roman Statutes</i> (London, 1996). |
| Cyr. Alex. <i>Contra Iul.</i> | Cyril of Alexandria, <i>Contra Iulianum: Address to the most pious and Christ-loving emperor Theodosius</i> |
| EJ | V. Ehrenberg and A. H. M. Jones (eds), <i>Documents Illustrating the Reigns of Augustus and Tiberius</i> (Oxford, 1955). |
| Eph. <i>CJ</i> | Ephrem, <i>Hymns against Julian</i> |
| J. Chrys. <i>Hom. stat.</i> | John Chrysostom, <i>Homilies on the Statues</i> |
| Jer. <i>Comm. in Isa.</i> | Jerome, <i>Commentary on Isaiah</i> |
| LSA | R. R. R. Smith and B. Ward-Perkins (eds), <i>Last Statues of Antiquity Database</i> (2012), http://laststatues.classics.ox.ac.uk |
| Lucian, <i>Im.</i> | Lucian, <i>Imagines</i> |
| Migne, PG | Migne, <i>Patrologiae Cursus, series Graeca</i> |
| OED | <i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> |
| OLD | P. G. W. Glare (ed.), <i>The Oxford Latin Dictionary</i> (Oxford, 1982). |
| Phaed. <i>Fab.</i> | Phaedrus, <i>Fabulae</i> |
| RPC | <i>Roman Provincial Coinage</i> |
| SCPP | W. Eck, A. Caballos, and F. Fernández (eds), <i>Das senatus consultum de Cn. Pisone patre</i> (Munich, 1996). |
| Sen. <i>Brev. vit.</i> | Seneca, <i>De Brevitate Vitae</i> |
| TLL | <i>Thesaurus Linguae Latinae</i> |

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1

Introduction

Caillan Davenport and Shushma Malik

1. Why *Representing Rome's Emperors* Now?

The year 2016 witnessed two significant events in the United States and the United Kingdom—the victory of the ‘Yes’ vote in the UK’s ‘Brexit referendum’ (June) and the election of Donald Trump as US President (November)—which unexpectedly thrust Roman historians into the limelight as political commentators. Enquiries were driven by the search for ancient historical parallels to contemporary events, a game that has long been played but one which has gained momentum in recent years through the serendipitous confluence of several factors: journalists seeking to explain extraordinary events in easily digestible morsels; the rise of online platforms such as *The Conversation* which aim to turn academic expertise into accessible commentary; and finally, the pressure placed on scholars to justify the relevance of their field and to fulfil new measures of impact and engagement demanded by universities and governments.¹ And so it was that Roman emperors were suddenly in vogue again. The little-known third-century usurper Carausius (c.286–93 CE) became responsible for the ‘first Brexit’,² even though he actually controlled some of the European mainland for part of his reign and wanted to be recognized as a legitimate member of the Roman imperial college.³ The rise of Donald Trump to the US presidency could be understood and explained by working out which Roman emperor he most resembled,⁴ the hot favourites being anyone with a reputation for tyranny or madness, such as Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, or Commodus,⁵ though one brave Byzantinist went for the twelfth-century ruler Andronicus Komnenos.⁶ Such comparisons became even more tempting following the election in December 2019 of a British

¹ This is an observation, not a criticism: we have also happily entered into the fray, as shown by our ‘Mythbusting Ancient Rome’ articles for *The Conversation*. See now the reflections on the phenomenon in Morley 2021, 337–8.

² Rogers 2017; Higgins 2018.

³ As noted by de la Bédoyère 2018 in response to Higgins.

⁴ On the pervasiveness of such comparisons, see Morley 2021, esp. his list of Google search results on p. 332.

⁵ Brinkbäumer 2017; Jones 2017; Forbes 2017; Higgins 2019; Brockell 2020; Nutt 2020; Sommer 2020. This is not an exhaustive list. On the legacy of imperial madness, see now Blank, Catrein, and van Hoof 2021.

⁶ Lau 2017.

prime minister with classical training (Lit. Hum. Balliol College, Oxford, 1987), Boris Johnson.⁷

This search for historical parallelism is much more complicated than headlines and online op-eds would allow, as Mary Beard has reminded us after fielding journalists' questions on the topic of Trump and Roman emperors.⁸ The obsession with Trump, Johnson, Brexit, and Rome's emperors has more to do with our own preoccupations and preconceptions than it does about the reality of contemporary British or American politics. One explanation, proposed by Neville Morley, is the popular appeal of the 'Great Man theory of history, according to which events are shaped by the decisions, actions, and pathologies of a few larger-than-life individuals'.⁹ The view of Trump as Caligula or Nero reborn thus obscures the importance of the structural elements of autocratic regimes, such as the roles of advisers, the administration, the people, and values and ideologies that support and endorse their leaders. Morley's argument is an important one: the emphasis on 'colorful anecdotes' drawn from Suetonius and other ancient writers to illuminate Trump and Trumpism via the Roman world does indeed miss the big picture. Suetonius was actually deeply interested in exploring imperial behaviour within the context of structures of political power such as the court.¹⁰

Although the 'Great Man' theory does not entirely lack explanatory power—for example, the return of the monarchy under Augustus altered the ways in which authors structured history, including how they wrote and thought about individuals and their relationship with the state¹¹—the point that leaders and socio-political structures coexist, interact, and clash in the same world is well taken.¹² Brexit was in part the result of long-simmering discontent in sections of British society, but it took internal infighting in the Conservative Party and the acquiescence of its leader, David Cameron, to bring about the referendum. Carausius' revolt in the late third century had nothing to do with any desire for British independence, but perhaps we can say that it also emerged from a similar confluence of community concerns (provincials' desire for their own emperors) and individual circumstances (Carausius had been caught embezzling money and thought a leadership challenge was the best response).¹³ In both scholarship and wider discussions of individuals and their circumstances, the lure of the 'psychological' cannot be underestimated, but needs to be treated with caution. The question highlighted by Keith Hopkins, for example—"What was it like to be emperor?"—is attractive simply because most of us will never be in such a position

⁷ Dunning 2020.

⁸ Beard 2019; and see now Beard 2021, 277.

⁹ Morley 2017.

¹⁰ Wallace-Hadrill 1995.

¹¹ Swain 1997.

¹² See Fowler and Hekster 2005, 24–5, on the relationship between ideologies of kingship and social structures and expectations. In the contemporary context, Wyke 2012, 202, points out that the HBO TV series *Rome* subverts the 'Great Man' trope by giving pride of place to two members of the non-elite and their relationships as well as to characters such as Caesar, Antony, and Octavian.

¹³ For a recent examination of Carausius' rule and its depiction, see Davenport 2019.

of authority. We possess vivid minds and imaginations that need to be nurtured and fed.¹⁴

This collection focuses on a range of literary and artistic representations of Roman emperors created in their own lifetimes and in subsequent centuries, and, in particular, we seek to explain why these representations took the form they did. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines representation as ‘something which stands for or denotes another symbolically’.¹⁵ The equation of contemporary political events with Rome and its emperors can be explained both by our fascination with the psychological, as outlined by Keith Hopkins, and by the fact that Caesars have long functioned as symbolic representations of autocratic rule in the Western imagination, as masterfully explored by Mary Beard.¹⁶ Since most European rulers from the fifth century CE onwards have wanted to be recognized as types of Roman emperors in one way or another, their sexual habits, political ambitions, personal behaviour, and violent crimes have often been conceived in Roman terms. Such interpretations have become popular in other Western countries, such as the United States, where, as Maria Wyke has shown, Rome and Caesar(ism) have served as models for interpreting and analysing American foreign policy and the imperialistic ambitions of its leaders since the end of the Second World War.¹⁷ In the early twenty-first century, newspapers and magazines were awash with many comparisons between, and depictions of, George W. Bush and Julius Caesar, even though they were not as numerous as recent depictions of Trump as Nero.¹⁸ Roman emperors have also played prominent roles in political satire and humour.¹⁹ When the Australian prime minister William MacMahon orchestrated a plot to remove his minister John Gorton while staying at the ‘Isle of Capri’ on the Gold Coast, the opposition leader Gough Whitlam mocked him in Parliament as ‘Tiberius with a telephone’.²⁰ The striking difference between past and present is that Bush, MacMahon, Trump, and Johnson, unlike Roman emperors, are leaders elected by the people. There is, accordingly, a real sense that these imperial parallels are used as a way to comment on democratic leadership which is perceived to have veered off course into autocracy.

Representation is semantically related to the adjective ‘representative’, which refers to something that ‘speaks or acts on behalf of a wider body or group of

¹⁴ Hopkins 2017, 547, in his letter to ‘Martha’ (read: Mary [Beard]) about Severus’ ‘autobiography’, notes that ‘there is a huge gap between post-Freudian western culture and ancient Rome. We are interested in emotions. They weren’t. So we never, or rarely, know the emotions and motives of ancient characters.’

¹⁵ OED s.v. ‘representation’ n1, I 1a.

¹⁶ Beard 2021.

¹⁷ Wyke 2006; 2012.

¹⁸ Wyke 2006, 314–17. See now Morley 2021, 333–6, who collects data for Bill Clinton, George W. Bush (junior), and Barack Obama in addition to Donald Trump, showing the explosion in comparisons with the last.

¹⁹ See Beard 2021, 23, 277, on the visual shorthand of Nero’s wreath and lyre.

²⁰ *House of Representatives Hansard*, 17 August, 1971, p. 18. Carroll 2011, 75, states that the joke had added relevance, since the ABC was currently broadcasting *I, Claudius* on Sunday nights in Australia. But this could not have been the case, since the TV series had not yet been made.

people'.²¹ When reading opinion pieces, newspaper articles, and social media posts as much as when reading history, we analyse and evaluate texts, pictures, and memes, according to whether we have an ideological, cultural, or intellectual connection with the message we read and with the person(s) publishing it. We are more likely to trust those with whom we can find a way to relate and those whom we regard as in some way representative of our own social and cultural milieu. Kingship has been the dominant form of government throughout world history, found in North and South America, Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific, as well as in Europe.²² But it is Roman kingship—or, more precisely, the Roman imperial monarchy—that forms the dominant paradigm for conceptualizing leadership and autocracy in the mainstream Western media, prompted by the assumption that Rome's emperors are the examples that audiences will understand.²³ In the Western imagination, Rome functions as a unifying cultural canon for theorizing leadership in a way that more parochial references to kings such as Henry VIII of England or Ludwig II of Bavaria—let alone the monarchs of Hawai'i or Nubia—would not.²⁴ Nor are such comparisons in any way new. Representative models from the past have always been appropriated in the image-making of kings and in their critique and deconstruction, as the ambiguous place of Alexander the Great in Roman political thought demonstrates.²⁵ How—or if—the Roman imperial frame of reference has a representative function outside the Western world in countries such as Thailand and Japan, which still retain politically or symbolically powerful monarchies, is a question that lies outside the purview of this particular volume, but it is one which demands examination in the future.

In our Western contemporary context, there is a certain comforting safety in making allusions to *Roman* tyranny, centuries into the past, rather than to more recent exempla like Hitler, Franco, or Mussolini.²⁶ It is, therefore, crucial to recognize that the Roman models themselves are constructed from a series of *diverse* representations.²⁷ There was never one unified image of a Roman emperor, even in an ideal form. As Duncan Kennedy notes, 'Rather than our representations mirroring a prior Reality (singular), this network of representations *produces* the realities (plural) we experience, and fresh modes of representation can

²¹ OED s.v. 'representative' A. I, I 1a (b).

²² See Graeber and Sahlins 2017, esp. 1–22.

²³ See Goodman 2018b: 26–8, on Augustus as 'a shared point of cultural reference' and an 'icon'.

²⁴ This sentence was written in 2020, and we have left it unchanged. We are pleased to see that the point is emphasized in almost exactly the same terms in Beard 2021, xi: 'Caligula and Claudius continue to resonate across centuries and continents in a way that Charlemagne, Charles V or Henry VIII do not.'

²⁵ On kingship and models from the past, see Fowler and Hekster 2005, 23–4. On the 'Roman Alexander', see Spencer 2002.

²⁶ Note in this context, Pelling 2006, 6, on the story of Julius Caesar as political commentary on regicide: in Handel's *Giulio Cesare* (1724) 'the theme of justifiable regicide is put into a safe and distant world, far away in Egypt: a mixture of regicide and good fun'.

²⁷ Thus Beard 2021, 276: 'The history of images of the Caesars, right back to antiquity, is one of constructively changing identities, hapless or wilful misidentifications.'

produce new realities.²⁸ We need to do as much as possible to unpick how Romans represented their emperors in order to comprehend their presentation in subsequent centuries and in our own contemporary imagination.

This book consists of a series of case studies examining the representation of Roman emperors across more than two thousand years of history from antiquity to the present. They cover a range of different texts, media, and contexts, ranging from histories, coins, and statues of the Roman empire to twentieth-century novels and museum exhibitions. The volume is not intended to be a ‘Companion’ or ‘Handbook’ which offers comprehensive coverage of all imperial representations (indeed, as noted above, the focus is squarely on the Western world, and mainly Europe at that). Instead, we commissioned chapters with the intention that they would model a range of different methods and approaches to studying the representation of Roman emperors.²⁹ Some employ close readings of literature, such as histories, treatises, and novels (Rhiannon Ash, Shane Bjornlie, Frances Muecke, Shushma Malik, and David Scourfield), while others analyse artworks (Estelle Strazdins), exhibitions and events (Penelope Goodman), or juxtapose textual and visual evidence (Eleanor Cowan, Lucy Grig, Meaghan McEvoy). Emperors are examined as individuals (e.g. Penelope Goodman on Augustus; Frances Muecke on Titus and Trajan; Filippo Carlà-Uhink on Justinian and Theodora) and as collective thematic groups (e.g. Eleanor Cowan on fathers and sons; Shane Bjornlie and Shushma Malik on emperors and emperorship in Jordanes and Montesquieu, respectively). The chapters have also been selected to ensure that the volume included different imperial types, from the old and reclusive emperor (Tiberius, examined by Rhiannon Ash), the Hellenophile (Hadrian, in Estelle Strazdins’s chapter), a child ruler (Meaghan McEvoy’s Theodosius II), and Christian monarchs (Justinian and Theodora, discussed by Filippo Carlà-Uhink), spanning the period from the foundation of the Principate to late antiquity.

We have tried to avoid duplicating existing work. The post-classical representations of Julius Caesar and Augustus have been expertly examined by Maria Wyke and by Penelope Goodman and her colleagues,³⁰ so we did not want to make the first two Caesars the focus of the volume (despite their obvious importance). Instead, we commissioned chapters that moved in new directions, notably David Scourfield’s analysis of Caesar and Augustus in novels and Penelope Goodman’s chapter on commemorations of Augustus’ birth in 1938 and death in 2014 (the latter taking preference to celebrations of the bimillennium of Tiberius’ accession, it seems). Caesar and Augustus now receive a typically incisive

²⁸ Kennedy 2010, 89. See also Beller 2007, 5.

²⁹ The ‘case study’ methodology has, for example, been employed by Maria Wyke in her monographs on the reception of Rome in cinema (1997) and Caesar in the USA (2012).

³⁰ Wyke 2008; 2012; Goodman 2018a.

treatment in Mary Beard's *Twelve Caesars*, which appeared when this volume was in its final stages of preparation.³¹ The representation of 'tyrannical' emperors such as Caligula and Nero in antiquity and beyond has likewise received significant attention.³² These figures do feature in this volume, but they are integrated into the wider thematic discussions on family relationships or the decline of Rome highlighted above. Nor do we cover emperors in cinema or television, which has proved to be a popular topic, especially where Rome's more controversial rulers are concerned.³³ This bias reflects the tastes of both filmmakers and their source material (we are still waiting for the authoritative cinematic take on Antoninus Pius).³⁴

In what follows, we do not summarize the contents of individual chapters, but situate them within the scholarly discourse of representation and the key themes of the volume, which cross temporal and spatial boundaries: the relationship between history and fiction, the intricacies of imperial (material) image-making, the implications of a fragmented knowledge base, and the draw of the Romans as arch-imperialists.

2. History and/as Representation

Scholars have been struggling with the (often inharmonious) relationship between the 'historical' (in a positivist sense) and the 'representational' for decades. In 1967, Roland Barthes (following the *Annales* school of thought)³⁵ asked the question, 'does [historical] narration really differ, in some specific trait, in some indubitably distinctive feature, from imaginary narration, as we find it in the epic, the novel, and the drama?'³⁶ Considering first the act by which historians must communicate ('*Énonciation*'), who the historian is ('*Énoncé*'), and how language is used to signify meaning ('*Signification*'), Barthes contended that there is nothing intrinsically 'real' about history writing: 'We could say that historical discourse is a fudged up performative, in which what appears as statement (and description) is in fact no more than the signifier of the speech act as an act of authority.'³⁷

³¹ Beard 2021, 43–73.

³² For example, Bjaï and Menegaldo 2009; Bönisch-Meyer et al. 2014; Cordes 2017; Malik 2020; Blank, Catrein, and van Hoof 2021.

³³ See Lindner 2007 on Roman emperors in film, and, for some examples of work on specific emperors: Augustus (Boyd 2008); Tiberius (Brighton 2015); Caligula (Southon 2017; Hunter 2019); Nero (Wyke 1994; 1997, 197–259; Winkler 2017); Elagabalus (Wyke 2017).

³⁴ Lindner 2007, 113–15, shows that the clear cinematic favourites are Julius Caesar, Caligula, and Nero, followed by Augustus, Claudius, Marcus Aurelius and Commodus.

³⁵ See Bann 1981, 4.

³⁶ Trans. Bann 1981, 7 = Barthes 1967, 65: '*cette narration diffère-t-elle vraiment, par quelque trait spécifique, par une pertinence indubitable, de la narration imaginaire, telle qu'on peut la trouver dans l'épopée, le roman, le drame?*'

³⁷ Trans. Bann 1981, 17 = Barthes 1967, 74, '*on peut dire que le discours historique est un discours performatif truqué, dans lequel le constatif (le descriptif) apparent n'est en fait que le signifiant de l'acte de parole comme acte d'autorité.*'

Barthes thus postulated an alternative way to understand history that rejected the historical positivism which had characterized the discipline until the late nineteenth century.³⁸ Six years later, Hayden White moved the discussion away from semiotics towards an interrogation of narrative devices, including modes of emplotment (romance, comedy, tragedy, satire), modes of explanation (idio-graphic, organicist, mechanistic, contextualist), and modes of ideological interpretation (anarchist, conservative, radical, liberal).³⁹ While we may know some historical facts (i.e. that some historical events took place), the historian must decide what kind of story to tell in order to link those facts together and to understand their import.⁴⁰ This is an act of creative interpretation, the end result of which is a representation of history, not a straightforward account of anyone's 'reality'. Arguments such as White's inevitably prompted discussions amongst historians about distinctions in genre—i.e. what makes narrative history distinct from a work of fiction. Stephen Bann, for example, maintained that, while linguistically there may be little difference separating history from fiction, the *intent* of historians to relate a truth is significant, even if there is no single truth there to uncover.⁴¹ Although we may think it is possible to discern *the* truth by comparing one source with another and making a value judgement, Bann is sceptical:

Where a debate of this kind has its limitations, surely, is where it assumes the possibility of a single, ideal account, in which all the areas of difference would be removed . . . it is virtually impossible to disentangle one from the other, without reducing the historical text to a kind of bloodless algebra.⁴²

Scholars grow anxious when an ancient work does not appear to be proper history or to conform to the appropriate rules of genre. We all know that Tacitus wrote history, despite the fact that he experimented with the annalistic form.⁴³ But witness the confusion over the genre of Eusebius' *Life of Constantine*—biography, hagiography, panegyric, or a combination of all of the above?—and one can see what happens when some modern scholars encounter texts they cannot define.⁴⁴ In reality, as John Marincola has pointed out, historical genre is fundamentally 'dynamic'.⁴⁵ Jordanes' *Getica* and *Romana*, as Shane Bjornlie notes in this volume, have qualities of the 'heroic epic' in their presentation of the Goths, which is a technique of narration to provide them with a foundation narrative worthy of

³⁸ Barthes 1967, 65; White 1973, 283.

³⁹ White 1973, 307.

⁴⁰ As Kennedy, 2010, 90, notes, facts themselves are difficult to define: 'facts are not unmediated; they must be adequately *represented*' (emphasis ours).

⁴¹ Bann 1990, 60.

⁴² Bann 1990, 52.

⁴³ Ginsburg 1981.

⁴⁴ Summarized by Cameron and Hall 1999, 29–33. They sensibly comment (p. 33): 'It seems unlikely that Eusebius himself had as clear a view of genre as modern critics wish upon him.'

⁴⁵ Marincola 1999, 282.

Virgil's *Aeneid*. The culmination of such dynamism can be seen in Montesquieu's 1734 work *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and their Decline*, discussed here by Shushma Malik, in which history is ultimately subordinated to political philosophy. Emperors are portrayed by Montesquieu as feeble individuals, unable to stop the declining civic and military spirit among the Roman citizen body, which leads to the fall of Rome. Rome's history becomes again a didactic moralistic tale, re-shaped for a specific purpose. This is a trap from which we have not escaped, as the political disintegration of the Roman empire has become a metaphor for the fall of numerous subsequent empires, up to and including the 'American empire'.⁴⁶

'Creativity' may be a better vehicle for understanding and uniting all the different depictions of emperors in the past and present.⁴⁷ Rhiannon Ash's analysis of Tacitus' use of proxemics in his characterization of Tiberius is relevant here. In constructing a portrait of an emperor to whom it is dangerous to be too close, but problematic to be too disconnected from, Tacitus brings to life the anxieties of Roman senators in the Principate.⁴⁸ Tacitus' creative use of proxemics does not distance us from 'what really happened', but enhances our understanding of it. The same point applies to Meaghan McEvoy's examination of the portrayal of Theodosius II in the ecclesiastical histories of Sozomen and Socrates: both these writers create an image of a prince, guided by his pious and devout sister Pulcheria, who made his devotion to God a hallmark of his regime. Their descriptions are inventive and creative (not least the idea that the imperial palace was like a monastery); but, as McEvoy shows, they are not necessarily misleading. They were part of the image of Theodosius II in which piety formed the key virtue of his regime, so much so that it could secure military success without the emperor needing to set foot on a battlefield. These readings move us away from needing to excavate the 'facts' underneath the 'embellishment' and we instead appreciate the artistry of ancient writers as revealing of the political world in which they lived.⁴⁹ As Ann Curthoys and John Docker write elsewhere, 'the very doubleness of history—in the space between history as rigorous scrutiny of sources and history as part of the world of literary forms—gives it ample room for uncertainty, disagreement, and creativity'.⁵⁰

As we have begun to see, since 1973, Hayden White's work has caused some controversy, and while he has many supporters among classicists and ancient historians,⁵¹ others have been less sympathetic to his approach. Arnaldo

⁴⁶ See Wyke 2012, ch.7; Watts 2021.

⁴⁷ Curthoys and Docker 2010, 11.

⁴⁸ Tacitus' use of space in his characterization of Tiberius had an impact on depictions of the emperor in film and television, which likewise play with the idea of the public and private ruler (Brighton 2015).

⁴⁹ Dench 2009 is essential on this point.

⁵⁰ Curthoys and Docker 2010, 11.

⁵¹ e.g. Woodman 1988; Henderson 1989; Elsner and Masters 1994; O'Gorman 2000; Malik 2020.

Momigliano wrote a respectful, if frank response to White in 1981, in which he reinforced the role and value of historical research. ‘History is no epic,’ he wrote, ‘history is no novel, history is not propaganda because in these literary genres control of the evidence is optional, not compulsory.’⁵² Later, Momigliano brought the discussion around to the idea of the historian’s disposition and the sort of researcher who has always been worthy of our trust:

What is true about me is true about any other historian, past or present. As history of historiography is basically a study of individual historians, no student of history of the history of historiography does his work properly unless he is capable of telling me whether the historian or historians he has studied used evidence in a satisfactory way.⁵³

This reminds us of the problem with representation we still face—we are more likely to take the word of people with whom we perceive a social, cultural, or intellectual connection. Here a connection is forged with the methodology employed, but there are also implicit assumptions made about the type of person equipped to practise that method.

These assumptions extend from antiquity to today. In the second century BCE, Polybius wrote that being a historian was not a part-time job, but something to which a man must devote all his time:

And I would say that history will be proper when men of affairs set their hand to history writing—and not as they do now, treating it as a pastime, but rather considering it to be the most necessary and fairest of professions, applying themselves unceasingly to the task through their whole lives—or when those who attempt to write history consider the experience that comes from actual events to be necessary for history. Until then, there will be no end of the ignorance of historians.⁵⁴

⁵² Momigliano 1981, 261. Cf. Lendon 2009, 57, who argues that ancient historiography is ‘closer to the modern genres of the “non-fiction novel” or popular, non-academic history’, creating an artificial division between ‘academic’ and ‘popular’ history that negates the creative and literary element in the former while demeaning the latter. See now Stevenson 2011–14, 118–19 on modern scholars ‘becoming more open to the role of imagination in their work’.

⁵³ Momigliano 1981, 264.

⁵⁴ Trans. Marincola 2017, 108 = Polyb. 12.28:

καγὼ δ’ ἂν εἶποιμι διότι τὰ τῆς ἱστορίας ἔξει τότε καλῶς, ὅταν ἢ οἱ πραγματικοὶ τῶν ἀνδρῶν γράφειν ἐπιχειρήσωσι τὰς ἱστορίας, μὴ καθάπερ νῦν παρέργως, νομίσαντες δὲ καὶ τοῦτ’ εἶναι σφίσι τῶν ἀναγκαιοτάτων καὶ καλλίστων, ἀπερίσπαστοι...παράσχωνται πρὸς τοῦτο τὸ μέρος κατὰ τὸν βίον, ἢ οἱ γράφειν ἐπιβαλλόμενοι τὴν ἐξ αὐτῶν τῶν πραγμάτων ἔξιν ἀναγκαίαν ἡγήσωνται πρὸς τὴν ἱστορίαν. πρότερον δ’ οὐκ ἔσται παῦλα τῆς τῶν ἱστοριογράφων ἀγνοίας.

Polybius' idea of the professional historian dedicating his entire life to the perfection of his expertise now rightly seems out of date, but a consequence of this traditional mode of thinking is that historians have often seen themselves as the academic inheritors of the skills of their ancient scholarly ancestors—those Greek and Roman *men* knew how to write good history.⁵⁵ And shared experience between historians can go beyond the library or archive. In his *Memoirs*, Edward Gibbon looked back to points in his upbringing that qualified him to venture into the 'field of study and observation'. He wrote:

[military] experience forced me to feel the characters of our leading men, the state of parties, the forms of office, and the operation of our civil and military system. . . . The discipline and evolutions of a modern battalion gave me a clearer notion of the phalanx and the legion; and the captain of the Hampshire grenadiers (the reader may smile) has not been useless to the historian of the Roman empire.⁵⁶

Gibbon acknowledged that to draw a parallel between the Hampshire grenadiers and the Roman imperial army might be a little (or very) far-fetched, but he nevertheless finds compelling the notion that sharing experiences with figures from antiquity has a particular kind of benefit for a historian. With Thucydides or Polybius, Gibbon had found common ground.

Of course, Gibbon was not the first historian to frame himself and his task in relation to his professional ancestors. In fact, this has been continuing since antiquity, as Shane Bjornlie demonstrates. For Jordanes, 'imperial fulfilment' was not just a question of *translatio imperii* ('transfer of imperial power'), but also of writing a history that emulated Roman literary styles, both classical historiography and Latin epic. Indeed, Jordanes had his own 'Polybian' moment as he pondered the historian's craft—Bjornlie suggests that Jordanes' references to his 'conversion' refer not to religion, but rather to a shift away from a publicly active life to one of quiet, scholarly retirement and a devotion to the writing of history. Gibbon might also have appreciated the sentiment of a shared European cultural inheritance centred around Rome's first emperor, as discussed by Penelope Goodman in this volume. The idea of Augustus as a putative paternal cultural ancestor draws a line from the first *princeps*, via Charlemagne and Queen

⁵⁵ For example, in J. B. Bury's editor's introduction to Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, he states:

Gibbon is one of those few writers who hold as high a place in the history of literature as in the roll of great historians. . . . Gibbon thus ranks with Thucydides and Tacitus, and is perhaps the clearest example that brilliance of style and accuracy of statement—in Livy's case conspicuously divorced—are perfectly compatible in an historian. (Bury 1906, xxxi)

⁵⁶ Milman 1840, 94.

Victoria, to the Europeans of the twenty-first century celebrating the bimillennium of Augustus' death.

History, then, is made up of a series of representations that are guided by the conventions of language and narrative, but it is also written by individual historians (ourselves included) who represent themselves as part of, or removed from, particular scholarly traditions. This is how canons are formed: canons of historical and literary works, canons of historical practice, and canons of political representation. There is a causal link between the type of people who have written history, the works they have read and regarded as important to read, and the models from the past—such as Roman emperors—through which they have chosen to view their present experiences.

3. Representation and Reception

'Representation' is the term usually employed by scholars studying the literary and artistic images of emperors produced during the Roman imperial period.⁵⁷ In this collection, the analysis of imperial representations in various media continues through and beyond late antiquity, into Byzantium (the common term for the surviving Roman empire in the East), the medieval West, the Renaissance, and the early modern and modern periods. This is a field traditionally known as 'Classical Reception', but in this book, we prefer to speak of 'post-classical representations' in order to trace common themes that run through representations over time, whether ancient, modern, or in between, and to explore their development.⁵⁸ Our view is that this process would be obscured by using the different terms of 'representation' and 'reception'.⁵⁹ As Mary Beard has written, 'there is an inextricable two-way influence between the old and the new'.⁶⁰

That does not mean that we are not cognizant of, or inspired by, important work in the field of Classical Reception Studies. In 1993, Charles Martindale wrote a 'theoretical intervention' which challenged the value of historical positivism in

⁵⁷ A number of works on Roman history subjects in relation to emperors have made use of the terms linked to representation and imagination in the past twenty years. For example, Hekster 2002; de Blois et al. 2003; Weber and Zimmermann 2003a; Hekster and Fowler 2005; Ewald and Noreña 2010; Noreña 2011; Manders 2012; Bönisch-Meyer et al. 2014; Cordes 2017; Burgersdijk and Ross 2018; Schulz 2019.

⁵⁸ This is something not often done—Elsner and Masters 1994; Bjaï and Menegaldo 2009; Icks 2011; Walde 2013; Goodman 2018a; Beard 2021 are notable exceptions—monographs or collections tend to focus on either antiquity or post-classical reception. Handbooks and companions will look at both, but usually with reception taking up a small section at the end (a structure which Martindale 1997 pointedly flips on its head). For the use of the term 'representation' for both contemporary and non-contemporary images, see now Beard 2021, e.g. 8–9.

⁵⁹ See also Goodman 2018b: 23–4, who makes the same point about connecting antiquity and later periods, but prefers to use the term 'reception' throughout.

⁶⁰ Beard 2021, 23.

relation to the texts (by which Martindale means any ‘vehicle of signification’, not just written words) produced in ancient Greece and Rome. Rather, Martindale argues, we should focus on the illumination that can come from studying how the past has been received by others; in other words, history is ‘a discourse constituted by the traces produced by *différance* which are present in all textuality’.⁶¹ For Martindale, the future of Classics as a discipline lies in the considered study of post-classical reception—the right texts, when read actively,⁶² can tell us as much about ancient society as they do about the social circumstances within which the texts were written.⁶³ These are bold statements, as Martindale concedes, but some have been more controversial than others. While many now agree that Classical Reception Studies should focus on the reciprocal relationship between the classical and the post-classical,⁶⁴ the questions of what counts as an instance of classical reception and how the study of the dialogue between texts should be conducted remain contested.

The problem can perhaps be summed up like this: can a film like *Gladiator* (Martindale’s go-to example) tell us anything new about the ancient world? No, says Martindale, as ‘it does not present a thoroughly imagined classical world’.⁶⁵ The issue is partly one of engagement with ancient texts and partly one of aesthetics. Comparing *Gladiator* to Dante’s *Commedia*, Martindale writes that ‘in general material of high quality is better company for our intellects and hearts than the banal or the quotidian’.⁶⁶ Conversely, a text by Dante Alighieri or by Walter Pater carries both intellectual and aesthetic value:

Pater is our greatest aesthetic critic... Pater is a model of what one important type of classicist could and should be, if the subject is to survive in any meaningful form in the general culture. This is because of the way that, in addition to his particular insights into classical antiquity, Pater also engaged, often in fugitive and oblique fashion, with many of the pressing intellectual issues and debates of his own day.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Martindale 1993, 21. *Différance* refers to Jacques Derrida’s use of the term which combines the ideas of difference and deferral. See Martindale 1993, 7.

⁶² An active reader who plays a part in constructing meaning, following Roland Barthes’s thesis in ‘Death of the Author’ (1968), Martindale 2010, 73.

⁶³ Martindale 2013, 171.

⁶⁴ See Hardwick and Stray 2011, 4; Porter 2011, 474. Adding another layer of complexity, Porter 2006, 17, (rightly) draws attention to the problems inherent in defining eras as classical and post-classical for the study of Classics: ‘Don’t we have to admit that the postclassical era in some sense invented the classical age? If so, then to speak of the classical properties of classical objects or attitudes from, say, Periclean Athens is to speak of projections by a later age.’ This temporal ambiguity also lies behind Shane Butler’s third way between ‘tradition’ and ‘reception’, i.e. ‘Deep Classics’, on which, see Butler 2016, 9, 15.

⁶⁵ Martindale 2013, 176. The *Gladiator* example also features in Martindale 2006, 11; 2010, 65, 78.

⁶⁶ Martindale 2006, 11. ⁶⁷ Martindale 2017, 1.

Aesthetics is particularly important to Martindale, as the beauty of a work imbues it with the 'high quality' that makes for productive reception research.⁶⁸ Thus, aesthetics dictates both the selection of material and the mode of study. Beautiful texts are deserving of our criticism, and the apparatus by which we should criticize is those outlined by Kant and Jauss—the close analysis of individual pieces, and their relationship with each other.⁶⁹

Not all reception scholars, however, have decided to adopt aesthetics as a theoretical basis for interpreting classical and post-classical materials. It is to the benefit of reception studies that the scope of materials and the approach to them have been widened. Joanna Paul, for example, has skilfully shown how *Gladiator* makes use not only of a rich tradition of epic films, but also of narrative strategies that belong to ancient texts (e.g. 'retelling' in epic).⁷⁰ Further, aesthetics as a mode of criticism has been supplemented with a wider range of responses from different historical and cultural perspectives. It matters, argues Simon Goldhill, in what context the products of classical reception are fashioned. When studying Milton and Virgil, it is not enough purely to focus on the individual texts as aesthetic objects, but instead we must recognize horizontal connections (i.e. contemporary context that moves beyond the aesthetic into the cultural, political, religious, etc.) as well as vertical (the texts' relationship with their predecessors using a transhistorical approach).⁷¹ For Martindale, Goldhill remains constrained by the bounds of historical positivism, but there is a great deal to be said for a broader context-based approach.⁷² This is because, while a Barthesian Author-God (the omniscient, omnipotent author whom Barthes denounces in favour of the agency of the reader) may indeed be a step too far, our judgement of post-classical writers, artists, etc. as 'readers' of classical materials depends upon our own understanding of authorial intent and upon our understanding of the situations that led to the production of the post-classical material.

Paul and Goldhill's strategy is no less effective in creating a dialogue with the classical past than Martindale's aesthetic approach, and both modes of reception studies are contained in this volume's chapters. Frances Muecke, for example, situates Biondo Flavio carefully amongst his fellow humanists, while also teasing out the linguistic nuances in Biondo's treatment of the Roman imperial period in general, and of Titus and Trajan in particular. David Scourfield reminds us that the study of cultural context affords scholars a better chance of producing 'authoritative' history than if we go looking for 'truth' in narrative histories of distant periods, but he also presents close, careful readings of Thornton Wilder's *Ides of March* and John Williams's *Augustus* that show the authors' ability to

⁶⁸ Martindale 2010, 72.

⁶⁹ For example, Martindale's close study of Ovid and Titian (1993, 55–74).

⁷⁰ Paul 2013, 149. See also Rood 2013, 200, on the dialogue between *Gladiator* and *Spartacus*, and Virgil's *Aeneid* and Lucan's *Bellum Civile* as representations of ancient violence.

⁷¹ Goldhill 2010, 62.

⁷² Martindale 2010, 74.

invoke the ‘spirit’ of the late republican and Augustan periods through fictionalized versions of ancient letters, poems, official reports, graffiti, commonplace books, journals, etc. The intellectual flair of Wilder and Williams in their recreation of the past is fundamental to the contrived ‘historicity’ of their novels.

And so, in this volume, by exploring both classical and post-classical representations of Roman emperors we hope to establish a productive framework for analysis that an artificial division between representation (the term commonly used by scholars of the Roman empire in its contemporary context) and Reception (everything after, with a capital R) might occlude. That said, this volume owes its existence to a substantial amount of scholarship that has challenged preconceptions about what we are able to know about ancient Greece and Rome (e.g. the value and relevance of historical positivism), and how we can best enhance our appreciation of antiquity (i.e. by what mode of study we should approach ancient and post-classical materials).

4. History as Fiction?

Historians have always relied on a range of literary strategies to bring their version of the past to life. One of the Roman world’s most notorious writers, the anonymous author of the *Historia Augusta*, was also one of its most creative. Writing in the late fourth century CE, he encountered a particular problem as he set out to write the lives of the emperors of the mid-third century. Having relied on the now lost biographies of Marius Maximus to provide factual and anecdotal details about the Antonines and (most of) the Severans,⁷³ he now encountered a serious deficiency in source material, especially of the type useful for reconstructing character and motivation.⁷⁴ The author could depend on Herodian to take him through to 238 CE, but thereafter lives had to rely on details gleaned from an earlier Latin biographical history (known to scholars now as the *Kaisergeschichte*, the ‘Imperial History’) and Greek works such as Dexippus’ *Chronicle*.⁷⁵ This meant that many illuminating details about the character of rulers such as Gordian III (238–44), Gallienus (253–68), Aurelian (270–5), and Probus (276–83) had to be invented.

The *Historia Augusta*’s creation of a third-century past is widely held in suspicion by scholars. There are good grounds for doing so, not least because the single author of this series of imperial biographies pretends to be six different

⁷³ Syme 1968, 89–93. On Marius Maximus, see Birley 1997.

⁷⁴ In SHA *Prob.* 2.7, the author says he will not be imitating Sallust, Livy, Tacitus, or Trogus, but writers such as Suetonius and Marius Maximus.

⁷⁵ The existence of the *Kaisergeschichte* (KG for short) was persuasively argued by Enmann 1884. See further Barnes 1970, esp. 40–1.

writers (collectively referred to as the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*).⁷⁶ But it is also important to acknowledge that the author's literary techniques are not that different from previous Roman historians—he made use (albeit liberally) of rhetorical *inventio* (the creation of material) as others had done.⁷⁷ Thus, the author of the *Historia Augusta*—an educated and erudite individual with a flair for the dramatic—created inscriptions, letters, speeches, and anecdotes around the historical information he had to hand in order to bring the third century to life. He was the descendant of a long historiographical tradition that began with names such as Q. Fabius Pictor, M. Porcius Cato, Cn. Gellius, and L. Calpurnius Piso in the middle and late Republic.⁷⁸ These men wrote centuries after the earliest events they were describing and did so at length—but from where did they get their information? Documents such as the consular *fasti* and the *annales maximi* could be consulted for the basic framework of annalistic history, but they needed fleshing out.⁷⁹ These sources could not have provided all the material necessary: by the time Cn. Gellius' account of Rome from its beginnings reached 216 BCE, it was already in Book 33.⁸⁰ As Ernst Badian wrote, 'it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that there was simply not as much information to be had as Gellius produced'.⁸¹ Badian has dubbed the process of adding and augmenting material to the historical core 'the expansion of the past'.⁸²

Between the worlds of Cn. Gellius and the *Historia Augusta* lies a Roman past that we think we know, that is, the Roman past told by those historians whose research processes and scholarly integrity we recognize and trust. The age of the early empire seems a period of greater certainty, illuminated, as it is, by Suetonius and Tacitus, authors of lives and annals, respectively. There is the apparent reassurance of senatorial records and imperial archives carefully consulted, sometimes even quoted, and prior authorities occasionally cited, offering a (tenuous) thread of research and reliability.⁸³ We know, of course, that Tacitus' speeches are his own interpretations, composed in accordance with the rhetorical techniques described above. But as historians, we often take comfort in having the original preserved, as in Claudius' speech on the admission of Gauls to the senate on the *Tabula Lugdunensis*, so that the artistry of the historian can be carefully distinguished from the pedantry of the emperor.⁸⁴ Even better when a chance discovery, such as when the fragmentary bronze copy of the *Senatus Consultum de Cn.*

⁷⁶ As demonstrated by Dessau 1889.

⁷⁷ See Woodman 1988, x, 87–94, 176–9; Wiseman 1979, 26, on the rhetorical techniques employed by Roman historians. Cf. Damon 2007, 444–6 for an alternative view of Tacitus' purpose. For similar ideas in assessing the influence of rhetoric in Cassius Dio, see Bellissime 2016.

⁷⁸ For an outline of Rome's earliest historians, see Badian 1966 and Wiseman 1979, 9–26.

⁷⁹ Wiseman 1979, 17–18.

⁸⁰ Wiseman 1979, 11.

⁸¹ Badian 1966, 12.

⁸² Badian 1966, 11. On the general acceptance of these theories, see Damon 2007, 339–40.

⁸³ Suetonius in the archives: Wallace-Hadrill 1995, 21, 62–4, 88–91. Tacitus and imperial records: Syme 1958b, 278–86, 294–6.

⁸⁴ Miller 1956; Griffin 1992; for the text, see the new edition in Malloch 2020. See Levick 1990 on the search for other Claudian material in Tacitus.

Pisone patre (SCPP) appeared in Spain, can assist us in reconstructing and comparing a whole series of events surrounding Germanicus' death in 19 CE and the trial of Piso in 20 CE with Tacitus' version.⁸⁵ But there is a certain degree of partiality in 'The Senate's Story' (to use Miriam Griffin's apt formulation) that renders the SCPP equally problematic.⁸⁶

One possible way to connect these historical and biographical texts and their way of thinking about the world would be in terms of 'fictionality'.⁸⁷ By this we mean a manipulation or invention of evidence (or lack of evidence) that goes beyond White's thesis of 'interpretation as history' and our discussion of creativity. Fictionality provides a through line from the *inventio* of Roman historiography to the novels discussed by David Scourfield, Wilder's *The Ides of March* and Williams's *Augustus*.⁸⁸ Both novels contain letters and documents that are plainly fictitious in that they were not written by the historical characters they purport to have been written by, in the same sense that many of the sources quoted in the *Historia Augusta* are also invented. However, like the letters of the *Historia Augusta*, and indeed, Tacitus' version of Claudius' speech on the Gauls, they are not works of pure fantasy, but based on a desire to evoke the spirit of the past and its characters. The integration of Augustus' *Res Gestae* into Williams's *Augustus* suggests an intense wish to reconstruct the vicissitudes of power through the persona of the *princeps*.⁸⁹ 'Fictionality' is an appropriate lens for Scourfield to explore the themes and techniques of these novels because they are, at least on the surface, presented as fictional works. It would also perhaps be productive to describe some of the popular texts discussed by Lucy Grig in this volume, such as the *Syriac Julian Romance*, using terms of fictionality, like Adam Kemezis' recent exploration of the fictional world created by Philostratus in his novel *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*.⁹⁰ The slippage and interaction between the ancient and modern understanding of historical and fictional writing are, of course, exactly the theme that Scourfield and his novelists explore.

5. The Ingenuity of Material Images

As we have begun to see, 'representation' works on multiple levels. Another common use of the term is 'a depiction or portrayal of a person or thing, typically

⁸⁵ The title of Eck 2002, 'Cheating the Public, or: Tacitus Vindicated', is telling.

⁸⁶ Griffin 1997.

⁸⁷ Curthoys and Docker 2010. Axtell 1987, 460–2, writes of different 'plots' used by historians to narrate the past.

⁸⁸ Fictionality has certainly been considered for the work of Tacitus in various ways. Jerome 1912 thought that Tacitus' Tiberius was fiction. For degrees and types of fiction in Tacitus, see Haynes 2003, a very challenging read. For the backlash against these ideas, see Rudich 1994; Lendon 2009, 58–9.

⁸⁹ These novels stand in a long tradition of fictional works that prided themselves on their authenticity and reliability: see Stevenson 2011–14, 113–14 on nineteenth-century historical novels which were regarded as 'a vivid and compelling representation of the past'.

⁹⁰ Kemezis 2014, 158–60.

one produced in an artistic medium'.⁹¹ A statue of Claudius as Jupiter—such as that from Lanuvium now in the Vatican Museums (Figure 1.1)—thus stood in for the real Claudius; this fact was reinforced by the many honours and forms of veneration paid to statues and other representations of the emperor.⁹² But Claudius' statue was imbued with other elements of representation, in particular 'the action of putting forward an account of something discursively' and 'the action or process of presenting to the mind or imagination'.⁹³ In short, imperial statues offered a specific representation designed to *persuade* all who viewed them.⁹⁴ Claudius' statue offered up an image of the emperor as godlike protector, all-powerful father, and vengeful master.⁹⁵ These definitions of representation extend beyond visual media to the written or spoken word. Poems and plays, invectives and treatises, and histories and biographies from the ancient world all contain specific representations of emperors designed to advance a particular interpretation of individual rulers or of imperial rule writ large.

Art, unlike historiography, has not usually needed to defend its inherent creativity. But artistic representations of Roman emperors, on the other hand, have not always been given the credit they deserve as creative endeavours.⁹⁶ Emperors were certainly concerned with how their image was articulated and disseminated.⁹⁷ Beginning with Augustus, they commissioned prototype 'portrait types' to be circulated throughout the empire.⁹⁸ Sometimes there were more idiosyncratic interventions. We see this in Caligula's order to replace the heads of Greek statues with his own and Caracalla's wish to be envisaged as a second Alexander.⁹⁹ But the imperial image, as articulated by the administration—what is usually called 'official' or 'central' media¹⁰⁰—was not determined solely by the emperor. Rather, it was the product of multiple agents, all engaged in the creative endeavour of depicting the emperor in the best light possible.¹⁰¹ Some of these were individuals in the employ of the imperial administration, as Lucy Grig notes in her chapter. But emperors also awarded artistic commissions to individuals, and occasionally the names of the creators of statues, paintings, gems, and palaces appear in our sources.¹⁰² As Penelope Goodman has observed regarding

⁹¹ OED s.v. 'representation' n¹, II 6a.

⁹² On the dual meanings of representation, see Weber and Zimmermann 2003b, 11–12, and on the term representation more fully, pp. 33–40. For honours paid to imperial images, see Ando 2000, 232–9.

⁹³ OED s.v. 'representation' n¹, II 8a, 9a.

⁹⁴ Trimble 2014, 129, 150.

⁹⁵ Beard 2021, 50, makes the important point that bodies of emperors were stylized to promote particular aspects of imperial rule; individuality was expressed only through the face.

⁹⁶ On artists and patrons, see Weber and Zimmermann 2003b, 37; Hellström and Russell 2020, 2–3.

⁹⁷ Weber and Zimmermann 2003b, 35.

⁹⁸ Fittschen 2010; Beard 2021, 65–7.

⁹⁹ Suet. *Calig.* 22.2; Hdn 4.8.1–2.

¹⁰⁰ For these terms, see Noreña 2011, 15–17, 200–18; Hekster 2015, 30–4.

¹⁰¹ See Kelly 2020 on the involvement of the imperial court and the impact of court politics in image-making.

¹⁰² References are rare: Augustus used a seal with his portrait cut by Dioscurides to secure his letters (Suet. *Aug.* 50; Plin. *NH* 37.8); the Colossus of Nero was created by Zenodorus (Plin. *NH* 24.45–7); Nero also commissioned a 100-foot high portrait of himself on linen (Plin. *NH* 35.51), and Rabirius designed the new palace of Domitian (Mart. 7.56).



Figure 1.1 Statue of the emperor Claudius as Jupiter from Lanuvium, now in the Musei Vaticani

Source: Trigger Image/Alamy Stock Photo.

Augustus, ‘it can be difficult to distinguish clearly between his own self-fashioning and the enthusiastic contributions of his supporters’.¹⁰³

Even the most ubiquitous purveyor of the imperial image—coinage—cannot be dismissed as lacking creative or artistic merit.¹⁰⁴ Coins depicted emperors in a variety of costumes, from military uniforms to consular regalia, along with temples, harbours, arches, provincial personifications, and gods and goddesses, with all their features and attributes depicted in detail. To take but one particularly striking example of this artistry, the emperor Maximian, whose divine protector was Hercules, was commemorated with a series of coins depicting Hercules’ labours (Figure 1.2 is an aureus with Hercules carrying off the Erymanthian boar). Indeed, Barbara Levick has persuasively argued that the designs of coins were intended by the engravers to flatter and appeal to the emperor.¹⁰⁵ Most of the time we do not know who the artists carving marble busts or engraving coin dies featuring the emperor’s image actually were, but that does not mean their contribution was unimportant. Comparison with the monarchy of Louis XIV, for which we have greater evidence, suggests how this could have played out in antiquity. In *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, Peter Burke discusses how the king’s minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert had a plan for using various forms of media to glorify the king, which he articulated in a letter to Jean Chapelain.¹⁰⁶ This grand design was put into practice by marshalling royal academies and an elaborate system of patronage and commissions to produce the king’s image, under the close supervision of



Figure 1.2 Aureus of Maximian with reverse image of Hercules and the Erymanthian boar (*RIC* VI Trier 25)

Source: Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, 18,202,533. Photographs by Lutz-Jürgen Lübke (Lübke und Wiedemann).

¹⁰³ Goodman 2018b, 4. See Rowan 2020, 249, for a modern parallel involving Barack Obama.

¹⁰⁴ Beard 2021, 78–117, shows the influential role imperial coin portraits played in shaping later representations of emperors.

¹⁰⁵ Levick 1982. See further Hellström and Russell 2020, 6.

¹⁰⁶ Burke 1994, 50.