

CHAPTER 10- *From Seven Hills to Three Continents* The Art of Ancient Rome

SUMMARY:

Introduces the student to the student to the Roman Empire. The Empire made a successful attempt at uniting the ancient world under one ruler and one ruling body. The Empire extended from the Tigris and Euphrates River valleys to the Thames in England; it went from Rhine in Germany to Egypt itself.

The Empire established a system of roads that linked its vast reaches.

- Rome's influence can be seen in models for government, the law and architecture.
- The Romans left significant remains and most important architecture throughout its empire.
- The art that was created acknowledged and praised the Empire. Art also marked the growth of Rome from a Republic into one of the most powerful forces in the ancient world.

Look at the map to see the vastness of the empire and the relationship of the Republic to the Empire.

- The Etruscans were expelled from Rome in the year 509 BCE
- 27 BCE Roman Republic officially transformed into the Empire (Augustus)

During Early Empire political ideas of the god-king came into Rome from the eastern segments of the growing empire and gradually transformed both the conception and depiction of the emperor and the emperor's power. This allowed the emperors (Caesars) to assume power and control of the empire.



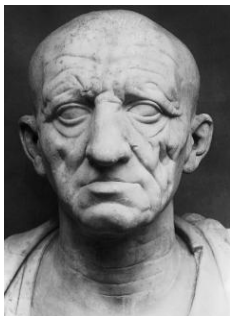
10-25 Portrait of Augustus as general, from Prima porta, Italy, copy of a bronze original of ca. 20 BCE

- The statue of Augustus from Prima porta the idea of divine relationships can be seen in the *cuirass* worn by Augustus and the presence of the small *putto* by his side is an even more clearly visual association with the gods.
- The *putto* represents Cupid, son of Aphrodite who is also lined to Rome as the ancestor of Augustus.

- The military breastplate that covers his torso and the symbolism of the figures on the breastplate referred to Augustus' victories and the supposed divine origins of the Julian house.
- The center relief showed the recovery of the Roman military standards from the Parthians, who had capture them during an earlier battle. Augustus had to make military concessions to the Parthians in order to regain the standards, but he claimed the whole episode as a victory.
- Apollo and Artemis are shown on his armor because Augustus claimed to be the new Apollo; he also constructed a temple dedicated to Apollo on the Palatine Hill.
- The rising sun symbolizes a new age and the figure of Mother Earth with a cornucopia and babies, representing Romulus and Remus & symbolizes the emperor's association with Earth and her gifts.
- The discreet reference to Venus can be traced through the ancestry of Julius Caesar to Aeneas, who had escaped from the destruction of Troy and finally to Venus herself, who had supposedly conducted a liaison with Lascanius, the father of Aeneas. The small putto on the dolphin at Augustus' feet further established the divine relationship, which refers to yet another son of Venus, Cupid. This complex iconography served to create the idea and vision that the emperor and his statue, the Primaporta, are symbols of the Empire itself.

ITS BEEN SAID that Roman art was born "*grown up*" that is had no infancy or youth. The statement that the art of the Etruscans and that of Greece were the parents of Roman art can further develop this idea. Their legacies are the elements of *realism and idealism*, at times alternating and at other times coexisting, but blending together to form Roman art.

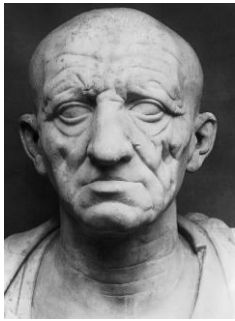
- Ideas from Greece were introduced at the end of 3rd C. BCE but were often strongly resisted as weak. Romans like Cato admired Greek cleverness but considered the Greek people untrustworthy, emphasizing instead the Roman virtues of uprightness, honesty and hard work.



10-07 Head of a Roman patrician, from Otricoli, Italy, ca. 75–50 BCE

The head of the roman patrician carved during the late Republican period shows a realistic and vital portrayal of a specific human being, and also echoes Cato's virtues. He could represent a man such as Cato. There is a strength and austerity about Roman portraits of this period that cannot be found in the world-weary Hellenistic portraits of the same time frame. The wings in the atrium of a Roman house were supplied with niches in which the ancestor portraits were kept.

■ During important occasions such as funerals these images were brought out and often carried in processions, some scholars have attempted to explain the great realism of Roman portraits are a result of the use of death masks, which are casts made of the deceased after death.



10.9



denarius of Julius Caesar

■ In contrast, the portrait of *Julius Caesar* with its modeling and confident expression seems much closer to both the mode and technique found in Hellenistic portraits, than it does to the tight and rather self-righteous portrayal of the *old Roman*. Yet there is a synthesis of Republican attitude and the Hellenistic style, which is depicted in the *denarius of Julius Caesar 10.9*. Very different representations of Augustus Caesar were carved some in the tight, dry tradition of Roman realism. Most often, however, he is depicted as *superhuman, idealized, and godlike*.

■ The model is no long the union of Republican and Hellenistic portraits that influenced the portrait of Julius Caesar, but rather the ideal, abstract creations of 5th C. BCE Greece, when human beings were depicted with perfection of the gods. This image of godlike perfection was a very conscious choice and was intended to imply the godlike power of the emperor.

■ The pose has been modified from the 5th C. BCE Greek Doryphoros of Plykleitos



that had been adapted by the Romans as the basis for the *adlocutio* or address to the soldiers of the army.

■ Augustus appears to be addressing; instead, the people perhaps telling them of the peace or as it was known the *Pax Roman* that was a fact of his rule.



10-27 Ara Pacis Augustae (Altar of Augustan Peace), Rome, Italy, 13–9 BCE

10-28 Female personification (Tellus?), panel from the east facade of the Ara Pacis Augustae, Rome, Italy, 13–9 BCE

■ The monument that best illustrates the combination of the realistic Roman tradition with the idealization imported from Greece is the Ara Pacis Augustae. One of the *allegorical* panels shows Tellus, or Earth with symbols of air and water on either side. The imagery follows a poem composed by the Roman Horace in 17 BCE to commemorate the founding of Rome, but the style, with its full figures, subtle modeling and single plane strongly reflects Roman realism.

■ A comparison of the depiction of the members of the imperial family from the ARA



Pacis 10-29



with figures from the Parthenon frieze 5-48 shows the drapery of the Greek figures falls gently and quietly in folds that stress repeated calm verticals.

■ While the draperies of the Roman figures are much more active, swinging this way on one figure and that way on another. The carving seems dry and the folds shallow.

■ The flat neutral background is allowed to appear between the Greek figures, creating ample space around each.

■ The Roman figures, by contrast seem to crowd up against one another, even stand in two rows, so there is not space for easy movement, yet the flow seems more natural and real. The heads come close to being portraits, although they are somewhat more generalized than the portrait busts.

■ The sculptors have created a visual document which supports the State and the family, the presence of the children add an intimacy which creates a sense of reality for Ara Pacis and its meaning for the Empire.

During the Early Imperial period, the stress was on the *moral integrity* of the emperor and his portraits sought to convey that ideal. For example:

■ **Vespasian, a simple and forthright man, tried to bring some semblance of order and virtue back to Rome after the destructive influence of the self-indulgent Nero. The Roman Sculptor captures the character of the emperor.**



10-35 Portrait of Vespasian, ca. 75–79 CE

■ **It was vital to the interest of the Empire that the emperor was perceived as an individual of unquestioned character and ability. The true appearance of the person was portrayed rather than the ideal of the image of the emperor. Elegant portraits were not unknown for example the portrait of a young Roman matron 10.36 portrays a woman of beauty and grace.**



10-36 Portrait bust of a Flavian woman, from Rome, Italy, ca. 90 CE

■ **There is a vast range of human types, a range that far outdistances the achievements of even the Greek Hellenistic sculptors.**



10-59 Equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius, from Rome, Italy, ca. 175 CE

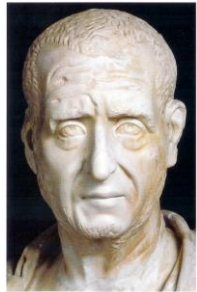
■ **The life-sized equestrian portrait of Marcus Aurelius done in bronze indicates another aspect of the emperor; this time the emperor appears as a mounted general ready to lead the troops into victorious combat.**

■ **An earlier portrait of Hadrian 10-47 condenses the heroic grandeur of Augustus Primaporta into a synthesis of the ideal and the real. Hadrian is presented as the successful general he was but the military presentation has been modified into a diplomatic and tactful portrait of power restrained.**



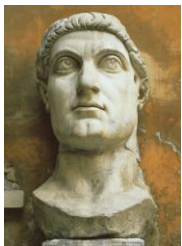
10-47 Portrait bust of Hadrian as general, from Tel Shalem, Israel, ca. 130–138 CE.

DURING MUCH of the 3rd century the Empire was ruled by a series of so-called Barracks emperors like Trajan Decius 10-69



■ **These emperors had been successful generals whose troops had succeeded in displacing the current emperor and putting their own leader on the throne. They are represented with short military haircuts that replace the curling locks of the earlier century, and are often portrayed with beards.**

■ **During the 4th C. the style was further exaggerated. The rigid frontality and staring eyes, as well as the gigantic scale of the head of Constantine (10-78) seem to take the emperor out of time and space and into a strangely rigid world somewhere else.**



10-78 Portrait of Constantine, from the Basilica Nova, Rome, Italy, ca. 315–330 CE