# The Representation of Gods on Roman Historical Narrative Reliefs, 200 BC-AD 315




Thomas Edward Pears Runeckles

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Classical Archaeology

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the representation of gods on Roman historical narrative reliefs from the Republic to Constantine for the first time as a single, unified phenomenon. It provides a detailed analysis of a series of major Roman monuments and argues that gods in visual narratives should be understood as divine actors with a full range of roles.

Chapter One outlines the material being discussed and the argument and structure of the thesis. Chapter Two assesses Roman narrative reliefs from the Republican and Augustan periods and argues: (1) that the gods played an important legitimising role from the beginning of Roman commemorative art; and (2) that the needs of the Augustan regime conditioned the phenomenon in important ways. This chapter is intended to set the background for the key imperial monuments discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter Three looks at the first extant monumental images of imperial action that include participating gods — the narratives on the Flavian Arch of Titus and the Cancelleria Reliefs — and argues that these images should not be interpreted, as the prevailing view holds, as allegorical representations of virtues, but instead as manifestations of a new 'imperial mythology', in which the emperor was defined as a divinely powered 'imperial hero'. Chapters Four and Five discuss the contextual and genre-based ways the gods worked in this developing system of imperial mythology on the monuments of the Trajanic and Antonine periods, including the Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum, the panel reliefs of Marcus Aurelius, and the 'Parthian Monument' from Ephesus. Chapter Six extends the argument into the later imperial periods and analyses the diverse treatment of the gods on the Arches of Septimius Severus and Constantine. Chapter Seven concludes.

The aim is to establish a fresh understanding of Roman narrative art as a complex and multi-faceted system of visual imperial action that was animated by the gods.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis analyses the representation of gods on Roman historical narrative reliefs. Images of contemporary political action pervaded Roman monuments, and the gods represent an important component of these visual narratives. Within the images, deities often outnumber human protagonists. Yet there exists no focused study of the divine element of Roman narrative art. The gods have been discussed in general studies of historical narrative and in interpretations of individual monuments, but the lack of dedicated attention has limited our ability to build a coherent understanding of their meaning. Deities have too often been understood simply as allegorical figures or as reflections of imperial virtues, in ways that do not capture the range of their significance in ancient thinking. It is the purpose of this thesis to provide a fuller and more systematic interpretation of the gods in their own right. The gods, we will see, were superhuman protagonists with their own sharply defined identities and narrative roles. Only by reading them as active participants in visual narratives, rather than as abstract symbols or allegories, can we understand their pivotal role in the imagination of their ancient audience. This introduction outlines the material being discussed, the problems that have arisen from the study of that material in previous scholarship, and the argument and structure of this thesis.

## Historical reliefs and imperial narrative

The core material for this thesis consists of large marble reliefs from the Republican and imperial periods (c.200 BC—AD 315), which constitute the most important medium for Roman historical narrative.[1] Little survives from the Republican period, and the primary focus of this thesis is the much better documented imperial material. Alongside imperial portraits, narrative reliefs represent one of the central concerns of scholarship on Roman art.[2] The imagery of these reliefs formed the primary means of representing the emperor in action and defined for many the emperor's proper role and nature by setting him in a system of highly conceptualised visual drama.[3] A carefully directed suite of deeds and achievements was created

[1] For an overview of the material: Koeppel 1983b-1992. Some key studies of the main phases of the genre: Hölscher 1978, 315-357 (Republican reliefs); Hölscher 1988b, 351-400 (Augustan reliefs); Torelli 1982; Faust 2012b; Hölscher 2019, 258-337 (all three on imperial reliefs).
[2] Two recent introductory discussions that highlight these issues: Hölscher 2015, 34-51; Sobocinski and Thill 2015, 279-291. Serious study of Roman narrative reliefs began in the nineteenth century: Bergmann 1991, 201-224 (with an outline of the historiography of the subject).
[3] On the varied narrative conceptions of the reliefs: von Blanckenhagen 1957, 78-83; Hölscher 1980, 281-299.

in art for the emperor, in order to communicate the character and activities of the exemplary Roman ruler. Sculptured narratives of battle, ritual, and imperial ceremony were displayed on monumental arches, columns, bases, and altars throughout the empire, particularly in Rome, and played an important role in the commemoration of political action in the Roman world.[4]

The visual language of these reliefs was defined by what is best described as conceptual realism.[5] The narratives were neither accurate transcriptions of past events nor purely fictional constructs: they were selective visualisations of real imperial activities.[6] Particular initiating events — the actual campaigns, triumphs, and movements of the emperor — often stood behind the images, and in many cases a historical point of reference can be precisely identified. But this raw historical material was always put into a broader ideological framework, designed to articulate the higher truths of the emperor's eternal conceptual roles — as invincible commander, virtuous high priest, and authoritative imperial executive.[7] The gods, whose presence saturates the reliefs, had a prominent and complementary role in making this system work. They were real conceptual actors with whom the emperor interacted, and it was their protecting influence and shaping intervention that made imperial action possible. In the images with which we are concerned, recognisable protagonists and 'real' contemporary elements are combined with a highly charged, co-ordinating system of divine power, manifested in the form of participating gods. For Romans, this strange, vivid intersection of the real and the religious was a natural and central part of their thinking about political action. Deities were not divinising intrusions superimposed onto otherwise historical images, but vital components of a bold visual system of real-looking 'imperial mythology'.[8]

[4] Two case studies focusing on this political-commemorative role, from the beginning and end of the empire: Billows 1993, 80-92 (the Augustan Ara Pacis); Zanker 2012, 77-105 (the Arch of Constantine).
[5] I take the phrase 'conceptual realism' (*konzeptionell Realismus*) from the work of Tonio Hölscher, who has developed the concept across multiple studies, including: Hölscher 2015, 39-42; Hölscher 2016, 262-288; Hölscher 2019, 2-6, 180.
[6] This understanding emerged gradually and recently. Key contributing studies include: Fittschen 1972, 742-788; Strocka 1972, 147-172; Gauer 1974, 308-335; Hölscher 1980, 265-321; Torelli 1982; Settis 1985, 1151-1173; Pirson 1996, 139-179; Faust 2012b. For a concise overview of these ideas and their broader context: Smith 2002, 92.
[7] For a recent interpretive synthesis of the reliefs: Hölscher 2019, 258-337.
[8] This is not always recognised. For example: Sobocinski and Thill 2015, 278 ("allegorical figures are often found within depictions of historical scenes").

'Imperial mythology' is a deliberately provocative characterisation of this artistic category, and a little more should be said about the nomenclature and unifying characteristics of the reliefs. In recent years, traditional terms such as 'historical narrative' and 'historical relief' have come under increasing pressure, because the narratives are historical only in the particular, conceptualised sense outlined above.[9] Existing alternative terms, however, such as 'monumental relief' and 'representational narrative', arguably do not capture the defining political-imperial qualities of the images.[10] At the same time, prevailing interpretations of the narratives often see in them an extensive mapping of the emperor's virtues — *pietas*, *clementia*, *virtus*, *iustitia* — which are taken by many scholars as the main point of the images.[11] The problem with this is that the marble world of ritual, warfare, and ceremony which the reliefs present seems clearly to transcend these virtue-based descriptions.[12] Slogans such as *virtus* and *pietas* were employed constantly throughout the empire, and changed little over time.[13] The reliefs, on the other hand, vary significantly, according to the action depicted and the context in which they were presented.

The reliefs, then, were not simply 'historical' or 'monumental', and nor were they driven merely by a need to convey the emperor's virtues. They were instead compelling 'imperial narratives' of divinely inspired political action. The reliefs, we will see, show crystallised episodes of a political-imperial mythology, in which mortal emperors — Rome's 'imperial heroes' — were protected and empowered by a developed supporting cast of gods. The intervention of gods presented the emperor as an 'hero', in the sense that he was characterised

[9] See, for example, the sensitive handling of the 'historical' nature of imperial reliefs in a recent handbook on Roman art: Stewart 2008, 108-123. The following quotes indicate some of the disatisfaction felt with the traditional nomenclature: Strocka 1972, 148 ("*Man darf die römischen Staatsreliefs nicht als Historienbilder betrachten*"); Zanker 2004, 60 ("*nichts ist irreführender, als solche Bilder als* '*historische Reliefs*' *zu bezeichnen*").

[10] 'Monumental reliefs': Sobocinski and Thill 2015, 277-279. 'Representational narrative': Hölscher 1978, 315-357; Hölscher 1980, 265-321 (both of these important studies operate under the broad term of "*Repräsentationskunst*"). 'State relief' is an effective term, but is less culturally specific than 'imperial relief'.

[11] Some classic and recent examples of this virtue-based approach: Fittschen 1972, 742-788; Strocka 1972, 147-172; Hölscher 1980, 265-321; Faust 2017, 121-127; Langer and Pfanner 2018, 84; von den Hoff 2019, 42 ("*Man bevorzugte in den Reliefs gleichwohl standardisierte Darstellungen, um...der Qualitäten vor allem Kaisers zum Ausdruck zu bringen*"). Tonio Hölscher has recently offered a nuanced defence of virtue-based analyses, pointing out: (1) that relating images to virtues does not necessarily imply a limited range of meaning, because terms such as '*concordia*' and '*virtus*' were themselves rich, culturally resonant concepts; and (2) that 'reducing' images to linguistic terms is simply a necessary part of talking about them in a verbal or written format; opponents of virtue-related readings that substitute 'roles' or 'actions' in their place cannot escape this problem, they simply replace one set of reductive descriptors with another: Hölscher 2019, 285-287. These points are valid, but certain interpretations can perhaps be preferred as less reductive than others.

[12] This has begun to be emphasised in some recent studies. For example: Griebel 2013, 14-15.

[13] Imperial slogans and virtues, and their consistent representation throughout the empire: Noreña 2011.

as an exceptional and divinely favoured mortal who was guided and helped by the gods. Virtues were a part of these representations, but as important was the alluring definition of the emperor's relationship to other actors, groups, locations, and deities, which together constituted the visual drama of imperial events. The reliefs are thus imperial, in a culturally specific sense, rather than simply historical, and 'imperial narrative' and 'imperial mythology' are therefore the main terms used for these reliefs in this thesis.

Because most imperial monuments were set up by the senate or other elite groups, the emperor was normally a part of the intended audience of the images, rather than the guiding force behind their design. The reliefs were therefore as much about visually honouring and celebrating the ruler, in a dynamic, consensus-building process initiated by the elite, as they were about propaganda and self-representation.[14] Narrative reliefs were negotiated responses to the emperor's power that projected an agreed visual expression of his status, subject to different norms in different contexts. The elevated scenes on court cameos, for example, are best understood as loyalist visualisations of the emperor seen from the perspective of close supporters. Public reliefs, on the other hand, were senate-approved commemorations of the emperor's official role as a public magistrate. In the provinces, the rules were different again: metropolitan protocol was discarded, and the emperor often became a Hellenistic-style, semi-divine royal warrior. These visual categories and narrative conceptions were situated in different cultural zones, with their own horizons of interpretation and internal logic. Divine and imperial roles are thus variously articulated by the monuments according to the different expectations of the initiating social groups and their intended audiences.

The need for this commemorative visual discourse between the emperor and the elite, and prior to that between members of the Republican aristocracy, emerged as Rome's military and political horizons expanded beyond those of an individual citizen of the ancient city-state.[15] Due to the inherent limitation of the first-hand experience of an event to a relatively small number of direct observers, the visual representation of political achievements was an effective

[14] The following studies provide a range of discussions of the commissioning and design processes of imperial monuments: Bode 1992, 168-169; Bergmann 1998, 91-98; Rich 1998, 72-91; Bergmann 2000, 166-188; Stewart 2004, 34-38; von den Hoff 2009, 239-261; Giuliani 2010, 30-45; von den Hoff 2011, 15-44; Hölscher 2018, 299-308; Hölscher 2019, 259-266; Kelly 2020, 128-149; Koortbojian 2020, 125-134.
[15] On the emergence of Roman narrative images: Hölscher 1978, 315-357; Hölscher 1988b, 351-400; Walter 2004, 132-154; Hölscher 2019, 230-249.

way of bridging the gap between the memory of the event in a constricted circle of original participants, and the desired impression of that event in the collective memory of the intended audience.[16] Narrative reliefs provided ephemeral contemporary achievements with a definitive visual expression and a durable public presence.[17] The empire relied on effective collaboration between the emperor and the elite, and the production of monuments and narrative reliefs helped to formulate their relationship. Within this process, deities functioned as a potent narrative tool. The gods had a strong effect on how the empire's unfolding, and the emperor's place within it, was ordered and understood.

**Roman gods and previous scholarship**

The Roman pantheon encompassed a broad range of deities, from ancient Olympians to innovative personifications. Many were active gods with well-defined imperial aspects and important political roles, but the real, living character of Rome's deities has not always been appreciated in discussions of narrative reliefs, and it will be helpful first to look at previous interpretations of gods in narrative art, before turning to their character as it is presented in Roman sources. The resulting picture of the gods that emerges will then form the basis for the approach and argument of this thesis.

A large amount of sophisticated work has been done by scholars on imperial images, but gods in imperial narratives have not been intensively studied, and have often been analysed as symbolic figures or as visual translations of the emperor's virtues, rather than as independent narrative actors.[18] For example, in an important article by Tonio Hölscher on the conception of history in Roman art, gods are compared to the key words and concepts found on coins and are read as analogous in certain cases to the emblems on a coat of arms.[19] The related idea of deities as "attributes" of the emperor is also widely expressed in scholarship.[20] The interpretations of the well-known triumphator relief from the Arch of Titus may serve as typical examples of this

[16] For these ideas (in other contexts): Barash 2016, 39-51.
[17] These ideas: Hölscher 2005, 472; Hölscher 2009, 161-181.
[18] Significant studies of gods in imperial images include: Hölscher 1967 (Victory); Simon 1981 (the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum); Bergmann 1998 (solar imagery); Rowan 2012 (Severan coins).
[19] Hölscher 1980, 320-321. Further: Hölscher 2015, 34-51.
[20] Attributes: Pollini 1993, 266 (Oceanus as "attribute" on the Gemma Augustea). Further: Alföldi 1999, 15 (deities as allegories); Fejfer 2008, 376 (gods as a "standard canon"); Sobocinski and Thill 2015, 278 (deities inserted as "allegorical figures").

approach. The relief (Figure 10) includes three deities, Virtus, Honos, and Victory, who participate with the emperor in his triumph. In current scholarship, Virtus is interpreted as "not a self-sufficient goddess, but an embodiment of one of Titus' virtues"; and the participation of supposedly 'allegorical' divine actors is taken by some as a sign that "the scene is not a representation of a specific historical event".[21] Other leading interpreters have seen gods on monuments such as the Great Trajanic Frieze as "slogan-like";[22] and even when represented in action alone, away from the emperor, gods can be understood as figures that "embody the glory and honour of the general".[23] In a recent major study of Roman art, the gods are said to signal the "transformation of a real ceremony into an allegorical form", with deities such as Mars representing "the army that accompanies (the emperor)".[24] We will see that this prevailing approach constitutes an underestimation of the identities of the gods and of the active nature of their narrative roles.

Gods in narrative imagery have been investigated in more detail by scholars such as Andreas Alföldi, Inez Scott Ryberg, Ann Kuttner, and John Pollini.[25] In their discussions, the phenomenon of gods in narrative is compared with a wide range of media, such as panegyrical literature and portraits which assimilate gods and mortals, sometimes without sufficient appreciation of the important differences between these varied categories of representation.[26] Pollini, for example, views divine honours, theomorphic portraits, and the association of gods and men in narrative reliefs as interwoven strands of the same phenomenon: all stress the godlike character of leading mortals.[27] Kuttner's discussion of these phenomena is driven by a similar emperor-centred approach: divine comparisons in panegyric and participating deities in public reliefs both aimed, according to this view, to enhance the glory of the emperor.[28] There is, however, a fundamental difference between a divinising portrait or a literary encomium (both of which expressed the mortal subject's own quasi-divine power) and a

[21] Embodiment of virtue: Pfanner 1983, 68. Accepted: Kleiner 2007, 131. Not a specific event: Kleiner 1992, 188.
[22] Faust 2012b, 16-17 ("*schlagwortartig*").
[23] Fuchs 2009, 371 (discussing the divine warrior on the battle frieze from the 'Parthian Monument' at Ephesus).
[24] Hölscher 2018, 79.
[25] These scholars were all looking at 'divine' elements of imperial representation: Alföldi 1970(=1934/1935), 186-276 (divine associations of the ruler); Ryberg 1955, 203-210 (sacrifice and ritual); Kuttner 1995, 56-67 (gods and men in narrative); Pollini 2012, 69-76 (divine associations in narrative). Further: Alföldi 1999, 42-82 (divine associations of the emperor).
[26] Comparing panegyrical speeches and poetry: Kuttner 1995, 65. Comparing theomorphic portraits: Kuttner 1995, 63; Alföldi 1999, 54-57; Pollini 2012, 70. Further (seeing divine aspects of imperial art as precursors to divine kingship): Alföldi 1970(=1934/1935), 190-191, 214-216; Ryberg 1955, 205.
[27] Pollini 2012, 70-71.
[28] Kuttner 1995, 56-67.

narrative representation of gods and men in action, in which divine and human roles are separate. Analysis of the divine aspects of the emperor's image has contributed significantly to the study of Roman art, but phenomena such as theomorphic portraits and imperial cult are not our area of focus.[29] This thesis is concerned, not with the integration of the emperor's human and divine aspects, but with the ways in which mortals and deities stood and acted side-by-side as flesh and blood participants in the dramaturgy of imperial narrative.

Current understanding of the gods, then, is constrained by two main issues: first, there is a lack of dedicated focus on deities in favour of analysing the emperor; and second, when the gods are interpreted, their meaning is often held to refer to things outside themselves, such as the emperor's virtues, of which the gods are merely symbols. In order to look at the phenomenon from a different perspective, this thesis moves the primary investigative attention onto the gods themselves and proposes a new paradigm for understanding how deities worked in narrative reliefs: gods were authorising, independent actors with a range of functions. We may look briefly at the ancient basis for this view.

Roman conceptions of gods suggest we should take a broad view of their political-historical roles and recognise their self-sufficient identities. For example, the Roman pantheon as a whole had a pronounced political orientation. Rome's gods emerged in a single city-state and had no direct equivalent to the panhellenic Hesiodic cosmogony of the Greeks. In place of such a developed mythological network and its intra-divine events and relationships, Rome's gods developed their identities more through interactive connections with historical and political affairs, and revolved around Rome's own local history.[30] Jupiter, for example, was simultaneously the supreme head of the Roman pantheon and the patron deity of the city-state — a convergence of political ideology and divine sovereignty that was mostly unthinkable in the Greek world.[31] The active, political character of Roman gods is well brought out in literature: in Cicero's dialogue on the gods, for example, historical intervention is made a

[29] Significant contributions in these areas: Price 1984, 183-205 (imperial cult); Bergmann 1998; Hallett 2005, 223-264 (both on portraits and divinised images); McIntyre, 2019, 1-88 (imperial cult).
[30] Rüpke 2007, 16, 76-78. Early Roman gods, for example, had few marriages or offspring: Simon 1990, 57, 148-149.
[31] Feeney 1991, 113-115 (comparing the supra-national Greek Zeus with the partisan Roman Jupiter). Further: Rüpke 2007, 126-130. On Jupiter, see now: Hejduk 2020.

central argument for their existence;[32] and other sources too show that the shaping political agency of the gods occupied a large amount of the superstructure of Roman thinking.[33] In addition, Roman society was marked by an extraordinary inter-penetration of religious and political activity.[34] Public events frequently took place in areas defined by religious authority, such as temples;[35] religious and political offices were often held together;[36] and temple building was intimately tied to political events, with new cults regularly arising from a process of petition, vow, and perceived divine assistance.[37] Divine power was continually placed alongside and above human virtue in historical and panegyrical writing.[38] And the intervention of the gods, whether through their invisible presence or tangible manifestation, was imagined to have influenced historical events, as with, for example, Apollo's participation in the battle of Actium.[39] The gods thus pervaded Roman thinking about action and their power was an important political factor in its own right. These points are well known, but a sustained application of a view of the gods as historical actors to narrative reliefs has not previously been attempted. If Romans held that their state and its leaders were propelled by divine support, then the appearance of gods in narrative reliefs should not be understood as allegory or metaphor, but as the dramatisation of a conceptual reality.

## Personifications

Alongside Olympian gods such as Jupiter and Apollo, Romans worshipped a range of deities referred to in modern scholarship as 'personifications'.[40] Anthropomorphic representations of

[32] Cicero, *Nature of the Gods*, 2.6. Also: Virgil, *Aeneid*, 1.145 (comparing Neptune's role with that of a Roman magistrate). Further: Feeney 1991, 137.
[33] For example: Cicero, *Response to the Haruspices*, 18-19 (authority for all action is derived from *auspices* and the gods); Cicero, *Laws*, 2.15; Cicero, *Philippics XI*, 28 (divine law is the basis for appropriate action). Further: Rüpke 1990, 260; Feeney 1998, 79; Rüpke 2012, 183-184; Koortbojian 2020, 11. Other and later (imperial) sources that support these ideas are cited and discussed in the following chapters, in connection with the relevant monuments.
[34] For a basic outline of this topic: Beard, North, Price 1998, 43-44.
[35] For example: Cicero, *Against Catiline III*, 22 (senate meeting in the temple of Jupiter Stator); Cicero, *On his House*, 11 (popular unrest near the temple of Concord); Bleicken 2015, 81-82 (Octavian presents himself to the people at the temple of the Dioscuri).
[36] Cicero, *On his House*, 1 ("worship of the gods and the vital interests of the state should be entrusted to the direction of the same individuals").
[37] For example: Livy, 1.27 (shrines to Pallor and Panic); 2.20 (temple of Castor); 4.25 (temple of Apollo); Winkler-Horaček 1995, 16-23 (Salus and her cult).
[38] For instance: Cicero, *On the Command of Pompey*, 36; Cicero, *Pro Marcello*, 6; Sallust, *Jugurthine War*, 14 ("*Virtute ac dis volentibus magni estis et opulenti*"), 63, 90; Sallust, *Catiline's War*, 8; Tacitus, *Annals*, 16.1-2.
[39] Apollo at Actium: Virgil, *Aeneid*, 7.671-713; Propertius, *Elegies*, 4.6.
[40] The discussion here focuses on 'political' deities, rather than ethnic or geographical figures. Terminology: Axtell 1907, 97 ("personifications"); Fears 1981b, 832 ("virtues"); Clark 2007, 26 ("divine qualities"); Davies 2017, 47 ("divine qualities").

non-human things might seem unusual or insincere from a modern perspective,[41] but the realisation of qualities, mental states, and political ideas in the form of self-sufficient divine beings was a natural part of ancient religious conceptualisation.[42] These deities are prominent in narrative reliefs and are often the focus of virtue-related, allegorical interpretations. It will therefore be helpful to establish their character as real gods at this early stage.

These deities emerged in the middle and late Republic in the context of political changes, primarily military expansion, and their arrival was signalled by the establishment of cults, particularly in the third century BC.[43] Concordia, Victory, Spes, Fides, Salus, Honos, and Virtus were among the most important of these new gods.[44] The grammatical gender of the nouns on which they were based informed their identity (Honos was the only male), and their cults were connected with events in which their powers were felt to be at work.[45] In a religious system with no hegemonic doctrine to hold back development, it was logical that new divine personalities would take shape around new social-political contexts: in this case, primarily imperialist expansion.[46] Gods such as Virtus and Honos were therefore the natural religious products of Roman thinking about action.[47] Temples and cults will have given each of these gods a strongly defined identity — which was expressed visually in cult statues and other images, such as those on coins.[48] For Romans, cult was a central pillar of divine existence. Cult

[41] An ancestral version of this modern view is present in the works of early Christian writers, who emphasise, and criticise, the fact that Romans accepted these beings as true gods: Augustine, *City of God*, 1.24, 4.24, 7.3, 8.24.
[42] Fears 1981b, 828-829; Shapiro 1993, 12. These kinds of deities are found already in Homer: Homer, *Iliad*, 15.119 (Terror and Panic assist Ares). Greek personifications: Shapiro 1993, 12-13; Stafford 2000, 1-36; Stafford and Herrin 2005. Roman personifications: Clark 2007, 12 n.20 (bibliography), 29-37 (origins); Rüpke 2007, 55-56.
[43] The Romans projected these gods onto their mythological past: Livy, 1.27 (king Tullus' shrines to Pallor and Panic); Spannagel 2000, 237-238. Main phases of development: Clark 2007, 49-58, 58-68, 225-243. Full temple list: Clark 2007, 283-286. Cult list: Axtell 1907, 7-58.
[44] Fears 1981b, n.67 (bibliography by god); Hölkeskamp 1987, 238-240; Spannagel 2000, 237-240. Recent case studies: Winkler 1995, 16 (Salus); Balmaceda 2017 (Virtus, as a concept and a deity); Kazantzidis and Spantharas 2018 (Spes).
[45] Feeney 1993, 90; Feeney 1998, 91-92; Davies 2017, 47-50. Most often the gods were connected with battles and prodigies: Livy, 27.25 (Virtus and battle); Cicero, *On the Laws*, 2.58 (Honos and prodigy).
[46] Fears 1981b, 833-837; Simon 1990, 9-12.
[47] Rüpke 2007, 78-80. Also: North 1976, 1, 11. Virtus and Honos' cults: Richardson 1978, 242-246; Davies 2017, 49, 60, 74, 80, 82, 219.
[48] Coins: Clark 2007, 291-299 (full catalogue). Sculpture: Spannagel 2000, 249-260; Clark 2007, 141, 146-147. Temples: Hölscher 2019, 245-246, 249. Also: Appian, *Civil Wars*, 2.106 (Caesarean temple of Clementia, in which the god and the dictator were shown "clasping hands"). On Roman cult statues: Cicero, *Nature of the Gods*, 1.81 ("we learn to know…the gods with the particular face which painters and sculptors intended them to have"); Vermeule 1987; Martin 1992; Stewart 2003, 184-222 (defining divine images); Gladigow 2011, 9-24.

made these beings into gods, and in their primary ritual context no qualification as 'abstractions', 'virtues', or 'personifications' was required.[49]

Through this process of deity-creation, the state was able to capture and control the potentially disruptive success of elite individuals.[50] New gods stabilised the relationships between leading statesmen and the wider political community, because temples and images that represented politically active gods helped to present individual achievements as part of a collaborative, divinely orchestrated project. It was not just the efforts of mortal generals that were responsible, success was also owed to the gods. If the deities involved were regarded simply as extensions of the virtues of the men who financed their cults, this harmonising political effect would have dissolved. The allegorical use of divinities primarily developed after antiquity, when artists were able to encode political and moral concepts in the iconography of dead pagan imagery.[51] For Romans, Victory, Concordia, Salus, and Honos were living, breathing, functioning gods.

There is some ancient evidence which suggests that a more complicated interpretation of these deities was possible. In Cicero's dialogue on the gods, for example, the deities in question can be described both as independent divinities and as forces that come from within men.[52] Similar ideas are conveyed by writers such as Ovid, who talks of Concordia as "at once the deity and the work (of Romulus)".[53] There are also cases in which these gods were given independent narrative settings, that is, when they appear as freestanding characters in literary narratives.[54] With the ambiguous formulations in mind, however, it is understandable that the appearance of Virtus in a narrative relief could be read as a symbol of the emperor's own military prowess. But the helpfulness of these literary ideas for artistic analysis is open to question. Texts gave writers the ability to present different views about the same subjects and to explore religious

[49] Classen 1986, 277-278 ("*Die Römer der Republik setzen keine abstrakten Personifikationen auf ihre Münzen*").
[50] Coin images, cults, temples, and other dedications were often initiated by individuals, but the overall process was encouraged and guided by the state: Ziolkowski 1992, 307; Orlin 1992, 35-75; Davies 2017, 242-244, 272-275.
[51] There were some pure allegorical personifications in the ancient world, but mostly in contexts and images very different to those addressed in this thesis: Smith 1993, 63-64.
[52] Cicero, *Nature of the Gods*, 2.60-62 (independent), 2.86-87 (within men).
[53] Ovid, *Fasti*, 6.92 ("*numen opusque ducis*").
[54] For example: Virgil, *Aeneid*, 12.335-336 (Formido); Statius, *Thebaid*, 10.632-645 (Virtus); Valerius Flaccus, *Argonautica*, 6.398-409 (Discordia); Latin Panegyrics IV.32.4 (Victory).

ambiguities.[55] Image-making, on the other hand, is to a large extent a selective and exclusionist mode of signification. A narrative image is forced to make a concrete choice about which version of a deity it represents, and the reliefs we are concerned with leave little room for equivocation: they depict fully formed gods who act in political events — the same events with which their official temples and cult images were associated. The indecision of poetic and philosophical textual sources on this aspect of the gods should therefore be left to one side. Their shifting conceptions of divinity are not appropriate for the context of imperial monuments. While Romans were able to recognise a hierarchy of non-mortal beings, with Jupiter regularly perceived as the highest god, for example, we may for the purposes of this thesis proceed on the basis of a provisional definition of a Roman god as: a superhuman figure who received cult and who could be depicted in narrative as an anthropomorphic participant with recognisably divine iconography.[56] Representations of figures such as Virtus and Honos, as well as of deities such as Danube and the Genius of the Senate, are thus considered as they appear within the logic of the reliefs, as visual instantiations of independent gods.

## Approach

This thesis approaches gods as actors in narrative with a range of roles. To help structure our understanding of divine action, and to recover some contemporary concepts and vocabulary in which the gods were conceived, the norms of divine representation as described in different literary sources are utilised more systematically than in previous studies. It is well known that deities acted differently according to the literary genre in which they were depicted. Gods appear as towering, articulate Olympians in ancient epic, for example, but are normally described as impersonal forces of nature and fate in historiography. This thesis proposes that a

[55] For instance: Pliny, *Natural History*, 2.14-27 (an iconoclastic enquiry into the nature of ancient gods); Tacitus, *Annals*, 6.22 (a sceptical interlude on the role of the divine in world affairs).

[56] Recognisably divine iconography includes ideal-divine physiognomies, hairstyles, bodies, costumes, and attributes. On the definition of Roman gods: Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1.168-198 (a full hierarchical range of gods dwell in heaven and on the mountains of the earth, from Jupiter to nymphs and satyrs); Beard, North, and Price 1998b, 26-59 (collection of images, texts, inscriptions, and dedications emphasising the multi-layered and flexible Roman approaches to gods, who were primarily conceived as anthropomorphic superhumans who received worship); Rüpke 2007, 65-85 (gods were housed in temples and shrines, and could be recognised by their size, beauty, and attributes, as defined particularly in images); Levene 2012, 53-73 (gods were defined by their unusual powers, their non-human nature, their different, impressive, or ideal appearance, and their immortality — cult was an important, but not a necessary quality of divinity: Aurora, for instance, is not known to have received cult anywhere in the Roman world, but could still be imagined as a god in certain contexts). For similar ideas in relation to Greek gods: Parker 2011, 64-102. For Genii: Kunckel 1974, 8-13 (Genii were worshipped protective gods associated with the divine forces inherent in places, in powerful men, such as fathers and emperors, or in important groups of men, such as the senate and people of Rome). Other kinds of non-mortal beings, such as ethnic and geographical personifications, will be assessed in the following chapters on a case-by-case basis when they appear.

similar genre-based system of divine representation can be applied to Roman monuments. It is important to adjust text-based ideas in the light of the content of the reliefs themselves, but the representation of gods in writing can nevertheless provide an illuminating frame of reference for our investigation. We may outline some of the key features of these complex literary conceptions of the gods, to bring out the range of divine narrative roles that existed in ancient thinking.

In historiography, for example, narrative events were often held to be driven by an underlying divine design, but the gods themselves remained impersonal and unseen.[57] The powers of the gods could be projected in a range of forms — most often extreme or exceptional weather — but the deities responsible were normally referred to only as a divine collective ('the gods', 'god-given rain', 'a divine force').[58] Gods in historiography do not appear in concrete form and do not interact with mortals.[59] This was a key aspect of the genre's plausible, 'documentary' style and authentic narrative texture. Panegyrical texts, on the other hand, described divine influence on events in detail, and the relationship of the emperor to the gods was a key concern of the genre.[60] The emperor, for instance, was said to be "chosen" (*electus*) by "Jupiter himself" (*ab Iove ipso*), and had the privilege of "interceding and acting with the gods" (*apud deos adesse consuesti*) on behalf of the people and empire.[61] In panegyrical terms, the gods were "companions" (*comites*) and "guardians" (*conservatores*) of the emperor, and the genre threw great emphasis on their direct collaborative relationship.[62] Narrating the divine associations of the ruler in this way was an effective means of praising the emperor within the 'constitutional' norms of the imperial system. Description of the emperor's subordinate relationship to the gods combined high praise with pious deference. We will see that imperial reliefs frequently

[57] Divine design and influence: Caesar, *Gallic War*, 5.52; Sallust, *Jugurthine War*, 63.1, 92.2-3; Sallust, *Histories*, 2.44; Livy, 1.28, 1.9, 2.12, 2.20, 5.54; Tacitus, *Annals*, 2.40; Levene 1993 (on Livy). Unseen gods in historiography: Tacitus, *Annals*, 4.1; Feeney 1991, 180-184; Levene 1993, 243; Feeney 1998, 80-81; Davies 2009, 171. Almost-visible gods: Tacitus, *Annals*, 13.41.

[58] Extreme divine weather: Sallust, *Jugurthine War*, 75.1-10 (rainstorm); Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.28 (eclipse), 13.17 (rain); Dio Cassius, 68.31.1-4 (lightning, with a rare quasi-specific attribution, to Helios), 72.8.1-3 (divine storm). Similar divine natural events: Livy, 1.31 (a divine mountain voice), 2.7; Dio Cassius, 76.12.4-5.

[59] Biography, as a subset of historical writing, depicted unmediated epiphanies more frequently — such as the "being of splendid size and beauty" that guides Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon in Suetonius — a fact that reflects the individual focus of the genre and highlights the privileged divine access of leading men: Suetonius, *Caesar*, 32. More examples: Plutarch, *Sulla*, 9.4 (goddess gives thunderbolt to Sulla); Suetonius, *Claudius*, 1 (giant supernatural barbarian warns against further campaigns). Roman biography: Wallace-Hadrill 1995, 125.

[60] Key features of panegyric: Rodgers 2012, 292. More below (especially Chapters Three, Four, and Six).

[61] Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 1.5 (chosen by Jupiter), 78.5 (acting with the gods).

[62] For example: Nazarius, *Panegyricus*, 7.1-3 (gods assist in victory); Latin Panegyrics VI.2.2 ("*deorum comes*"); XII.18.1-2 (the river god Tiber as "*conservator*").

deployed the gods in this 'panegyrical' manner, to celebrate the emperor's actions while subordinating them to a higher, legitimising system of divine control. Lastly, we may mention epic, which represents an extreme and detailed form of divine description.[63] Epic gods had highly specialised appearances and iconographies,[64] continually involved themselves in human affairs (and were seen to do so),[65] and were capable of powerful, kinetic intervention.[66] On one level, it was the personalised representation of the divine that defined epic as a genre distinct from history.[67] The defining feature of epic divine action was the leading, physical role of the gods themselves, in contrast to panegyric, where deities primarily empowered and revolved around mortal individuals.[68] Gods in other forms of poetry also had a wide range of roles, but often followed this personalised epic model.[69] Propertius' Apollo, for instance, was able to sink ten ships per arrow fired at the battle of Actium.[70]

Depending on the genre, then, gods could act at the level of (unseen) historical involvement, have a striking 'panegyrical' relationship with individuals, or influence events in a vivid and decisive 'epic' manner. The invisible divine presence in historiography stands in contrast to what we see in narrative reliefs, where gods are nearly always visible and usually identifiable. This contrast is driven partly by the difference in medium, rather than by an always intentional modulation of the intensity of the divine presence. The reliefs are not, in other words, necessarily implying the concrete manifestation of the divine figures that they depict: it was just not possible for a visual narrative to convey the idea of a 'divine force' or 'god-given rain' without explicitly inserting a divine actor. What level of divine involvement or visibility we are to imagine is thus best considered on a case-by-case basis.

[63] Lloyd-Jones 1983, 3; Heinze 1993, 259. Epic characterisation of the gods: Virgil, *Aeneid*, 1.11 (Juno's emotions), 1.589-590 (Venus' interaction with Aeneas), 1.662-663 (Venus and Cupid as a divine family), 7.305-306 (conflict between Jupiter and Diana), 7.557-558 (conflict between Juno and Allecto), 5.694 (Jupiter saves a fleet); Silius, *Punica*, 4.675-689 (Vulcan's fire saves Scipio).
[64] For example: Virgil, *Aeneid*, 3.11-13 (Cybele), 7.446-450 (Fury), 8.31-36 (Tiber). Silius, *Punica*, 17.236-240 (Neptune).
[65] For example: Silius, *Punica*, 1.535-547 (Jupiter in battle).
[66] For example: Virgil, *Aeneid*, 5.240-241 (Portunus pushes ship); Silius, *Punica*, 1.548-549 (Juno's supernatural vision), 9.438-450 (Mars in battle), 12.403 (Apollo and Hostus); Statius, *Thebaid*, 9.492-526 (Hippomedon and Mars, and Juno and Jupiter), 10.632-645 (Virtus' powers).
[67] Feeney 1991, 261.
[68] For example: Silius, *Punica*, 11.385-409 (Venus in action). Further: Heinze 1993, 239.
[69] For example: Propertius, *Elegies*, 2.10.10-12, 4.6.14 (gods attend significant events), 4.6.27-60 (gods address the emperor); Virgil, *Eclogues*, 4.15-16 (deities appear to great mortals).
[70] Propertius, *Elegies*, 4.6.67-68 (Apollo at Actium). Further 'poetic' divine intervention: Propertius, *Elegies*, 4.10.37 (the gods give the Roman general Cossus strength as he wins the *spolia opima*).

Each image was situated in the conceptual landscape articulated by ancient texts in a different way, and we will return to the range of divine modes outlined here in the following chapters. We need first to read the powers of the gods through an iconographic analysis of their attributes and actions. The relevant ancient evidence can then be brought to bear to draw out the identity of the deity in the imagination of the audience. A final assessment of the particular way these visual and mental elements are combined and driven through the image can then be reached. What identity was being channelled: a cult meaning, for example, or something new and specific to the image in question? Just as there was a full and wide range of human roles in the reliefs — emperors, generals, senators, soldiers, citizens, barbarians — so too we should be prepared to see a full range of divine roles — from active protagonists and protective companions through to legitimising topographical divinities and static cult manifestations.

**Structure**

This thesis is directed towards monumental reliefs and friezes, primarily those displayed in Rome. There are two reasons for this focus. First, the imagery of the big reliefs is cardinal to the phenomenon in question — it is the medium in which the most detailed picture of the gods in action can be found. Second, the surviving body of Roman narrative sculpture is large and varied, yet manageable. It provides a coherent corpus of images that can be analysed on the same broad interpretive plane.

The organisation of the following chapters is mainly chronological, with some flexibility. The Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, for example, are discussed together, because of their highly distinctive shared narrative genre. This blended chronological-thematic structure aims to exploit the fact that the material offers a precisely dated series of major monuments, while allowing meaningful thematic divisions within the material to be emphasised where appropriate. There are some changes over time, but the primary axes of differentiation are those of context, ‘narrative genre’, and the expressive aims that were prioritised in each case.

Following this introductory chapter (Chapter One), Chapter Two assesses Roman narrative reliefs from the Republican and Augustan periods, and argues: (1) that the gods played an important legitimising role from the beginning of Roman commemorative art; and (2) that the needs of the Augustan regime conditioned the phenomenon in important ways. Many of the ideas and motifs that would go on to constitute imperial narrative were developed in this period, and the chapter is intended to set the background for the key imperial monuments discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter Three looks at the first extant monumental images of imperial action that include participating gods — the narratives on the Flavian Arch of Titus and the Cancelleria Reliefs — and proposes that these images should be interpreted as manifestations of a new imperial mythology. It is argued that that the reliefs do not represent historical episodes embellished with symbolic deities, but rather 'mythologised' imperial events in which the gods had their own narrative identities and roles. Gods were not, as current opinion maintains, virtue-related allegories, but instead divine actors in a grand visual environment that aimed to present the emperor as a god-driven imperial hero. This interpretation of the monuments is supported by a discussion of the representation of divine action in contemporary Flavian poetry and panegyric.

Chapters Four and Five discuss the contextual and genre-based ways the gods worked in this developing system of imperial mythology on the monuments of the Trajanic and Antonine periods. Chapter Four looks primarily at Trajanic reliefs. The discussion first analyses two distinctive monuments — the Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius — and proposes that the treatment of the gods on these monuments was shaped by a highly specific 'documentary' narrative conception. The discussion then turns to the Great Trajanic Frieze and the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum, where it is argued that these monuments displayed a 'panegyrical' conception of imperial action in which the gods were presented in a fundamentally different way to the deities on the Columns. Chapter Five analyses imperial narrative in the Antonine period. It is argued that the 'Parthian Monument' from Ephesus provides a uniquely detailed insight into the understanding of the emperor and the gods held by elite social groups in the Greek East. The panel reliefs of Marcus Aurelius and the column base of Antoninus Pius, on the other hand, are interpreted as examples of a countervailing, metropolitan view of Antonine emperors and gods in action. Chapter Six extends the argument into the later imperial periods

and analyses the diverse treatment of the gods on the Arches of Septimius Severus and Constantine, after which the political and religious ideas that underpinned the phenomenon began to change. Chapter Seven concludes.

A picture will emerge that is varied and multi-layered, but largely static: from Augustus to Constantine, the gods and actions of imperial relief remained in many ways the same. Although chronologically or vertically there was great continuity, horizontally or contextually there were significant distinctions. The following chapters attempt to describe how the narrative input of the gods helped to define Roman visual conceptions of political action and imperial sovereignty, beginning with the monuments of the Republican period.

# Chapter 2: The Republican and Augustan Background

The gods were active in Roman narrative art from the very beginning. The Republican period witnessed the swift creation and continuing adaptation of a range of visual strategies for representing divinely enabled political action, and although there are only a few surviving monuments, it can be shown that the phenomenon had some of its parameters set and many of its core ideas unleashed in this period.[71] Across the surviving images, gods crown generals, accompany statesmen in moments of victory, and sanction ritual narratives. Divinely charged crowning, the intervention of gods in military episodes, and the presence of deities 'in person' to receive sacrifice are all found in Hellenistic and earlier Greek art.[72] Republican images took these Greek formulae, adapted them, and put them to work in their new Roman contexts, adding a 'historiating' layer of military realia and ritual specificity derived from their own Roman-Italic political culture.[73] This chapter asks how the gods worked in this evolving system of political representation and argues that deities sanctioned the actions of Republican statesmen, in two main ways, as authorising bringers of victory and as approving recipients of sacrifice. The discussion then moves on to consider the extent to which the political transformations brought about by the Augustan principate influenced the representation of gods in narrative art. Among other things to do with iconography and interpretation, it is argued that the priorities of the new regime caused a sharp change in the trajectory of the phenomenon. The overall aim of the chapter is to demonstrate the central place and wide range of divine roles in early Roman narrative relief, and in doing so to present the background against which the major imperial monuments emerged.

## Gods, monuments, and political power in the late Republic (c.200-30 BC)

The surviving material, from the beginnings of Roman political commemoration in the later fourth century BC down to the end of the Republic, is not abundant.[74] From the diverse range

[71] Several studies have discussed divine aspects of Republican art, but a dedicated treatment of gods in visual narratives is lacking: Ryberg 1955, 203-210 (scenes of ritual); Hölscher 1967, 136-156 (depictions of Victory); Meyer 1983, 83-107 (images of myth-history); Kuttner 1995, 56-68; Ritter 1995, 56-87 (representations of Hercules); Alföldi 1999, 28-41; Holliday 2002, 104-121, 155-178; Pollini 2012, 69-76.
[72] Greek historical images: Hölscher 1973; Borchhardt 2002, 91-127; Hölscher 2019, 83-164.
[73] Engagement with Greek art and culture in the Republic: Coarelli 1971, 241-265; Kraus 1971, 224-240; Hölscher 1990, 73-84; Gruen 1992, 84-182; Rüpke 2012, 9, 33, 88.
[74] On the beginnings of Roman visual political commemoration: Ryberg 1955, 20-22; Hölscher 1978, 317-318; Hölscher 1990, 74-79; Holliday 2002; Walter 2004, 132-154; Hölscher 2019, 230-249.

of monuments recorded in literary sources, only a fragmentary handful remain, almost all without detailed historical contexts.[75] In many cases we do not know who commissioned the monuments, when and why they were produced, or precisely what they depict. For example, the best-studied Republican narrative relief — the frieze from the so-called 'Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus' — is still regarded as controversial on each of these points: its proposed dates and contexts range over several centuries.[76] The following discussion thus treats the monuments as part of a single broad late Republican context, with greater specificity pursued on a case-by-case basis where possible. Gods in this period acted primarily as bringers of victory and as recipients of sacrifice, and the discussion is accordingly divided between sacrificial and victory-related images. Religious action and the commemoration of conquest were two central themes of Roman public life and art, and the bulk of imperial monuments are also concerned with these subjects. An examination of the divine component of their early artistic manifestation will thus serve as a useful starting point for this thesis. Before coming to the monuments, it will be useful to say something about the contemporary political context.

The main surviving monuments are all dated roughly within the last two centuries BC, covering the end of the middle and the whole of the late phases of the Republic (c.200-30 BC).[77] This was an era shaped by external military expansion and internal political competition. The two spheres were inseparably interlinked, and monuments served as vectors for the political claims of leading and aspiring actors in both arenas. Visual representations were part of a broad set of competitive display strategies, ranging from honorific statues and relief-decorated victory monuments through to temple buildings and triumphal and funerary processions, all of which aimed to assert status and to secure collective recognition of individual achievements.[78] Generals and magistrates wanted to increase their prestige, and the state wanted to encourage and reward talented individuals who used their abilities to advance the commonwealth's interests. Monuments, as permanent fixtures of the public landscape, had a unique ability to extend the transient glories of limited-term office tenure into the future and were able to project

[75] For the range of Republican monuments and the relevant sources: Zinserling 1960, 404-413; Hölscher 1978, 315-348; Holliday 2002, 13-14, 30-33; Hölscher 2019, 230-257.
[76] See: Maschek 2018, 27-52 (with a table of different interpretations).
[77] Mid-late Republican history: Syme 1939, 10-312; Hölkeskamp 1987; Brunt 1988, 1-92; Millar 1989, 138-150; Hölkeskamp 2004; Hölkeskamp 2006, 360-396; Rüpke 2012.
[78] Republican representation: Hölscher 1978, 315-348; Hölscher 1990, 74-84; Wiseman 1994, 37-48; Holliday 2002; Walter 2004; Hölkeskamp 2005, 249-271; Hölkeskamp 2018, 710-756; Hölscher 2019, 230-257. Honorific statues: Sehlmeyer 1999. Victory monuments: Stein-Hölkeskamp 2013, 429-445. Temples and war booty: Ziolkowski 1992, 17-185; Aberson 1994, 10-185. Rituals: Hölkeskamp 2006, 387-396.

achievements won in foreign military theatres into the political centre of society in a uniquely immediate way. Narrative reliefs created microcosms of filtered political reality that stated all at once in what way and for which reasons a particular figure was to be remembered. This vigorous public struggle for prestige expressed in monuments and images was something new in Italy. Etruscan art, for instance, seems to have been primarily concerned with a more private funerary sphere of representation.[79] The sharp political character of Republican visual culture was a function and a driver of Rome's uniquely dynamic system of imperialist government.

Across this spectrum of competitive political representation, the gods played an important role. Maintaining proper relations with the gods (the *pax deorum*) was a core objective of Republican state religion and a key part of the *pietas* which both the Romans themselves and outsiders such as Polybius liked to think had made them great. "The respect in which the Roman constitution is most markedly superior", wrote Polybius, "is in its view of the gods…that superstition is precisely what gives the Roman state its cohesion".[80] The Republic also saw the emergence of a range of active political gods such as Virtus, Honos, Salus, and Concordia.[81] The proliferation of such deities is unparalleled in any Greek kingdom or city-state.[82] In Roman thinking, the support of the gods was central to the moral architecture that underlay their position of unprecedented world leadership, and divine backing was positioned throughout Republican literature as the foundation of political legitimacy.[83] Narrative images gave the gods key roles that reflected their pivotal position in Roman consciousness.

A basic aim of representing gods in narrative images was to manifest legitimacy, to give sacred sanction to the raw circumstances of real or claimed political power. Republican monuments operated in a field of peer-to-peer elite competition that rested on ideals of aristocratic equality and the proper balancing of the state's collective needs against those of its leading members. Any suggestion of personal prominence required justification, and the intervention of protective gods in visual narratives made a compelling case that the prestige claimed by the

[79] Hölscher 1990, 75-79; Hölscher 2005, 476.
[80] Polybius, 6.56. Gods, religion, Republican politics: North 1976, 1-12; Liebschuetz 1979, 1-54; Rüpke 1990; Rüpke 2012; North 2014, 225-245; Latham 2015, 288-317.
[81] For references, see the notes in Chapter One, under the section 'Personifications': notes 40-54.
[82] Hölscher 2005, 476.
[83] Support of the gods: Caesar, *Gallic War*, 2.31; Livy, preface; Virgil, *Aeneid*, 1.277-279, 6.851-853. Divine backing and political legitimacy: Cicero, *Against Verres II.5*, 184-188.; Cicero, *On the Command of Pompey*, 47-50; Cicero, *Philippic II*, 87; Sallust, *Catiline's War*, 52.28-29.

protagonist was valid and secure — that his actions were constitutionally and religiously correct. Narrative reliefs were especially adept at articulating the roles of the gods and their relationships with mortal actors. Illustration of the interactions between different figures was a special competence of the medium.

The prevailing scholarly view holds that visual association with the gods was primarily a sign of divinising or aggrandising assertion. For example, in her classic study of Roman ritual imagery, Inez Scott Ryberg saw the presence of gods in Republican reliefs as a precursor to later imperial forms of 'divine rulership'.[84] Similar ideas can be found in more recent studies.[85] In the Roman world, however, proper political action was always divinely enabled. We need to be ready to see a range of visual agendas, in which the gods were deployed to present legitimate and pious deference to state deities, as well as to assert personal prominence and achievement. The particular formulation of the gods' roles within a given image needs to be determined before their effect can be assessed. Our discussion begins with some of the earliest examples of the phenomenon: those found in narratives of sacrifice.

**Images of sacrifice**

The three most important images of sacrifice that survive from the Republic are: the terracotta sculptures from the Via San Gregorio; the relief decoration of the Borghese Altar; and the historical frieze from the 'Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus'.[86] In each case the gods have an important role, and by examining these images we can trace the outline of a significant strand of later imperial narrative: that of divinely sanctioned ritual interaction between men and gods. The representation of deities in sacrificial scenes had Greek and Etruscan precedent, and a brief outline of the more significant Greek antecedents will help to frame our approach to the Roman material.[87] Greek images of sacrifice are primarily known from votive reliefs, which followed a regular formula of mortal worshippers, sacrificial equipment, and divine recipient, and are notable for their depiction of deities and mortals in close proximity and their use of a hierarchy

[84] Ryberg 1955, 205.
[85] For example: Ramage 1991, 98-106; Kuttner 1995, 56-68; Alföldi 1999, 28-41; Pollini 2012, 72-73.
[86] Other sacrificial-ritual images: Ryberg 1955; Schraudolph 1993; Fless 1995; Huet 2017, 11-28 (with literature).
[87] Etruscan antecedents: Ryberg 1955, 6-19; Holliday 2002, 155-181.

of scale to differentiate men and gods.[88] These images stressed the special relationship between the dedicator and the gods, and recorded divine reception of ritual gifts. Republican images drew from this visual language, but directed it towards a competitive field of public display, different from the more personal environment of the Greek votives. Individual dedicators are replaced by public magistrates, and personal worship becomes mediation with state gods. In these respects, the Roman monuments also looked back to state-level 'votive reliefs', such as the Parthenon frieze, which had a comparable public orientation.[89]

The second-century terracotta sculptures from the Via San Gregorio (Figure 1) constitute perhaps the earliest extant representation of a Roman sacrifice.[90] Although their subject is surely mythological rather than historical, the sculptures combine human and divine figures in narrative and are thus useful for the norms that they present.[91] The terracottas are fragmentary and their original context is unknown, but it is clear from their size that they once decorated a pediment. A connection with the temple of Mars near the Porta Capena has been suggested (because of Mars' prominence within the sculptures), though the terracottas were not found there — they were discovered near the Palatine.[92] The sculptures represent a sacrifice in which a central triad of gods is approached by worshippers, attendants, and animals.[93] The shape of the visual field dictates the scales of the figures — gods largest, then men, then animals.[94] The pediment thus combines a typical central divine group with elements of sacrificial votive reliefs.[95] The central armed god is surely Mars, but the identities of the flanking goddesses are unknown: their open-ended iconography does not allow for specific identifications.[96] The

[88] Greek votive reliefs: Ryberg 1955, 3-5; van Straten 1974, 174-184; Neumann 1979, 37-39; Boardman 1985, 186; Smith 1991, 186-187; van Straten 1995, figs.57-108; Osada 2019, 1-37.
[89] Parthenon frieze: Neumann 1979, 64-65 (connection to votive reliefs), plates 30b, 38b, 40b (comparable smaller-scale votives); Osada 2019, 1-37 (votive aspects).
[90] Key discussions: Ryberg 1955, 22-23; Dohrn 1966, 408-411; Kuttner 1995, 58-59; Ferrea 2002; Holliday 2002, 158-161; Di Cesare 2010, 247-249; Strazzulla 2010, 87-88 (first half of the second century); Davies 2017, 92. An engraved cista may be earlier: Ryberg 1955, 22-23; Menichetti 1994, 7-27.
[91] Seeing a historical subject: Kuttner 1995, 58-59; Holliday 2002, 158-161. Seeing a legendary-mythological subject: Di Cesare 2010, 248.
[92] The temple of Mars: Platner and Ashby 1929, 327-329. Proposing a connection with the sculptures: Ryberg 1955, 23; Di Cesare 2010, 248. Alternatively: Strazzulla 2010, 87 (discussing the Palatine temple of Fortuna Respiciens). Provenance: Dohrn 1966, 410.
[93] For all aspects of the iconography: Ferrea 2002.
[94] On the scales of the figures: Felleti Maj 1977, 173.
[95] Kuttner 1995, 58-59. A Republican pediment in Florence, for example, has a comparable central divine group: Dorante and Paribeni 2010, 246.
[96] Mars' identity is unanimously agreed. Republican images of Mars: Simon and Bauchhenss 1984, 535-536; *LIMC* Mars, 282, 403; Strazzulla 2010, 87-88. For the goddesses, Venus, Victory, Juno, Fortuna, Vesta, and Ops have been suggested: Ryberg 1955, 22-23; Dohrn 1966, 409-411; Hölscher 2005, 476; Di Cesare 2010, 248.

conventions of temple decoration point strongly towards a mythological subject and we might imagine that the pediment represented a legendary version of the founding rites of the temple on which the sculptures were displayed.[97] If a contemporary point of reference was intended, we might think of the mythological connections or ancestors of the patron. These kinds of references became prominent in the imagery of second-century Republican coins, and the Augustan Ara Pacis would show a foundational legendary sacrifice performed by Aeneas, a mythological ancestor of the emperor.[98] The allusive mythology of these images can perhaps be placed with the terracottas in the same broad tradition. In each case, legendary connections with gods or heroes provided contemporary political legitimacy.

The late-second- or early-first-century Borghese Altar preserves a key image of a contemporary Republican sacrifice.[99] The Altar is a half-metre tall object (possibly a statue or trophy base), decorated with a relief that stretches round its entire outer face (Figure 2).[100] A rectangular altar occupies the 'centre' of the composition, with three gods on the left and a sacrificer-patron, two musicians, two lictors, four attendants, and two animals (a calf and a pig) behind the altar and on the right.[101] A winged figure of Victory holding a palm branch and wreath stands in the middle of the three gods and shows that the narrative commemorated military success.[102] To the right stands Hercules, identified by his lion skin and club, and holding a ritual vessel or *skyphos*.[103] Like Victory, Hercules was an important god of military success in the late Republic.[104] The third deity is normally taken as either Venus or Iuventas (who was Hercules' wife through assimilation with Hebe), but neither goddess is certain.[105] The absence of Amor, who was the consistent companion of Venus in late Republican imagery, perhaps makes Venus

[97] All Greek pediments have mythological themes: Lapalus 1947, 341-357. Roman mythological pediments, some examples: Zanker 1969, fig.46 (Mars Ultor); Simon 1986, figs.142-143 (Apollo Sosianus); Pollini 2012, fig.7.20 (Magna Mater); Davies 2017, 52 (Victoria), 59 (Diana); Fless et al. 2018, plate 80 (uncertain). Founding rites interpretation: Di Cesare 2010, 248.
[98] Mythological-ancestral allusions and coins: Wiseman 1974, 153-164; Fears 1981, 783-787; Alfoldi 1999, 30-31; Walter 2004, 84-89. Aeneas on the Ara Pacis: Zanker 1988, 203-205.
[99] Date: Ritter 1995, 57-58 (early first century). Recently: Koortbojian 2020, 116-117.
[100] Ryberg 1955, 23-24; Simon 1966, 718-720; Ritter 1995, 57-60 (suggesting the object held a *tropeum*).
[101] Best description: Ritter 1995, 57. The lyre player beside the altar is sometimes interpreted as Apollo, but the figure's toga makes a divine identity unlikely. Apollo: Holliday 2002, 168-172; Kropp 2016, 207. Musician: Goethert 1931, 21; Simon 1966, 719; Fless 1995, 82-83; Ritter 1995, 57; Hölscher 2005, 477.
[102] Ritter 1995, 57.
[103] Ryberg 1955, 25; Ritter 1995, 57. Gods participating in their own sacrifices: Himmelmann 1998, 103-129.
[104] Appian, *Civil Wars*, 2.76 (Hercules-related watchwords); Strabo, 4.1.11 (victory dedications to Hercules); Vitruvius, 3.3.5 (Pompey's probably war-related temple of Hercules); Ryberg 1955, 26; Ritter 1995, 85-87.
[105] Venus: Holliday 2002, 168-172 (uncertain); Kropp 2016, 207. Iuventas: Goethert 1931, 20-21; Ryberg 1955, 26. Hercules and Iuventas: Livy, 21.62.9.

unlikely, and the non-specific iconography of the figure suggests her identity should be left open.[106] The partnership of Hercules and Iuventas is only thinly attested and other favoured deities of the unknown patron of the monument are equally possible.[107] Whatever the identity of the goddess, the monument attests to the important legitimising role of the gods in late Republican representation. The lictors confirm that the protagonist-patron was a magistrate, and the Altar was surely a votive dedicated to Hercules following a military victory that his protection was imagined to have secured.[108] In line with this context, the monument's political aspects are more pronounced than those of the Via San Gregorio sculptures: here, a team of protective deities is brought into the centre of contemporary public life. For us, these ritual themes are given their most detailed expression on the controversial 'Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus'.

**The 'Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus'**

As one of the earliest and best-preserved monuments of its type, the late-second- or first-century 'Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus' is a key piece of evidence for the study of Roman narrative art.[109] The surviving parts of the monument consist of two friezes, one each now in Munich and Paris. Much discussion has accompanied the reliefs since their discovery and many aspects of the monument are uncertain.[110] The content of the reliefs, therefore, is the focus of analysis, and controversies surrounding the monument's disputed function and unknown patron are largely left to the side.

Despite their common name, the reliefs did not adorn an altar.[111] They perhaps formed part of a large statue base, although other options are possible.[112] The provenance of the reliefs offers

[106] Venus and Amor in Roman imagery: Kropp 2016, 203-210.
[107] Ritter 1995, 58-59. Republican victory dedications to Iuventas are attested: Livy, 36.37.3 (temple). Speculation on possible patrons: Ryberg 1955, 27; Simon 1966, 719. The well-known Hercules temple associated with the Ara Maxima was serviced with Greek rites, which the relief does not depict: Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 3.6.16-17; Platner and Ashby 1929, 251-258; Ritter 1995, 59.
[108] Ritter 1995, 59.
[109] Important discussions: Furtwängler 1896, 33-48; von Domaszewski 1909, 67-82; Kähler 1966; Maschek 2018, 27-52. Date: Ryberg 1955, 28 (first century); Kähler 1966, 30-36 (50-25 BC); Hölscher 1979, 340-342 (early first century); Stilp 2001, 91-92 (late second-early first century); Schmid 2008, 47-57 (early Augustan).
[110] Previous interpretations: Schmid 2008, table 1; Maschek 2018, table 1. Discussions of controversy: Kähler 1966, 10; Hölscher 1979, 337-338; Maschek 2018, 27-28.
[111] Proposing an altar: Kähler 1966, 36 (altar or other dedication); Schmid 2008, 62-64 (altar near the Pantheon).
[112] Simon 1990, 190 (water basin); Kuttner 1993, 198-229 (statue base); Lohmann 2009, 119 (statue base); Maschek 2018, 48 (votive base). A funerary function has not been suggested, but the combination of

little assistance. Their sometimes-assumed location of display, near the temples of Neptune and Mars in the Circus Flaminius, is merely an inference based on their early-modern re-use in the nearby Palazzo Santa Croce, from which the reliefs entered modern museum collections.[113] The specific function and ancient location of the monument should be left open.

The content and style of the friezes are strikingly disparate.[114] The Munich reliefs depict a Hellenistic-style scene of the marriage of Poseidon and Amphitrite,[115] which adorned, in a pi-shape, three sides of the monument. The fourth was decorated with the reliefs now in Paris, which represent a narrative of sacrifice executed in a plainer style. The Munich thiasos frieze is usually interpreted as an allusion to an aspect of the patron's public image, either a naval victory or descent from Neptune.[116] These ideas are possible but are perhaps too specific. Thiasos imagery was widely applicable in the ancient world and often referred in a general way to felicity and prosperity.[117] Without knowing who was responsible for the monument, any precise point of reference now escapes us. It can be said simply that the monument throws emphasis on the power of Neptune, who was clearly a relevant or favoured deity for the patron in this context.[118]

The subject of the historical Paris frieze (Figure 3) is labelled with near unanimity as a censorial lustrum, accompanied by a census-related administrative scene on the left.[119] However, this

commemorative Roman imagery and romantic Greek mythology has proved difficult to incorporate into the majority of reconstructions, and accords well with the politicised and creative tomb monuments of the late Republic. Compare: Rolland 1969, plates 51-54 (first-century funerary thiasos frieze); Zanker 1988, 11-18 (Republican tombs); Zanker and Ewald 2012, 111-130 (thiasos sarcophagi). Historical images in funerary contexts: Rolland 1969 (Glanum monument); von Sydow 1974, 187-216 (Via Appia frieze); Smith 1993 (Zoilos monument); Muth 2004, 263-274 ('biographical' sarcophagi); Zimmermann and Salvadori 2017, 179-188.

[113] Assumed: Torelli 1982, 5-9; Kuttner 1995, 57; Holliday 2002, 162-163. Provenance: Kähler 1966, 7-10; Meyer 1993, 45-52; Stilp 2001, 9-16, 71-76; Maschek 2018, 29-32.

[114] Style: Kähler 1966, 29-34; Kuttner 1993, 212; Meyer 1993, 56. The materials of the friezes are also different. The marble of the Munich reliefs has a non-Italian origin: Kuttner 1993, 198-229; Schmid 2008, 43-44; Maschek 2018, 31-32.

[115] Or Neptune and Salacia. On the issue of Greek or Latin names: Kähler 1966, 16-17.

[116] Victory: Hölscher 1979, 340; Kuttner 1993, 216; Schmid 2008, 60. Descent: Wiseman 1974, 162-164; Zanker 1988, 12-14; Gruen 1992, 147; Stilp 2001, 54-60. Other: Meyer 1993, 60-61 (concordia); Maschek 2018, 43-46 (Neptune's protection of a colony).

[117] Thiasos imagery: Lattimore 1976, 18, 29; Walter-Karydi 1991, 248-257; Zanker and Ewald 2012, 111-130.

[118] Other monuments with myth-history juxtapositions: Hölscher 1973, 60-65 (Stoa Poikile, Athens); Meyer 1983, 59 (Elgin throne); Smith 1991, 99-104 (Attalid dedications in Athens); Holliday 1993, 175-192 (François tomb). These monuments use mythological analogues to define their historical subjects. The Republican reliefs present a (seemingly) looser combination.

[119] For example: von Domaszewski 1909, 79; Kähler 1966, 28; Coarelli 1971, 259; Wiseman 1974, 161; Zanker 1988, 12; Gruen 1992, 145; Kuttner 1993, 213; Stilp 2001, 48-49; Holliday 2002, 164; Wünsche 2010, 284.

view has recently been strongly criticised by Dominik Maschek, who has demonstrated that the consensus view is in fact highly unlikely: the dress and attributes of the participants show that none of the figures can be the required censor.[120] Maschek proposes instead that the frieze depicted a *deductio* (a ritual that preceded the foundation of a colony) and suggests tentatively that the monument may belong to the years around 123 BC, based on the fact that the only Republican colony known to have been associated with Neptune (the protagonist of the adjoining frieze) was founded on this date.[121] The details of this new reconstruction are plausible, but not certain. The important point is that the narrative and the historical context of the frieze remain unknown. For the purposes of the present discussion, then, an outline of the basic agreed components of the frieze will be helpful. The imagery allows us to see one kind of role that was performed by gods in the ritual narratives of this period.

The frieze depicts two scenes: administrative business takes place on the left; and, in the centre and on the right, we see a sacrificial procession, with a bull, a ram, and a pig (*suovetaurilia*), that fills the rest of the frieze. The scene on the left shows a group of four figures, two seated, two standing, who interact with each other and several large books. The size of these books shows that they relate to public records: this is official administrative activity.[122] The first seated figure wears senatorial shoes (*calcei senatorii*), indicating his high status, and should be taken as the presiding magistrate.[123] The group is likely supervising an enrolment list of citizens or soldiers, the members of which the sacrifice is intended to purify.[124]

Next on the frieze comes a pair of soldiers, one of whom steps towards the central altar, verifying the soldiers' participation in the main ritual. This ritual scene fills the rest of the frieze. A square altar, surrounded by musicians, attendants, a togate sacrificer-patron, and an armed figure, is approached from the right by further attendants and three sacrificial animals (a bull, a ram, and a pig), that are known from literary sources to comprise a *suovetaurilia*.[125]

[120] Maschek 2018, 27-52. Partially accepted: Koortbojian 2020, 95-97. A rare earlier voice of criticism: Ryberg 1955, 33-34.
[121] Maschek 2018, 43-49.
[122] Compare the large official books depicted on the Anaglypha Traiani relief: Torelli 1983, 89-91.
[123] Senatorial shoes: Stilp 2001, 65-67; Maschek 2018, 37. On Republican dress: Goette 1990, 20-25; Fittschen 2008, 177-183.
[124] Interpretations: Ryberg 1955, 33 (military discharge); Kähler 1966, 27-28 (census); Maschek 2018, 43-46 (classification of colonial citizens).
[125] There is also a controversial figure carrying a flag (left to one side in what follows): Maschek 2018, 38-39, 43.

The *suovetaurilia* was a sacrifice to Mars with a range of purposes.[126] Its primary function was to constitute and purify a social group or religious space and to orientate that entity towards future action under the protection of Mars.[127] The role of the patron in this important ritual is the core subject of the frieze. Three soldiers — two infantrymen and a horseman — stand at the far right and complete the scene. Together, the five total soldiers bracket the procession. Their varied equipment probably represents the different classes of the Republican citizen army.[128]

The size and central placement of the two figures on either side of the altar (the above-mentioned sacrificer and armed figure) show that they are the protagonists. They are easily interpreted as a magistrate-patron and accompanying god.[129] The figure on the right of the altar wears a toga, has his head veiled, and holds a patera: he is the leading mortal actor in the ceremony.[130] The figure on the left of the altar is armed, and in this context must be either Mars or a mortal commander. He is usually interpreted as the war god.[131] Since the gods are central to this discussion, it will be useful to establish the figure's identity with certainty.

The figure wears greaves, a cuirass, a cloak, and a pseudo-Corinthian plumed helmet.[132] He holds a large round shield, a sword, and a spear. This military dress sits in counterpoint to the civic-religious appearance of the sacrificer. One might think, then, of a mortal general, perhaps a consul flanking the altar with his colleague. But there is no appropriate role for a mortal commander in this narrative, whatever its subject: Cicero tells us that generals conducted the lustration of their troops themselves;[133] commanders had no role whatsoever in the censorial

[126] These purposes included the closing of a census and the purification of a city, temple area, citizen body, or army: Cato, *Agriculture*, 141; Varro, *Latin Language*, 6.87-95; Livy, 1.44; Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities*, 4.22; Tacitus, *Histories*, 4.53; Ogilvie 1961, 31-39; Wiseman 1969, 59-75. Visual representations: Ryberg 1955, 104-119; Vermaseren 1957, 1-12; Scheid 2017, 145-150.
[127] Scheid 2017, 146.
[128] Republican army classes: Polybius, 6.21-26.
[129] The central togate figure should certainly be read as *a* patron of the monument. But it is uncertain whether the other high-ranking togate participants (the seated figure on the far left and the flag-carrying figure on the right) should also be taken as depictions of historical figures responsible for the monument: Maschek 2018, 39-46 (arguing that each of the three represents a different collaborating patron).
[130] The face and most of the neck of the figure are restored: Kähler 1966, 15-16. Toga: Meyer 1993, 57.
[131] Kähler 1966, 28; Stilp 2001, 52-53; Maschek 2018, 33. Mars is doubted by: Gruen 1992, 149 ("the god, so it is generally asserted, appears on the relief. But the figure, if indeed it is Mars, does not hold central place in the scene.").
[132] Best description: Kähler 1966, 25.
[133] Cicero, *On Divination*, 1.102. Also: Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.26; Ryberg 1955, 113 (visual representations).

sacrifice;[134] and the representation of armed figures performing sacrifice or standing by an altar is extremely unusual in Roman art, except for divine or mythological figures.[135] The narrative logic of the frieze thus makes a mortal commander unlikely. The figure's divinity, on the other hand, is suggested by iconographic details. The large round shield and pseudo-Corinthian helmet are both ideal armaments commonly associated with deities — most famously in Phidias' Athena Parthenos and most importantly for us in a number of Republican images of Mars.[136] The body type and costume have also been connected with known images of the war god.[137] Lastly, suovetaurilia were exclusively associated with Mars, and the narrative setting of the frieze is specified by the presence of soldiers as outside the city boundary and thus probably in the Campus Martius, an area in which the war god's presence was strongly felt.[138] The frieze thus provides an interlocking set of reasons that confirm the figure's identity as Mars. The god and the sacrificer-patron form the focus of the narrative and mirror each other in pose and scale.[139] Their visual connection promotes the idea that the patron's pious action secures Mars' divine support.

**Images of sacrifice: discussion**

The Via San Gregorio pediment, the Borghese Altar, and the Paris frieze all exploit the close association between men and gods that was felt to accompany acts of sacrifice.[140] The Borghese Altar and the Paris frieze resurrect contemporary ritual acts for permanent public display and inject gods into the centre of the action. In doing so they turned historical events into conceptually charged political narratives. Hercules, Victory, and Mars are instantiated in permanent sculptural epiphany as legitimising witnesses to their patrons' achievements. The monuments give their own visual form to the divinely sanctioned ritual action that we read

[134] Kähler 1966, 28.
[135] A scene on the Boscoreale cups is perhaps the only exception before the third-century AD: Kleiner 1983, 297-298.
[136] Athena: Pausanias, 1.24.5-7. Mars: Simon and Bauchhenns 1984, 535-536; *LIMC* Mars, 282, 403; Strazzulla 2010, 87-88.
[137] Stilp 2001, 52; Maschek 2018, 33.
[138] Campus and Mars: Vitruvius, 1.7.1 (recommending temples to Mars be placed outside the city); Jacobs and Conlin 2014, 22, 29, 43-6. Further: Koortbojian 2020, 95-101.
[139] Kuttner 1993, 211; Holliday 2002, 165; Stilp 2001, 53, 71.
[140] For comparable ideas in literature: Latte 1960, 45-46. Three other late Republican reliefs may be mentioned in this context: (1) a relief from Isernia juxtaposing a sacrifice with a scene of Victory, Fortuna, and Nemesis: Ryberg 1955, 34; (2) the Civita Castellana base, which depicts a mythological sacrifice attended by gods: Ryberg 1955, 27; Hölscher 1988b, 382-383; Holliday 2002, 172-176; and (3) a relief in the Vatican with a mythological sacrifice 'attended' by divine statues: Kleiner 1983, 248; Holliday 2002, 176-177; Fless 2018, 106-107; Koortbojian 2020, 14-16, 101-102.

about in literary sources, but reformulate these ideas in ways that suit their representational context.[141] The generalised 'immortal gods' of literature are replaced with particular magistrates, specific rituals, and nameable participating gods. Direct divine-mortal interaction in the images, however, is limited. The deities are static and are separated from their mortal counterparts by altars. The gods legitimise the narratives primarily through the force of their presence.

Previous analyses of the place of these monuments in the development of the phenomenon under investigation have been unsystematic, and have perhaps not exhausted the range of possible meanings. For example, in Inez Scott Ryberg's study of religious imagery, the Paris frieze is connected with monuments such as the Gemma Augustea and the Cancelleria Reliefs, and it is argued that the frieze represents a prototypical form of the 'divine-mortal assimilation' found on the later monuments.[142] There may be some truth in this, but such a sweeping account is in danger of suppressing significant distinctions between the monuments and their particular modes of representation. Similarly, in Ann Kuttner's important discussion of gods and men in Republican art, the basic points of contact between the Paris frieze and phenomena such as divinised portraits and panegyrical literature are perhaps pressed too closely.[143] This leads Kuttner to claim that the Republican frieze depicts Mars and the patron as "companions", a view that has been accepted in some recent scholarship.[144]

The idea of divine-mortal companionship is a potentially valid way of describing the relationships between leading Romans and their divine protectors, but it is questionable whether it can be applied to the Republican frieze.[145] A companion suggests close personal association and collaborative action, but the frieze is careful to place the god on one side of the altar. In addition, although Mars is positioned in the centre of the action, the sacrificer and attendants pay no attention to him. These details emphasize Mars' *unseen* participation in the narrative. In later images, such as the Cancelleria Reliefs, on the other hand, gods mix with and

[141] For example: Polybius, 3.112; Caesar, *Gallic War*, 5.52; Sallust, *War of Jugurtha*, 55.1-2, 92.2-3; Sallust, *Histories*, 2.44; Cicero, *On the Command of Pompey*, 36; Livy, 1.9, 1.28, 2.20, 5.54.
[142] Ryberg 1955, 205. Similar ideas: Alföldi 1999, 28-41; Pollini 2012, 70-73.
[143] Kuttner 1995, 56-68. Also: Kuttner 1993, 217.
[144] Kuttner 1995, 57, 65. Accepted: Holliday 2015, 195-197.
[145] Panegyrical texts, for example, announce that great emperors may become "companions of the gods" (*comes deorum*): Latin Panegyrics, VI.2.2. But these are imperial ideas (discussed in the following chapters).

touch their mortal favourites. Kuttner argued that on the Republican frieze Mars and the patron "seem to converse", but this is probably a misreading of what is a different, less direct divine-mortal relationship to those which emerge in later imperial art.[146] Here, as on the Borghese Altar, the two protagonists do not even look at one another. These distinctions suggest that a more differentiated approach may be helpful. Republican sacrifice narratives express ideal ritual connections between dutiful public magistrates and approving state gods, but men and deities maintain a pious, appropriate distance. The participating gods act in a static 'unseen' ritual capacity. More direct personal connections and divine-mortal companionship evolved in different narrative contexts and under different historical circumstances.

Ritual interaction between men and gods is important in later imperial art, but more central to imperial narrative was the activity of campaigning, administration, and victory. These war-related narratives formed the primary sphere of divine activity under the empire, and the visual language of divinely enabled victory was articulated with increasing force throughout the Republic. It is on these formative images of god-supported military achievement that the next section focuses. They depict a more active and direct type of divine-mortal interaction than that found in ritual narratives.

**Images of victory**

The participation of gods in victory narratives is attested throughout the Republic.[147] Coins and reliefs provide sharp visual depictions of the gods' protective military functions and texts record the divine connections of leading commanders.[148] The well-publicised relationship between Sulla, his victories, and Venus, for example, has left a footprint that can be sensed in both archaeology and literature.[149] The importance of the gods in this sphere emerges clearly. The surviving sculptural record, however, is poor. There are only a small handful of fragmentary monuments, all with undetermined historical contexts. The reliefs can

[146] Kuttner 1995, 57.
[147] Some of the first representations of victory-related deities were perhaps found in the ethnic-geographical personifications of triumphal paintings: Zinserling 1960, 424-425; Hölscher 1990, 75; Holliday 1997, 134-144; Holliday 2002, 63, 104-121. These images are unfortunately lost, and nor are there any significant extant representations of the triumphal ceremony itself, in which the gods also had an important role. Republican triumphs: Polybius, 6.53.7; Livy, 10.7.10, 37.59; Hölscher 1978, 344-348; Hölkeskamp 1987, 236-238; Rich 2014, 197-252; Lange 2017, 29-55.
[148] Republican victory representations: Fears 1981, 773-804; Walter 2004, 139-143; Hölscher 2019, 241-257.
[149] Sulla and Venus: Plutarch, *Sulla*, 19.5, 34.2; Ramage 1991, 98-106.

nevertheless be used alongside the information provided by coins to tell a story of Republican engagement with the war-related powers of the gods — one that forms an important part of the background to Augustan and imperial narrative art.

As with scenes of sacrifice, a glance at the participation of gods in Greek victory narratives may help to set the scene for what follows. The representation of divine support in battle and divine recognition of military success were primary concerns of some of the earliest political monuments of antiquity, and from the classical period onward gods participated in battle scenes and validated the achievements of mortal commanders through a range of narrative interactions, of which crowning and greeting-handshaking were the most important.[150] Roman monuments intersected considerably with this pre-existing repertoire,[151] but specific Roman conceptions of divinely authorised military sovereignty can be seen already in outline in the few preserved Republican monuments.

A well-known, probably first-century relief from Ostia provides a detailed visualisation of victory-related divine roles and may thus serve as a useful starting point for the discussion.[152] It illustrates some key ideas and shows that the gods were active in victory scenes from the earliest stages of Roman narrative representation. The relief (Figure 4) was found in front of the east end of the temple of Hercules at Ostia, where it originally functioned as a votive in Hercules' important local cult.[153] The relief describes an oracle of Hercules that leads to military success, and the monument was surely set up by a local patron following the victory that the relief references, to give thanks to Hercules and to promote the patron's role in the act.[154] An inscription records the name of the dedicator: C · FVLVIVS · SALVIS · HARVSPEXS · D · D ('The haruspex C. Fulvius Salvis donated an offering').[155] The

[150] Greek victory monuments and the gods: Pausanias, 10.10.1-2 (Athenian statue group at Delphi depicting a mortal commander and Athena); Hölscher 1973, 60-65, 178-179; Hölscher 1974, 77-79; Fears 1981, 753-773; Meyer 1983, 113; Borchhardt 2002, 91-127; Kunze 2002, 170-175; Hölscher 2019, 83-164.
[151] One of the earliest extant 'historical' images from the Republic, for example, is a coin made in c.196 BC for the Roman general Flamininus by Greek artists, featuring a portrait of Flamininus on one side and a figure of Victory 'offering' him a crown on the other: Kähler 1965, 7; RRC, 548; Fears 1981, 780.
[152] Date: Ritter 1995, 96 (100-66 BC); van Haeperen 2006, 32 (80-65 BC); Moret 2012, 115 (c.60 BC); Bolder-Boos 2017, n.44 (100-65 BC).
[153] Provenance: Becatti 1939, 40-55; Ritter 1995, 96; Bolder-Boos 2017, 47. Hercules' cult: Meiggs 1960, 347-353; Ritter 1995, 95, 97-98; Boin 2010, 253-266; Bolder-Boos 2017, 51-52. Roman votives: Schraudolph 1993, 22-23.
[154] Ostia and its port were an important staging ground for campaigns: Ritter 1995, 96.
[155] Fuhrmann 1940, 441; Bolder-Boos 2017, 52.

combination of the Latin name Fulvius, the Oscan-Umbrian name Salvis, and the priestly office of haruspex suggests he was a local notable who was (or was descended from) a client of the Fulvi.[156] The erection of monuments by local elites was increasingly common in the competitive political climate of the late Republic.[157]

The relief survives in two joining fragments that preserve approximately three quarters of its original length.[158] Three scenes are shown — two are preserved in their entirety, the third only partially. The extant scenes nevertheless present a coherent story. Beginning at the right, the first scene shows a striking 'aetiological' narrative of Hercules' Ostian cult, in which a statue of Hercules is recovered from the sea along with an oracle box.[159] The next scene, in the centre of the relief, shows Hercules' cult put into action, as the god (now appearing in-person) presents an inscribed oracular tablet to an adolescent temple assistant.[160] The third, fragmentary scene depicts a togate priest-patron, who hands the oracle tablet(?) to someone in the now-missing section of the relief, who is simultaneously crowned by Victory.[161]

Giovanni Becatti first proposed that the object in the togatus' hand was the same oracular tablet shown in the central scene, now being presented to a (missing) general who receives the oracle before battle: Victory's involvement confirms its efficacy and the general's future success.[162] Given the state of the relief, this interpretation cannot be certain, and we do not know to which general or victory the monument relates, but the oracular powers of Hercules and their

[156] Bolder-Boos 2017, 56. Hercules' Ostian cult was serviced by haruspex priests: Simon 1972, 86.
[157] Hölscher 1979, 347.
[158] A clamp-hole on the left of the relief shows that another piece was once attached: Schraudolph 1993, 123.
[159] Becatti 1939, 50-55; Felleti Maj 1977, 169; Zevi 2002, 41; Moret 2012, 112. Hercules' iconography: *LIMC* Herakles, 15-31, 1388-1390 (other votive reliefs). Hercules' attributes: Kähler 1960, 124; Schraudolph 1993, 134 (both restoring a bow). Against: Boin 2010, 260-261 (Vulcan, not Hercules). Oracle box: van Haperen 2006, 32. There is no historical record of such an aetiology, and it is possible the scene instead depicts the recovery of sunken cargo that was regarded as portentous: Meiggs 1960, 349.
[160] The tablet is inscribed "ORT · H", an abbreviation of '*sortes Herculis*' (oracular responses of Hercules). Hercules' oracular function: Bolder-Boos 2017, n.35. Tablet: Moret 2012, 111. Temple assistant: Fuhrmann 1940, 441; Ritter 1995, 96; Bolder-Boos 2017, n.36. Against: Schraudolph 1993, 134 (seeing the priest-patron, not a temple assistant). A diptych in the background perhaps contained further information about the oracle written in paint: Ritter 1995, 96.
[161] Becatti 1939, 40-55; van Haeperen 2006, 33; Bolder-Boos 2017, 54. Ellen Schraudolph detects an altar near the break, where the remains of an object and a diminutive head of a male figure (perhaps an assistant) can be seen: Schraudolph 1993, 134.
[162] Becatti 1939, 40-55. Accepted: Fuhrmann 1940, 443; Simon 1972, 87; Meyer 1982, 268-270; Kuttner 1995, 58; Ritter 1995, 96; van Haperen 2006, 33.

connection with military success are clearly expressed.[163] The precise description of Hercules' religious function is appropriate for the votive context: the narrative is concerned with the particular powers of this local god. The depiction of Victory is an early Roman representation in relief of a motif (crowning) with a long previous and subsequent history.[164] Although modest in scale and quality, the relief channels the central Roman idea that the gods were the authors of mortal victory and achievement.

Two other Republican monuments (both from funerary contexts) show gods at work in narratives of victory and may be used to add depth and texture to our discussion: the first is a late-second- or first-century fragmentary frieze from the Via Appia; the second is a now-lost sella curulis-shaped tomb monument of similar date from the Villa Casali.[165] Both monuments are poorly preserved and difficult to interpret, but they confirm widespread deployment of the kinds of divinely supported victory narratives that we saw on the Hercules relief.

The fragments from the Via Appia were reconstructed by Wilhelm von Sydow as parts of a battle frieze and were assigned to a grave monument, by the foundations of which the fragments were found.[166] One of the represented figures was interpreted by von Sydow as a Greek hero, and the narrative was connected with a victory won in the east by a late Republican commander.[167] The details of this reconstruction, however, are not secure. Only four fragments of the frieze survive, and they do not permit a certain reading of the scene or its participants. The fragments (A-D) depict the following: A shows the heads and upper bodies of three warriors (one, with a plumed helmet, may be a commander, and another with an exomis and spear was for von Sydow a divinity); B preserves a battered section of a dynamic scene which includes parts of two figures in military dress; C shows the head and shoulders of a bare-chested figure and the raised arm and part of the head of another, who is perhaps wearing a cap (for von Sydow these figures represented a 'Gallic' and an eastern barbarian, respectively); and the

[163] An alternative reconstruction places Hercules in the missing section of the relief: Zevi 2002, 41-42; Moret 2012, 111; Bolder-Boos 2017, 62-65. Hugo Meyer suggests a (hypothetical) Pompey-related context: Meyer 1982, 268-270. Accepted: Kuttner 1995, 58. Other votive imagery: Schraudolph 1993, 75-84, 91-92.
[164] Previous: Pausanias, 1.3.3 (Theseus and Demos painting with possible crowning); Plutarch, *Sertorius*, 22 (mechanical Victories used in a victory celebration); RRC 329.1; Smith 1993, 38-39. Subsequent: Hölscher 1967, 62-67 (scenes of adventus and profectio), 80-92 (triumphal imagery).
[165] Republican funerary monuments: Walter 2004, 112-118.
[166] Von Sydow 1974, 187-216. Accepted: Hölscher 1988b, 363.
[167] Von Sydow 1974, 201-202, 214-216 (suggesting P. Ventidius Bassus as a possible patron).

fourth fragment, D, is a piece of the decorative frame of the frieze and is adorned with vines.[168] It should be clear from this brief description that, while von Sydow was right to connect the imagery with warfare, there is not enough of the monument left to determine which episodes or protagonists were portrayed.

For the present discussion, the important aspect is the proposed deity. A divine interpretation of the figure in question is possible, but there is in fact nothing to suggest conclusively that the figure is anything other than a mortal warrior. Von Sydow's argument was based on the figure's 'ideal' appearance and costume, but the hair and physiognomy are not clearly divine, and the figure's spear and exomis are just as easily taken as those of a mortal soldier: perhaps, given the lack of Roman armour, of an auxiliary.[169] The figure's divinity, then, is debateable. But von Sydow employed a textual comparison — a passage of Plutarch that connects a Roman commander with a Greek hero — that is perhaps still helpful. In the passage, Lucullus on campaign imagines himself being encouraged by a "form" linked with the Greek hero Autolycus. The text presents the mortal general and the heroic figure standing "side-by-side", providing a potential specific point of contact with the frieze (in the frieze, the exomis-wearing 'deity' stands right next to the commander).[170] The text thus alludes to what was perhaps represented in the frieze: the complementary fusion of mortal virtue and divine backing that was imagined to power Republican victory.[171]

The sella curulis tomb monument from the Villa Casali (Figure 5) utilises narrative ideas that will come to play a large role in imperial narrative. The monument was destroyed by fire and its imagery survives in three drawings (which differ slightly in their depiction of details), but it is clear that the monument incorporated a narrative relief.[172] The relief centres on a cuirassed commander-patron, who is crowned by one divinity and greeted by another. At the

[168] Von Sydow 1974, 195-202 (A), 198-201 (B), 202-204 (C), 204-207 (D).
[169] Von Sydow 1974, 202. Tonio Hölscher proposed Honos, but the lack of correspondence between the figure on the frieze and certain depictions of Honos makes this idea difficult: Hölscher 1988b, 363. Heroic iconography: *LIMC* Alexandros, 55, Castores, 40-41, Diomedes, 1, 38 (these figures all have longer hair than the figure in the frieze).
[170] Plutarch, *Lucullus*, 23.3; von Sydow 1974, 202.
[171] Mortals, gods, Republican victory: Polybius, 3.112; Caesar, *Gallic War*, 5.52 (success secured "both by the assistance of the immortal gods and by courage").
[172] The find-location of the monument is unknown: Schäfer 1988, 434-435; Schäfer 1989, 147, Cat.1, 233-238.

commander's feet, a female barbarian rushes in to offer her submission.[173] This group is placed in a detailed setting. On the far left is a depiction of a town, and on the far right the relief shows a reclining river god in a cave.[174] These features highlight the extra-urban, foreign location of the narrative. The location was perhaps given greater significance by the presence of three strange figures in the scene — a centaur, a lion, and a ram — which are probably best interpreted as markers of a zodiac-related geographical framework.[175] Whatever the meaning of the animal figures, the action of the narrative is clear: the commander-patron conquers foreign lands with the support of the gods.

The pairing and attributes of the divinities that congratulate and crown the commander (a helmet-wearing goddess and a half-draped god with a cornucopia, respectively) suggest they are the military gods Virtus and Honos.[176] Thomas Schäfer instead saw Roma and the Genius of the Roman People, who also fit the iconography.[177] The militaristic, frontier setting of the narrative, however, excludes these civic deities. The city goddess and urban people did not accompany commanders on campaign, and a conquering general aided by Virtus and Honos is a more logical reading of the scene. As on the Ostian Hercules relief, the gods are given a central role in a narrative of victory: the commander-patron celebrates divine recognition of his military success.[178] Closely comparable motifs are recorded on other Republican reliefs, as well as on coins and gems of the Republican period.[179] The commander's close interaction with

[173] Description: Schäfer 1989, 234-235. Thomas Schäfer considers the deity on the left to be holding a globe, but this attribute is recorded in only one of the three drawings, clearly the least accurate of the three. The globe is therefore not certain and is passed over in what follows. Comparable kneeling personifications and barbarians: Horace, *Epistles*, 1.12.25; RRC 426/1; BMC I, plate 1.10-12; Schäfer 1989, plate 20.2-4 (Republican coins).
[174] River god iconography: Klementa 1993, plates 17, 20-22.
[175] The drawings of the monument differ in terms of which animals they include: some show all three, others only one or two. Iconography: *LIMC* Zodiacus, 19.1 (ram), 19.5 (lion), 19.9, 22 (centaur). Geographical framework: Schäfer 1989, 147, 235-236. Because centaurs were astrological signs of Celtic and Spanish areas, Thomas Schäfer identifies the river as the Spanish Ebro and the town as Osca, a nearby settlement, and in turn suggests that C. Domitius Calvinus, a late Republican proconsul of Spain, may have been the patron of the monument: Schäfer 1988, 435; Schäfer 1989, 237. Schäfer also proposed that the unusual zodiac-related iconography was an erudite upgrade of conventional public imagery for an elevated and contemplative tomb context: Schäfer 1989, 147, 237. The late first-century BC tomb frieze from the Zoilos monument at Aphrodisias, for example, also presents 'elevated' action and iconography that suited its funerary context: Smith 1993, 40-41, 51-54.
[176] Iconography of Virtus and Honos: Pfanner 1983, 67-71; Spannagel 2000, 244-257.
[177] Schäfer 1988, 434; Schäfer 1989, 234. Images of Roma: Vermeule 1959, plates 1-7; RRC, 391/3. Images of the Genius of the Roman People: Kunckel 1974, plates 1-4, 8; RRC 329.1.
[178] Further: Bergmann 2010, 111-134 (crowns in military contexts). Gods such as Virtus and Honos were increasingly important in late Republican commemorations of victory: Rüpke 2012, 238-240; Davies 2017, 153.
[179] See: (1) a relief in the Vatican showing a general crowned by a deity: Kuttner 1995, fig.10; (2) a coin image of a general crowned by Juno Sospita: RRC 509/1-5; (3) a Republican gem representing a god in a scene of triumph: Maderna-Lautner 1988, fig.203; and (4) a coin depicting Pompey receiving laurel and a crown from a pair of Spanish deities: RRC 470/1c. Discussion of crowning motif: Hölscher 1982, 275; Smith 1993, 38-39; Bergmann 1998, 156.

the gods highlights his outstanding status and achievement. His courage and military ability are recognised by Virtus (greeting) and these qualities lead to further god-granted benefits (the crown of Honos).[180] This was not a symbolic representation of the commander's own virtue and honour. The personal qualities of the general are conveyed effectively by his costume (military cuirass) and by his dominance over the submitting barbarian. The gods added something different. Their interaction with the commander signifies the earned validation of his actions by the most important Roman deities associated with his area of activity.[181] The relationships between mortal commanders and enabling military gods such as Virtus and Honos would come to form a primary element of imperial narrative.

There is a final point to be made. Apart from the Hercules relief at Ostia, all the monuments discussed have unknown patrons and unidentified protagonists. This means that the gods they represent must be discussed in 'abstract' terms. Coins, on the other hand, show us that specific relationships were forged between elite individuals and their favoured divine protectors, and that different dynasts could claim connections with multiple gods.[182] Pompey and Caesar, for example, both had coins produced that emphasised their alliance with Venus, and coins of Sulla present his association with a number of gods (Venus, Victory, Apollo, Jupiter).[183] Specific divine-mortal coalitions were evidently an important component of late Republican political ideology.[184] Emperors also at times promoted special affiliations with selected gods, and the

[180] The group of Virtus-mortal-Honos is similar to the group of Andreia-mortal-Timé on the near-contemporary frieze of the Zoilos monument at Aphrodisias: Smith 1993, 28-32, plate 33.

[181] Compare, for example, the unstinting list given by Fabius Pictor (quoted by Varro) of the gods invoked in sacrifices to Ceres: "*Veruactorem, Redaratorem, Inporcitorem; Insitorem, Obaratorem, Occatorem, Sarritorem, Subruncinatorem; Messorem, Conuectorem, Conditorem, Promitorem*" (Field-sweeper, Plougher, Furrow-maker, Sower, Over-plougher, Harrower, Hoe-worker, Weeder, Cutter, Collector, Storer, Grain-bringer). For Romans, even these minor figures could be conceived as active deities: we should thus resist allegorical interpretations of significant gods such as Virtus and Honos. For the full text and discussion of this passage and others like it: Rüpke 2012, 181-184.

[182] See, for example, the following studies, all of which include analysis of Republican coin images of gods: Hölscher 1967, 136-156; Hölscher 1982, 269-282; Crawford 1985, 152-194, 240-255; Classen 1986, 257-279; Trillmich 1988, 474-528; Kemmers 2019, 15-20.
Ritter 1995, 28-30, 44-47, 60-63, 66-68; Alföldi 1999, 28-41; Wolters 1999, 23-37.

[183] These phenomena belong to the last phases of the Republic (c.100-30 BC). Since probably the late third century a board of three junior magistrates (the *tresviri monetales*) had been primarily responsible for the designing and minting of coins: Crawford 1974, 598-604; Wolters 1999, 290 (in times of civil war, commanders sometimes produced coins themselves, 'unofficially', for their armies and supporters). Pompeian coins and Venus: RRC, 424/1, 426/3; Fears 1981, 800-804. Also: Plutarch, *Pompey*, 68 (Pompey fears Venus will abandon him for Caesar). Caesarean coins and Venus: RRC, 458/1, 468/1-2, 481/1, 482/1; Wolters 1999, 36. Sulla and gods on coins: Fears 1981, 790-797; Ramage 1991, 102-106.

[184] Hölscher 1982, 269-276; Alföldi 1999, 33-41; Wolters 1999, 32-37. The 'theological' postures of leading figures had deep-seated effects, encompassing visual representations (reliefs, coins), architectural statements (monuments, temples), and political-religious policies (such as new or enhanced rituals): Zanker 1998, 64; Stein-Hölkeskamp 2013, 429-445 (both on Sulla's impact in these areas).

legitimacy of their supreme position rested in part on their unique ability to mediate with the entire pantheon. The remnants of Republican narrative imagery preserve these key ideas in nascent form, but for us it is only in the imperial period that partnerships between nameable individuals and their patron gods are brought together in a unified vision within the detailed dramaturgy of monumental reliefs.

**Republican images: concluding discussion**

We have seen that the gods were participants in a range of narratives and that they expressed a range of meanings — cultic, topographical, legitimising, aetiological. Ritual sanction, victorious crowning, and protective presence represent the three main actions of the gods across the two key, religious and victory-related, zones of Republican narrative. The search for a legitimate relationship between religious activity, the commemoration of conquest, and political power dominated late Republican public life, and a basic priority of narrative reliefs was to make the gods present in these central political areas.[185] The division of themes in the preceding discussion was partly artificial: the ritual narratives of the Borghese Altar and the 'Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus', for example, both have marked military aspects, and the imagery of the Ostian Hercules relief is concerned as much with religious action as it is with the celebration of victory. That said, it is possible to draw a distinction between distanced, 'unseen' ritual-style representations of gods in sacrificial narratives, and more direct authorisations of military action presented in victory-related scenes.

We may also distinguish two broad chronological phases within the period under consideration (c.200-30 BC). In the first (c.200-130 BC), elite consensus in the face of strong external enemies meant that internal political collaboration retained high currency. In the second phase (c.130-30 BC), senatorial co-operation broke down, the need for wide-ranging commands increasingly outstripped the ability of the aristocracy to govern, and individual power was privileged over the preservation of collective norms. As a result, religious and military actions were increasingly tied to particular statesmen.[186] Prodigies, for example, moved from communal interpretation into the biographical episodes of leading individuals;[187] temple

[185] Hölscher 2016, 285.
[186] Fears 1981, 787-804; Rüpke 2012, 218-219.
[187] North 1986, 256; Wallace-Hadrill 1995, 192. Communal: Livy, 4.18. Individual: Suetonius, *Caesar*, 81.

building became more closely connected with individual commanders;[188] and claims of personal divine protection rose to the highest levels of political discourse.[189]

The monuments could be presented as developing in related ways, with later images showing an increased focus on individuals and their personal relationships with protective gods. We could, for example, place the pious narratives of sacrifice in the earlier, more co-operative period (c.200-130 BC), and assign the assertive victory scenes to the final, more volatile phase of the Republic (c.130-30 BC). The sacrificial pediment from the Via San Gregorio is probably the earliest monument of those discussed; the ritual scene on the 'Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus' is dated in its most recent publication to the late second century, not the first;[190] and most experts would place the victory celebrations of the Via Appia frieze and the sella curulis tomb monument in the last generation of the Republic, where the competitive coin images of Pompey, Caesar, and others certainly belong. There is probably some truth in this, but the uncertain dates of the monuments do not allow us to set up a chronological axis of development with certainty, and we should probably allow for a more heterogenous, evolving system, in which different elements co-existed for the different expressive purposes required in different contexts. The piety of votive images, the status projection of honorific monuments, and the posthumous aggrandisement of funerary reliefs were all filtered and sharpened through the participation of legitimising gods.

With divinely backed ritual activity and protective military action, the monuments of the Republic brought many of the basic components of imperial narrative into play. The subsequent development of this system, however, was not predictable. The dramaturgy of Roman narrative was continually reworked, with new strands added to serve new needs and contexts. The second part of this chapter takes a group of significant Augustan monuments as a case study and shows how late Republican trends were redirected by the demands of the Augustan regime. With the

[188] Rüpke 1990, 236-241; Ziolkowski 1992, 235-236, 307; Orlin 1997, 194-197; Davies 2017, 242-244, 272-275.
[189] Hölscher 1967, 141-154; Weinstock 1970, 80-132, 270-305; Wiseman 1974, 153-164; Ramage 1991, 106 (Sulla and Venus); Beard, North, and Price 1998, 137-139 (Cicero and Clodius). See also the shift in late Republican coin imagery towards individual-oriented representations: Hölscher 1967, 80-81; Fears 1981, 787-804; Classen 1986, 261-262, 264; Hölscher 2019, 241.
[190] Maschek 2018, 27-52.

visual worlds of the Republic and the early principate in view, we will then be ready to address the major monuments of the imperial period.

**Monuments and gods under Augustus (c.30 BC-AD 14)**

The Augustan period provides the first Roman narrative reliefs with identifiable dates, contexts, and protagonists.[191] Augustan images offer a detailed view of the treatment of gods in the earliest stages of imperial narrative, but they are in some ways unusual. There are, for instance, no monumental examples of the divinely assisted campaigns and ceremonies that will come to form the bulk of imperial reliefs. There are no big battles, departures, arrivals, or civic events that involve the gods. To some extent this is perhaps a result of the random survival of the evidence, but we will also see that Augustan narrative had a time-specific character. The divine aspects of the new regime were carefully controlled, and there are few public or official instances in which the emperor is shown in direct association with the gods. As with Augustus' deferential behaviour towards the senate, his refusal of explicit divine honours in Rome, and his contrived synthesis of 'Republican' powers and titles, the emperor in narrative was partly defined through a posture of calculated 'modesty', which in some contexts avoided potentially overbearing associations with the gods.[192]

This aspect of Augustan visual culture has been known in outline since Paul Zanker's seminal study *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, which described the creation of a new visual language that moved away from aggrandising late Republican practices.[193] Augustan images, on this view, depict relationships between gods and mortals in a modest or subtle manner, in order to express the idea of a return to an idealised Republican past in which state religion and collective institutions came before powerful individuals and their divine protectors. It is also well established that the principate witnessed the increasing use of new elevated forms of representation, such as court cameos, but the idea that the emperor's official relationship with

[191] Earlier images with good contexts, such as those on some coins and on the frieze of the monument of Aemilius Paullus at Delphi, are few and scattered. Paullus' monument: Kähler 1965; Taylor 2016, 559-574. Republican coins: above, note 182.
[192] Deferential to the senate: Suetonius, *Augustus*, 53-55; Brunt 1984, 423-444. Refusal of divine honours: Zanker 1988, 302-315; Koortbojian 2013, 155-226. Titles and Powers: Wallace-Hadrill 1982, 32-48; Rich 2012, 37-88; Koortbojian 2020, 43-77.
[193] Zanker 1988. On the transition from Republican to Augustan art and culture: Walter 2004, 408-426; Hölscher 2019, 266-284.

the gods was conditioned by a calculated 'modesty' is widely accepted. The view has been advanced most recently by John Pollini, who argues that, in contrast to earlier and later periods, Augustan art preferred indirect associations between men and gods.[194] Monuments such as the Ara Pacis, which depict contemporary and mythological imagery in separate zones, can be used to make this point. The dissociation of men and gods in narrative can be placed alongside other sensitive Augustan reformulations, such as the emperor's innovative portrait image and new carefully managed political position.[195]

The idea of Augustan 'modesty', however, is in some respects limited. Augustus emerged as a new centre in Roman society and had to perform a range of conflicting political roles. The emperor was simultaneously supreme general, chief priest, leading consul, and semi-divine father of his house and country. He had to be a commander to the army, a collaborative leader to the senate, a monarch to his dynastic supporters, and a legitimate statesman in the face of potential rival factions. The visual narration of the emperor's sovereignty unfolded in this new political landscape, and a stratified picture begins to emerge, with the presentation of the emperor's relationship to the gods mutating depending on the audience of the image in question and on which aspect of Augustus' power was emphasised in that context.[196] The transition from Republic to empire initiated an unpredictable search for effective means of commemorating the imperial phenomenon that now faced Roman society. This entailed an expanded range of divine narrative roles that helped to compose the varied visual episodes in which Rome's new imperial protagonist was called to act. In place of a unified or all-encompassing change, therefore, the following discussion offers a context-based model of Augustan narrative, in which the 'modest' or 'deferential' manner employed by monuments such as the Ara Pacis supplemented rather than supplanted direct modes of divine-mortal interaction that had emerged under the Republic. Direct interaction was now deployed in different (often private) circumstances. This context-based narrative system materialised in the principate to help to define this unprecedented Roman political project.

[194] Pollini 2012, 79-93.
[195] Portraits: Smith 1996, 30-47. Political position: *Res Gestae*, 4.4, 7-8, 34.3; Cotton and Yakobson 2002, 193-209; Rich 2012, 37-88. On an analogous 'modest' Augustan approach to nude and armoured portrait statues and military imagery: Hallett 2005, 160, 341.
[196] On the commissioning and design of images in the principate: Kelly 2020, 128-149.

The first, triumviral stage of Augustus' career (44-31 BC) is distinct mainly in hindsight.[197] For contemporaries it was an intensified extension of the highly charged phase of Republican politics that preceded it. Here, Augustus used all the tools of divine association that we have already discussed. In the Augustan period proper (c.30 BC-AD 14), a change occurred: the emperor's official public position was reconfigured as deferential towards the gods, and more explicit divine-mortal relationships were depicted in different, private contexts. In the following sections, the relevant major monuments — the 'official' Ara Pacis, Prima Porta Augustus, and Sorrento Base, and the 'private' Boscoreale cups and Gemma Augustea — are discussed first, before a concluding account is given of the complex treatment of gods across Augustan narrative. We will see that deities were protagonists in the dramatisation of Augustan politics, and that they had their own varied narrative roles that complemented those of the emperor.

**Augustus and the gods on official monuments**

The triumviral period (44-31 BC) witnessed extensive recycling of late Republican modes of representation.[198] Augustus' relationship with the gods was promoted in a number of ways. We have, for example: coins pairing the future emperor with important deities; politically charged temple projects; and reports of circulating stories that linked Augustus with gods such as Jupiter.[199] Augustus' relationship with the gods was even 'performed' at public events. For instance, during a festival in the early 30s BC, Neptune's image was removed from the procession due to the god's perceived allegiance to Augustus' rival, Sextus Pompey.[200] Divine support was clearly important for leading figures, but no narrative reliefs relevant to our theme survive from this time. Some measure of Augustus' aggrandising posture is provided by the imposing nude statues and other elevated public images produced in this period.[201] Like the other leading statesmen of his day, the triumviral Augustus comes across as a divinely favoured military dynast.[202]

[197] Syme 1939, 313-330; Zanker 1988, 79-100. Recently, on some of the art of the period: Hallett 2018, 181-201.
[198] Hölscher 1967, 157-159; Hölscher 1988b, 351-352; Zanker 1988, 33-77; Hölscher 2019, 266-267.
[199] Coins: Zanker 1988, 53-57; Gurval 1995, 47-65. Temples: Suetonius, *Augustus*, 29; Hekster and Rich 2006, 149-168; Zanker 1988, 65-72. Circulating stories: Suetonius, *Augustus*, 94-96.
[200] Suetonius, *Augustus*, 16. Sextus and Neptune: Dio Cassius, 48.48.
[201] Burnett 1987, 73; Zanker 1988, 37-43; Hallett 2005, 97-99.
[202] Gurval 1995, 87-111; Lange 2009, 39-48.

Following Actium and Augustus' political settlements in the 20s BC, changed political circumstances started to shape a new ideological attitude, as Augustus and the senatorial elite responded to the emperor's position with a carefully negotiated process of honours, modifications, and acceptances.[203] In part, the emperor now sought to reflect glory away from himself and onto state divinities. The well-known claim that Augustus removed eighty silver statues of himself and replaced them with gifts to Apollo highlights this new attitude.[204] Unlike the institution of Hellenistic kingship, the principate entailed a conflict between the monarchic position of the ruler and the professed ideology of the system, in which the emperor was merely an authoritative leading senator.[205] The presentation of Augustus as deferential towards the gods was one response to this conflict: ultimate power belonged to the Olympians, Augustus was simply their pious servant.[206]

Two major Augustan monuments, the Prima Porta Augustus and the Ara Pacis, confirm this attitude and record the pointed visual manner in which it was advertised to contemporaries. The Ara Pacis (9 BC) in particular can be considered emblematic.[207] It is mentioned prominently in the *Res Gestae*,[208] and the elements of its visual programme — state sacrifice, the imperial family, the mythology of Romulus and Aeneas — are reflected consistently across the art of the period.[209] The monument's principle of human-divine separation was also applied to Agrippa's Pantheon.[210] The imagery of the Ara Pacis, therefore, may be taken as representative, and it can be used to make our argument quickly. The Ara's north and south friezes represent a religious procession in which Augustus takes part. The emperor is depicted as a real-looking mortal magistrate, and no gods or other non-human figures participate.[211] The panel reliefs on the east and west of the altar enclosure, by contrast, are wholly divine and

[203] Hölscher 1988b, 353-356; Zanker 1988, 79-100; Rich 1998, 71-79; von den Hoff 2011, 15-26. On the victory monument at Nicopolis/Actium: Lange 2016, 141-153.
[204] *Res Gestae*, 24.2.
[205] Conflict: Bergmann 1998, 3-4, 14-21. Ideology: *Res Gestae*, 34.3; Hölscher 2019, 258-266.
[206] Zanker 1998, 78-80.
[207] Key studies: Toynbee 1953, 67-95; Simon 1967; Borbein 1975, 242-266; Settis 1988, 400-426; Billows 1993, 80-92.
[208] It receives its own chapter: *Res Gestae*, 12.
[209] Zanker 1988, 111-112, 195, 201-209.
[210] Statues of gods were placed inside the temple, statues of mortals outside: Dio Cassius, 53.27.3; Thomas 2017, 146-189.
[211] Against: Hannestad, 1986, 69 (restoring a trio of deities — Pax, Salus, and Concordia — to the missing sections of the south frieze). This idea is very unlikely. Augustus appears as a member of the important *quindecemviri sacris faciundis* college of priests.

mythological. The associations between Augustus and the divine are thus indirect, and the intervention of the gods is excluded from contemporary politics.[212]

The statue of Augustus from Prima Porta, which is probably a copy of a public original produced around 19 BC, illustrates a comparable separation of men and gods.[213] The mortal element is represented by Augustus' portrait head and armoured body, and the divine component is concentrated in the relief narrative on the emperor's cuirass, the cast of which is entirely superhuman.[214] Again, the roles of men and gods are separate and Augustus' association with the divine is implied, not narrated. Despite this, many scholars have read the cuirass as a reflection of Augustus' god-like nature, seeing the emperor as a "god above the heavens", a "cosmocrat", or a "saviour, benefactor, and inaugurator of a new golden age".[215] These interpretations underestimate the role of the gods in the narrative on the cuirass, and characterise the statue as a statement of straightforward glorification, when it might be better placed next to the Ara Pacis as a symbol of the new 'modest' Augustan attitude. It will therefore be helpful to look more closely at the narrative in order to assess the monument's meaning.

The cuirass (Figure 6) displays eleven figures in three registers, upper, middle, and lower, and is unique among statues with relief-decorated armour in that its imagery refers to a specific historical situation, the narrative of which is spotlighted in the central scene of its middle zone.[216] On the right of this central scene, a Parthian, equipped with bow and quiver, presents a standard to a figure on the left.[217] The Parthian's male gender suggests he is a royal

[212] On the indirect connections between Augustus and the mythological panels: Zanker 1988, 204-205.
[213] The statue was found in an imperial villa at Prima Porta, outside Rome: Kähler 1959, 7-9; Klynne and Liljenstolpe 2000, 121-128. Earlier literature: Jucker 1977, 19-35. Key studies: Kähler 1959; Zanker 1988, 183-192; Simon 1991, 204-233; Pollini 1995, 262-282; von den Hoff 2009, 252; Buxton 2012, 277-306; Squire 2013, 242-279; Cornwell 2017, 150-152. The incomplete tropaeum and wing on the back of the cuirass, as well as the strong political themes of the imagery, suggest that the statue is a copy of a public original: Hölscher 1988b, 388; Koortbojian 2020, 25-27. Cuirassed statues that could be viewed all around often had decoration on the back: Stemmer 1978, plates 7.2, 39.3, 54.2.
[214] The cupid statue-support connects Augustus with the divine in a subtle way: Hallett 2005, 232-233. Relief-decorated cuirasses: Stemmer 1978, 139-151; Laube 2006.
[215] God: Kähler 1959, 19. Cosmocrat: Bradley 2009, 448. Saviour: Pollini 1995, 276.
[216] Only the Augustan(?) cuirassed statue from Cherchel is comparable in this respect: Fittschen 1976, 175-210.
[217] The standard combines features of the *aquila* (eagle-topped shaft) and *signum* (decorated pole): Pollini 1978, 48-49. The bow and quiver can be seen by figure's left arm. The quiver has a round cross-section, and so cannot be a scabbard. The bow is indicated in subtle relief with a curved end (visible below the standard ornament over the figure's chest). These weapons confirm a Parthian identity. Against: Simpson 2005, 82-90; Buxton 2012, 277-286 (both discounting the bow and quiver). Parthians and bows: Plutarch, *Crassus*, 30.2; Horace, *Odes*, 2.18; Ovid, *Fasti*, 5.575-595; Virgil, *Georgics*, 3.31-32; Virgil, *Aeneid*, 12.946; RIC I, 517.

representative (rather than a geographical personification).[218] The combination of Parthian and standard suggests a narrative related to Augustus' Parthian settlement of 20-19 BC, specifically one which describes the return of the lost standards, here represented *pars pro toto* in a single object.[219] Augustus' settlement generated a significant artistic output, and contemporary political rhetoric positioned Roman dominance over the east as a pre-requisite for the legitimate order of things.[220] For the design to have had the greatest impact, the original public statue was probably produced around this time.

The recipient of the standard(s) is represented on the left of the central scene. He wears ideal armour (fur boots, 'classical' cuirass, pseudo-attic helmet) and is accompanied by a dog. His identity is not certain. The figure's long hair and ideal armour evoke divinity,[221] and the most frequently suggested name is Mars, who is appropriate for the iconography.[222] Mars was an important Augustan divinity, both generally and for the Parthian settlement in particular.[223] For example, coin images of Mars holding the standards, and the report in the *Res Gestae* that the real objects were deposited in the god's temple, suggest that Mars was regarded as a genuine historical actor in the settlement.[224] The god is thus the most logical interpretation for the figure on the cuirass. We see a young, warlike, active Mars. His canine companion can be read as part of the empire's defensive apparatus.[225] By placing Mars at the centre, the narrative connects with Augustan ideology. The gods, not the emperor, are shown to be responsible for contemporary achievements.[226]

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[218] Ethnic and geographical personifications are usually female. The figure also wears a 'royal' headband or diadem: Meyer 1983, 130-131. Specific kings: Ingholt 1969, 185 (Mithridates); Hölscher 1988b, 386 (Phraates IV).
[219] Settlement: *Res Gestae*, 29.2, 32-33; Suetonius, *Augustus*, 21.3; Dio Cassius, 54.8.1; Bleicken 2015, 315-318.
[220] Zanker 1988, 183-192; Rich 1998, 71-80; Rose 2005, 22-28.
[221] Tiberius has been suggested: Kleiner 1992, 67.
[222] Mars: Fittschen 1976, 204; Zanker 1988, 189; Simon 1991, 207-209; Hölscher 2019, 267. Compare: *LIMC* Mars, 21, 184, 188, 209-225, 307. Against: Pollini 1978, 25 (personified Roman army); Rose 2005, 24-28 (Roma). The hair is too short for Roma, and the only known representation of Roma wearing a cuirass comes from Aphrodisias, where there were specific local reasons for depicting the goddess in this way: Smith 2013, 166. The physiognomy of the figure also accords better with Augustan relief images of males: Kähler 1959, plates 16, 28.
[223] Generally: Virgil, *Aeneid*, 8.671-713 (Mars at Actium); Suetonius, *Augustus*, 18 (Mars credited with Actian victory), 29 (vow to Mars before Philippi); Dio Cassius, 53.27.2 (Mars in Agrippa's Pantheon); RIC I, 250a (Actian coinage featuring Mars' weapons); Zanker 1988, 195-201. Parthian settlement and Mars: *Res Gestae*, 29.2 (standards deposited in Mars' temple); Ovid, *Fasti*, 5.594-595; RIC I, 28, 39, 41, 58, 68-74, 84, 103-106 (coins relating to the settlement that depict Mars); Rich 1998, 80-81; Rose 2005, 22-24; Beckmann 2016, 130-135.
[224] For sources: see previous note.
[225] Some have read the animal as a wolf: Simon 1991, 209. Roman dogs as defensive apparatus: Virgil, *Aeneid*, 8.461; Fittschen 1972, fig.11 (guard dog in a frontier scene on the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum); Mayor 2014, 286-287 (dogs and Roman warfare).
[226] Ideology: Suetonius, *Augustus*, 58 (Augustus credits the gods with his success); Zanker 1988, 85-89, 102-110.

The other figures on the cuirass provide an elevating framework for the key event in the centre. Two armed female figures seated on rocks at the edges of the middle register represent defeated warlike peoples. They perhaps incarnate Spanish and Gallic nations, promoting with the Parthian the idea that Augustan victory ranges from east to west.[227] In the upper register, four astrological gods — Sol,[228] Caelus,[229] Aurora,[230] and Luna[231] — supply the narrative with a high-toned temporal setting. In literature and art gods such as Aurora and Sol usually appear to mark specific, decisive episodes.[232] Here, they emphasise that the narrative took place on a single pivotal day. The significance of the narrative is underlined by the figures at the bottom of the cuirass — Tellus, Apollo, and Diana — three weighty Augustan gods who protect the world in which the return of the standards takes place.[233]

The central role of the gods on the cuirass echoes the manner of divine representation found in Latin epic, in which distinct divine personalities were given decisive narrative functions.[234] We might compare, for example, Virgil's shield of Aeneas, a similarly sophisticated microcosm of divinely moulded Roman history, in which the gods take a leading, physical role.[235] The cuirass thus uses the gods to translate the operations of Augustan foreign policy into visual historical epic. Understanding the imagery in this way has implications for our interpretation of the monument. The idea that the Prima Porta statue is a representation of Augustus as a "god" or "cosmocrat" should probably be adjusted. The emperor's association with the cuirass and its god-driven narrative carried a heavy positive thrust, but the point was to emphasise the role of the gods in the creation of Augustus' supremacy, not to reiterate the emperor's virtues in allegorical fashion. Recognising the 'reality' of the gods as clearly defined actors allows us to see that the cuirass will have served partly to shield the emperor from accusations of

[227] Hölscher 1988b, 386-387; Squire 2013, 251.
[228] Compare: Horace, *Carmen Saeculare*, 9-12; Stemmer, 1978, plates 34.1, 64-65; *LIMC* Helios/Sol, 124-125, 146-147.
[229] Kähler 1959, 17; Zanker 1988, 191; Squire 2013, 253. Against, preferring Saturn: Hölscher 1988b, 387; Simon 1991, 213; Hölscher 2019, 269. The figure's 'mantle' is too large for Saturn's veil, compare: *LIMC* Kronos, 23.
[230] Aurora flying with Sol: Virgil, *Aeneid*, 11.182-183, 11.913-914.
[231] The figure is overlapped ('outshone') by Aurora, and her torch and swift motion suggest that she incarnates the passing night making way before Sol's chariot: Zanker 1988, 191. Against: Hölscher 2019, 269 (Venus).
[232] Literature: Virgil, *Aeneid*, 7.26, 11.182-183; Statius, *Thebaid*, 3.440-441. Art: Ehrhardt 2004, 32-38.
[233] Tellus: *LIMC* Tellus, 35, 69. The goddess is also depicted on the Ara Pacis: Zanker 1988, 172-179. Augustan Apollo: Horace, *Carmen Saeculare*, 61-68; Simon 1957, 30-44; Zanker 1988, 49-50; Gurval 1995, 87-111; Lange 2009, 39-48. Diana: Virgil, *Aeneid*, 11.557; *LIMC* Artemis, 1338, 1348.
[234] Epic gods: Feeney 1991; Feeney 2007, 173-202.
[235] Shield: Virgil, *Aeneid*, 8.608-731.

transgressive self-glorification. Michael Koortbojian has recently suggested that the statue's striking armoured costume was chosen to highlight the emperor's authoritative legal status as a holder of supreme and wide-ranging *imperium*.[236] The visual rhetoric of the narrative on the cuirass connects this new imperial authority to the work of the divine. The gods are presented as the drivers of Augustan history, and their legitimising intervention infuses potentially unstable monarchic power with an air of cosmic inevitability.

The Ara Pacis and the Prima Porta Augustus, then, were designed to express a measured, 'deferential' image of the emperor as a powerful and legitimate leader who is favoured by the gods, but who is only subordinately and indirectly associated with them. This careful visual construction of imperial power is also found on a monument set up outside Rome, the Sorrento Base, which presents a 'Republican-style' ritual narrative of the emperor conducting sacrifice. The Base thus provides further support for the idea that Augustan public images were shaped by a 'modest' understanding of the emperor's relationship with the gods.

The Base was (probably) found in the Sorrento area south of Naples, and perhaps functioned as a statue base.[237] Two large fragments are extant (preserving approximately half of the base), from which the imagery of all four of its relief-decorated sides can be reconstructed.[238] The main long side (Figure 7) represents a procession of the Vestal Virgins and (probably) Augustus to the temple of Vesta.[239] The goddess herself is seated before the temple, accompanied by two uncertainly identified female divinities.[240] Augustus' leadership of the vestals suggests a date after 12 BC (his assumption of the office of *Pontifex Maximus*).[241] The other sides of the Base depict the Apolline triad,[242] Mars and (perhaps) the Genius Augusti,[243] and a scene related to Cybele-Magna Mater.[244] These are official constellations — the Apolline

[236] Koortbojian 2020, 25-40.
[237] Rizzo 1932, 7-15, 101-109; Roccos 1989, 573-574.
[238] Rizzo 1932, 16-24.
[239] The central section, featuring the protagonist, is badly weathered: Ryberg 1955, 50-51; Kuttner 1995, 61-62. The temple is identified as that of Vesta by its round structure and by the presence of the Palladium inside: Hölscher 1988b, 375-376. On the Palladium generally: Schürmann 1985, 17-47. Giulio Rizzo suggested the inauguration of the temple as the subject of the narrative: Rizzo 1932, 25-50. On Augustus' relationship with and reverence for Vesta: Augustus, *Res Gestae*, 21.2; Zanker 1988, 207.
[240] The deities could be interpreted, for example, as Flora and Ceres. Discussion: Hölscher 1988b, 375-376.
[241] Ryberg 1955, 50-51.
[242] Rizzo 1932, 51-77; Simon 1957, 43; Roccos 1989, 571-588.
[243] Rizzo 1932, 78-91; Hölscher 1988b, 377.
[244] Rizzo 1932, 92-100.

figures, for example, have been convincingly connected with Augustan cult statues — and the images are clearly concerned with Augustan manifestations of the divine.[245]

The side with the emperor represents a typical votive-style composition. Augustus is separated from the gods by an altar and is depicted like the other mortals at a slightly reduced scale compared to the main goddess. The emperor thus appears as an ostensibly modest figure within an otherwise divinely focused iconographic programme. But, as noted by Tonio Hölscher, the emperor is simultaneously a simple, pious worshipper and the linchpin of the entire monument: all the deities have personal relevance to Augustus.[246] The monument consequently allows the emperor to be presented in an indirect, deniable manner as both the focus of state religion and as a mere servant of its divine superstructure. Augustus and the gods are shown in the same visual field, but as on Republican ritual reliefs such as the 'Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus', the gods do not personally interact with the protagonist. The sacrificial theme provides a strong narrative justification for the 'real' appearance of the gods. The Base thus reinforces the picture of carefully negotiated 'modesty' discussed so far.

**Augustus and the gods in other contexts: the Boscoreale cups and the Gemma Augustea**

Within the logic of official imperial protocol, Augustus was not qualitatively different from any other leading magistrate. He was pre-eminent, but mortal, with the primary emphasis placed on his constitutional legitimacy and the official magistracies through which this was exercised. From this perspective, a special direct relationship between the emperor and the gods was potentially too volatile to be permitted a central role in political representation. In other contexts, however, the calculated deference of official monuments was neither necessary nor desirable. For regime loyalists, Augustus was a heroic victor and the direct representative of the gods on earth, and in the sphere of semi-private imperial commemoration, Augustus' explicit interaction with the gods was more easily expressed. We have two major artefacts from this context. The first, the Boscoreale cups, reproduces the conquest, triumph, and sacrifice narratives of state reliefs for a private setting, in which Augustus' interaction with the gods is warmly embraced. The second example, the great cameo known as the Gemma Augustea, presents a jewel-like reformulation of Augustan power designed for the imperial court.

[245] Roccos 1989, 571-588; Hölscher 1988b, 376; Zanker 1988, 240-241.
[246] Hölscher 1988b, 378.

Together, the cups and the cameo provide vital alternative layers of early imperial narrative that need to be set alongside the time-specific 'modesty' of monuments such as the Ara Pacis. The direct divine-mortal interaction that they display constitutes an important part of the background to many later imperial narratives.

The Boscoreale cups are a pair of silver drinking vessels (*skyphoi*) decorated with a remarkable set of high-quality narrative images.[247] Four scenes are displayed, two on each cup: (1) Augustus and gods; (2) Augustus and barbarians; (3) Tiberius sacrificing; and (4) Tiberius in triumph. Roman silver was usually decorated with mythological or Dionysian imagery, and the exceptional political nature of the Boscoreale cups has provoked suggestions of a (now-lost) public monument from which the scenes were copied.[248] This hypothesis has been strongly argued for by the leading authority on the vessels, Ann Kuttner, who proposed a single original monument of 8-7 BC, the imagery of which she feels is closely reproduced by the cups.[249] Her dating depends on a figure she identifies as Drusus the Elder, who if present would provide a terminus ante quem for the conception of the scenes of 9 BC (Drusus' death). The portrait identification, however, is not typologically secure, and without Drusus the pairing of Augustus and Tiberius suggests a later date of c.AD 12, in connection with Tiberius' Pannonian triumph and after his adoption as Augustus' successor.[250] The relationship of the cups to any public monument(s), although possible, remains open. The compositions clearly draw heavily from the visual language of monumental relief, but the extent of any borrowings and the nature of their adjustment are unknowable. The cups are discussed here as private commemorative objects.

The scene of Augustus and gods (Figure 8) is the focus of the present discussion. It shows a seated emperor, Augustus, who is approached from the left by Venus and Amor, and from the right by Mars and a group of conquered ethnic personifications.[251] Two further gods stand at

[247] Main publication: Kuttner 1995. Further: Hölscher 1980, 281-288. Find context (a villa near Boscoreale): Kuttner 1995, 6-9. The cups were possibly used in celebrations of the emperor's birthday or cult: Simon 1986, 139-150; Kuttner 1995, 7.
[248] Roman silver: Simon 1957, 52-53; Kuttner 1995, 1-3; Faust and Hildebrandt 2015, 101-102, 106-108.
[249] Kuttner 1995, 193-198. Accepted: Hölscher 1996, 801. Rejected: Kleiner 1997, 377-378 (favouring multiple prototypes). Alternative suggested dates: Zanker 1988, 228 (AD 12); Kleiner 1992, 152 (Tiberian).
[250] Tiberius' portrait may also suggest a 'late' (c.AD 12) date: Faust and Hildebrandt 2015, 109.
[251] The depiction of Venus draws from late Republican and Augustan images of the goddess, which possibly referred to the Caesarean cult statue of Venus Genetrix by Arkesilaos: Pliny, *Natural History*, 35.155-156; Kuttner 1995, 23; Kropp 2016, 203-210. Compare: *LIMC* Aphrodite, 598 (Civita Castellana base); Zanker 1968, 14 (Mars

the left of the scene. Apart from the emperor, there are no mortals, whereas the other three Boscoreale narratives contain only human participants. The scene thus stands out as an elevated narrative tableau, the core action of which is the dramatisation of divinely granted victory.

The Amazonian female deity and the half-draped male god on the left of the scene are probably Virtus and Honos, who suit the iconography of the figures and the military theme of the narrative.[252] Scholars such as Tonio Hölscher and Ann Kuttner have preferred to see Roma and the Genius of the Roman People, but this pair is not well attested.[253] The Genius of the People should belong with the Genius of the Senate, who is clearly not depicted here.[254] Virtus and Honos are thus the only secure option. Their warlike identities dovetail with the frontier setting of the narrative. The conquered personifications with Mars are matched by subdued barbarians in the scene on the other side of the cup, and we are clearly dealing with narratives of victory and campaigning. By contrast, it is difficult to see what Roma and the Genius of the People would be doing in such a context.

At the centre of the scene, Venus places a Victory onto a globe in Augustus' hand. Victory-on-a-globe was to become an important imperial attribute, and the specific image and its use as a hand-held insignia were both introduced in the Augustan period.[255] The emperor set up a statue of Victory on a globe in the senate house to commemorate Actium, which Dio Cassius suggests signified the goddess from whom Augustus had received the empire.[256] A similar idea is inherent in the Boscoreale narrative, and Ann Kuttner proposed a quite direct connection between the statue, Actium, and the cup.[257] This is possible, but Victory-on-a-globe had been used in a number of contexts since 31 BC, including on coins associated with the Parthian

Ultor pediment); Zanker 1988, fig.151 (Algiers relief). All these images share the long chiton, hip-mantle, and accompanying Amor of the Venus on the cup. Mars is depicted wearing a 'heroic' cuirass (without ptergyes) and a winged Corinthian helmet.

[252] Virtus and Honos: Pfanner 1983, 67-71; Simon 1986, 143; Kleiner 1992, 153; Kleiner 1997, 378. Iconography: BMC I, 255; RIC II, 374.

[253] Hölscher 1980, 282; Kuttner 1995, 18; Hölscher 2019, 280-282.

[254] Pfanner 1983, 67-71.

[255] Victory-on-a-globe: Alföldi 1970(=1934/1935), 235-238; Hölscher 1967, 22, 28-30. Hand-held globes: RRC, 397/1 (god); BMC I, 609 (Augustus). Hand-held Victory: RRC, 480/17-18 (Venus); BMC I, 637 (Augustus). Victory-on-a-globe: RIC I, 415 (divine Caesar); Zwierlein-Diehl 2007, fig.603 (triton, on an Augustan cameo).

[256] Dio Cassius, 51.22.1-2 ("Augustus dedicated the temple of Minerva and the Curia Iulia, which had been built in honour of his father. In the latter he set up the statue of Victory which is still in existence, thus signifying that it was from her that he had received the empire.").

[257] Kuttner 1995, 25-26.

settlement, suggesting that Actium should perhaps not be seen as the primary point of contact for the image.[258] The Boscoreale Victory is better connected with the conquered peoples or *gentēs* that accompany Mars. Among these personifications, a Gallic, an Asian, and an African figure are recognisable, representing the three continents of the ancient world and evoking an expansive set of conquests.[259] The narrative thus makes a global statement about the power of the emperor, and characterises Augustus' victorious rule as a gift from the gods.[260]

The scene is bold in comparison with official Augustan images, and its depiction of divinely charged imperial power was no doubt welcomed by the regime-supporting owner of the cup, for whom it is possible the scene was adapted or created.[261] The scene is often described as an "all-out panegyric" or as a "glorification of (Augustus) as a new divinity".[262] It has even been characterised as a depiction of the "submission of the gods".[263] But, while these formulations capture the positive force of the image, the meaning of the narrative perhaps lies elsewhere. The emperor does not appear as a "new divinity", but as a togate human magistrate, without divine attributes. The idea of the "submission of the gods" is also a misunderstanding. The scene in fact displays the opposite: Mars alone guards the conquered peoples, and Venus' gift of Victory is articulated in detail. The mechanics of Augustan rule are shown to be powered by the gods. The narrative, in other words, frames the principate as a collaborative partnership of mortal and divine power. The gods do not simply reflect or submit to Augustus' sovereignty — they manufacture it. The direct divine-mortal association in the image is justified by Augustus' narrative rank within the four Boscoreale scenes: the successor Tiberius takes the position of active triumphal general, and Augustus is elevated to the level of a divinely

[258] Coins: RIC I, 121 (Parthian settlement), 185.
[259] Identifications: Kuttner 1995, 71-72 ('Gaul' has Celtic trousers; 'Asia' has a crescent-moon forehead ornament; and 'Africa' has an elephant-scalp headdress). Compare: RRC, 402 (Africa). Kuttner regarded the personifications as a "province group": Kuttner 1995, 93. The idea of 'Peoples' is better attested: Velleius Paterculus, 2.39.2 (*gentēs* in Augustus' forum); Hölscher 1988, 525-528; Smith 2013, 113-118.
[260] Venus had a role in Augustan theology as a guarantor of military success: RIC I, 250a (coin pairing the victorious emperor with Venus). Venus was also claimed as a protector by Sulla, Pompey, and Caesar: Plutarch, *Sulla*, 19, Plutarch, *Pompey*, 68; Suetonius, *Caesar*, 78.
[261] Von den Hoff 2011, 37 (suggesting the cup may have been created after Augustus' death). The scene's positive depiction of Augustan power can be compared broadly with similar positive ideas expressed by 'loyal' contemporary writers. For example: Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, preface 1.
[262] All-out panegyric: Zanker 1988, 230. New divinity: Kleiner 1992, 154.
[263] Submission of the gods: Faust and Hildebrandt 2015, 108 ("*Unterwerfung der Götter*").

appointed world governor.[264] The imperial-divine connections implied on the Ara Pacis and the Prima Porta cuirass are here explicitly narrated.

The Gemma Augustea (Figure 9) presents a fundamentally different narrative to those we have considered so far.[265] The large, sophisticated cameo was almost certainly designed as a display piece for a quasi-private context at the imperial court.[266] Such court cameos specialised in visualising aspects of imperial power that did not fit categories of public expression, such as the emperor's divine qualities, and in doing so they created an elevated visual language that radically restructured the emperor's relationship with the gods.[267] For the patrons and viewers of court cameos, Augustus was not a servant of the Roman pantheon, but a dynamic addition to it. The Gemma Augustea preserves the best surviving example of this new elevated narrative formulation, and by way of contrast it can help to define the divine-mortal interactions found on public reliefs.

The cameo is split into two registers. The upper shows Augustus, enthroned with gods, receiving the victorious Tiberius with Germanicus in attendance. The lower register provides the bedrock on which this grand ceremony sits, as divinities and soldiers erect a trophy above defeated barbarians. The whole is a majestic visual tribute to the divinely supported martial leaders of the Augustan dynasty. Germanicus' identity has been disputed, but a group of Augustus, Tiberius, and an imperial prince demands Germanicus. His young-looking portrait is simply inflected by his rank within the scene.[268] The imperial group gives the cameo a terminus post quem of AD 4 (the adoptions of Tiberius and Germanicus) and a terminus ante quem of AD 14 (the death of Augustus, after which the dynastic constellation would have lost

[264] On this aspect: Zanker 1988, 230. This 'static emperor-active prince' division of imperial roles was present in Roman thinking down to the fourth century: Latin Panegyrics VII.14.1-2 ("It becomes you (the senior partner) to survey from your pinnacle of command the world you share…to announce the auspices for wars…and to impose the terms when peace is to be concluded. You, young man, it behoves to transverse the frontiers tirelessly").
[265] Key studies: Kähler 1968, 17-39; Simon 1986, 156-161; Megow 1987, 155-163; Zanker 1988, 232-234; Hölscher 1988b, 371-373; Pollini 1993, 258-298; Jeppesen 1994, 335-355; Prückner 1997, 119-124; Meyer 2000, 63-80; Zwierlein-Diehl 2007, 149-154; Scherberich 2017, 14; Hejduk 2020, 30–32.
[266] Simon 1986, 155; Megow 1987, 1-3; Megow 1992, 71-80; Zwierlein-Diehl 2007, 150, 243-244; Bergmann 2008, 14 (allowing for a more public audience, in line with the wider consumption of poetry with the same themes). Cameos as court gifts: Giuliani 2010, 30-45.
[267] Cameo themes: Megow 1987, 1-4; Bergmann 2008, 13, 18.
[268] Bastet 1979, 218 (Germanicus is too old; prefers Gaius Caesar); Jeppesen 1994, 337 (the figure in the chariot is Germanicus; the standing prince is Tiberius' brother Drusus). Portraits and Augustan princes: Smith 1989, 214-215. Portraits on the Gemma Augustea: Megow 1987, 137-149.

relevance). The victorious Tiberius suggests that the cameo was connected with his triumph in AD 12, situating the composition in the final years of Augustus' reign (AD 12-14).[269]

Augustus sits on a double-throne with Roma,[270] and is equipped with Jovian attributes — sceptre, hip-mantle, and eagle — which convey his Jupiter-like powers.[271] Hugo Meyer saw these attributes as evidence for a posthumous dating of the image, but cameo representations of the dead (and so divine) Augustus consistently feature the solar crown, which is not present here.[272] The emperor is best taken as a living, supreme ruler, whose authority on earth is equated with that of Jupiter in heaven. The cameo replaces the public conception of princeps and senate with a court vision of a Jovian monarch ruling in partnership with the city goddess. To the right of the throne are three deities — Oikoumené,[273] Oceanus,[274] and Tellus[275] — who with Augustus and Roma observe and guarantee Tiberius' return and success. Their combined presence emphasises the significance of the narrative: the actions of the imperial house demand the attention of multiple deities.[276] Oikoumené crowns Augustus with the *corona civica*, dramatising his receipt of the oak wreath *ob cives servatos* (for saving the lives of citizens).[277] This honour was awarded by those who had been saved: in public, this meant the senate and people.[278] The action of Oikoumené shows that the emperor has been reconfigured here as the

[269] Megow 1987, 162-163. For a description of the historical triumph that echoes the cameo narrative: Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 21.
[270] Some have seen an allusion to Roma and Augustus' shared cult: Hölscher 1988b, 373; Pollini 1993, 260; Meyer 2000, 59. It is questionable whether official cult connections are appropriate for the non-official, private images of cameos: Bergmann 2008, 13.
[271] Augustus and Jupiter: Horace, *Odes*, 1.12.49-52; Zanker 1988, 230. On the Capricorn-decorated disc in the background: Simon 1986, 158 (sun disc); Hölscher 1988b, 372 (*sides Iulium*). Augustus also holds a *lituus*, illustrating that imperial action and victory is carried out under his auspices: Hölscher 1988b, 372; Koortbojian 2013, 151-152.
[272] Meyer 2000, 63-64 (preferring a Claudian date). Divine Augustus and solar crowns: Bergmann 1998, 99-126.
[273] Megow 1987, 158. Alternatively: Bastet 1979, 222 (Tyche); Jeppesen 1994, 341 (Magna Mater); Zwierlein-Diehl 2007, 151 (Kybele). These other goddesses are not appropriate for the figure's action. Kybele's iconography is also lacking. Compare: Virgil, *Aeneid*, 3.107-109; Megow 1987, plate 9.1-2.
[274] Suggestions: Bastet 1979, 222 (Tiber); Simon 1986, 160 (Saturn); Hölscher 1988b, 372 (Saturn); Zanker 1988, 231 (Oceanus); Meyer 2000, 61 (Aion). Aion should be a veiled seer: Smith 1993, plates 20-21, 32. Saturn should also be veiled: *LIMC* Kronos, 22-23, 26. Oceanus fits the iconography: *LIMC* Okeanos, 7; Smith 2013, fig.41. 'Ocean', 'Land', and the 'Inhabited World' (Oceanus, Tellus, Oikoumené) also form the most cohesive group. Reconstruction of attribute: Schmidt 2010 (restoring an oar).
[275] Zwierlein-Diehl 2007, 151. Alternatively: Galinsky 1966, 225 (Italia). The constellation requires a broad figure such as Tellus, rather than Italia.
[276] Comparable 'divine councils' were established in art and literature as a means of representing events of decisive importance: Homer, *Iliad*, 4.1-67 (Olympians discuss the Trojan war); Pliny, *Natural History*, 36.18-19 ("twenty gods" attend the birth of Pandora on the base of the Athena Parthenos); Osborne 1998, 88-95 (multiple gods at the wedding of Peleus and Thetis); Moon 1983, 98-103 (deities gathered for Hercules' introduction to Olympus).
[277] On this honour: *Res Gestae*, 34.2; Bergmann 2010, 135-183, 188-205.
[278] Honour and senate and people: Cooley 2009, 264-266; Bergmann 2010, 188-205 (inscriptions and coins); Smith 2013, fig.99 (narrative relief at Aphrodisias).

saviour of the entire world.[279] Tellus and Oceanus, land and sea, are similarly grand figures who evoke a high-toned, universal conception of imperial rule.[280] To the left of Augustus' throne, Tiberius steps down from a four-horse chariot driven by Victory.[281] The divine nature of his driver and the strong divine presence throughout the scene elevate Tiberius' return to the level of a cosmic event.[282]

The lower register reinforces these messages. On the left, four Roman figures raise a trophy over two defeated northern barbarians.[283] On the right, two further barbarians are dragged forward to complete the scene.[284] The 'Romans' in this right-hand section are covert deities. The foreground figure is an armed (and so 'unreal') female, possibly Diana,[285] and her partner's non-Roman costume (exomis, broad-brimmed hat) is appropriate for Mercury,[286] an important Augustan deity.[287] Diana's cloak is wrapped round her arm, a motif associated with battle and hunting.[288] These are active warrior gods who help to drive the imperial system. Their direct military interaction may be compared with the interventionist behaviour of gods in epic poetry: gods in historical writing and public reliefs, on the other hand, never physically fought with barbarians.[289] As on the Prima Porta statue and the Boscoreale cups, the emperor's victorious

[279] Compare: Pliny, *Natural History*, 16.3 (Augustus receives a crown from "all mankind").
[280] Compare: Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.9 (under Augustus, "the empire's bounds were the Ocean"); Fittschen 1975, 175-210 (land and sea centaurs on the cuirassed Cherchel statue); Smith 2013, 171 (land and sea symbolised in Julio-Claudian relief from Aphrodisias).
[281] Victory as chariot driver: Hölscher 1967, 68-73. Although only three horses are visible, the chariot is probably conceived as a four-horse quadriga, since three-horse chariots did not exist, and it is difficult to take the third horse as Germanicus', as has been argued, because Germanicus is wearing infantry armour (equestrian armour was shorter) and does not hold the horse's reigns, as riders in Roman art regularly do. Quadriga: Bergmann 2010, 330. Germanicus' horse and biga: Simon 1986, 160; Scherrer 1988, 116; Meyer 2000, 62. Equestrian armour: Hallett 2005, plate 81. Horses and riders: Smith 2013, figs.84 and 86 (heroic princes on reliefs from Aphrodisias).
[282] Divine chariots, Victory, cosmic events: Homer, *Iliad*, 5.702-909 (Athena drives Diomedes' chariot); Ovid, *Tristia*, 2.165-176 (Victory helps Tiberius wage war).
[283] Simon 1986, 158 (seeing the figure on the left as Quirinus and the figure wearing a cloak as Mars). Accepted: Zwierlein-Diehl 2007, 152-153. Against: Megow 1987, 161; Zanker 1988, 232. Seeing the shirtless figures as the Dioscuri: Hölscher 1988b, 372; Zwierlein-Diehl 2007, 152-153. Iconographic evidence for these suggestions is lacking.
[284] Compare: Vicogliosi 1988, Cat. No. 41 (Augustan frieze showing barbarians seated around a trophy).
[285] Will 1954, 600-601; Zwierlein-Diehl 2007, 152-153. The combination of female gender and weapons excludes a mortal identity. Some see Hispania, in reference to the role of Spanish auxiliary troops in contemporary northern campaigns: Zanker 1988, 232; Kleiner 1992, 71; Pollini 1993, 271. We may doubt whether recording such details was relevant for cameo narratives, and the iconography matches Diana well: *LIMC* Artemis, 1318, 1382, 1392 (double spears), Diana, 82, 95, 270 (costume) 268-270 (fighting), 278b (bare legs). Other suggestions: Simon 1986, 159 (Luna); Megow 1987, 160-161 (Amazon); Scherrer 1998, 125 (Bendis); Jeppesen 1994, 341 (Bendis).
[286] Compare: Vian 1951, plate 8; *LIMC* Mercurius, 20; Zwierlein-Diehl 2007, fig.434. Suggestions: Will 1954, 600-601 (Mercury); Megow 1987, 160 (Macedonian figure); Hölscher 1988b, 372 (Mercury); Zanker 1988, 232 (Thracian figure); Pollini 1993, 271 (Thracian figure); Jeppesen 1994, 345 (Neoptolemos).
[287] Mercury on Augustan gems: Maderna-Lauter 1988, 455, Cat.251, 268.
[288] Cloak motif: Hallett 2005, 48 (with sources).
[289] Gods in battle in epic: Virgil, *Aeneid*, 2.612-617; Chaudhuri 2014.

rule over barbarians is aligned with divine authority to legitimise the imperial dynasty. The statue and the cups represented the links between these themes comparatively indirectly. The cameo, in line with its untrammelled semi-private court context, combines all the elements into a single sophisticated composition.

The nature of the cameo's divine representation diverges from that found on public reliefs. The friezes of the Ara Pacis were populated entirely by human figures, and even the god-supported Augustus on the Boscoreale cups wore the costume of a civilian senator. The cameo, on the other hand, describes the emperor's personal power in explicit divine terms, with a royal throne, Jovian attributes, and intimate contact with protective deities. In place of the more restricted constitutional activities of public reliefs, the cameo projects grand ideas of universal peace and victory and welds them to members of a specific dynasty. It is easy to think of cameo narratives as elevated or mythologised images, but in some ways it was the 'modest' public reliefs that perpetrated the greater fabrication. Through their portrayal of a peculiarly Roman monarchic power, cameos thematised the true (military and dynastic) basis of the imperial system. The military supremacy of magnificent god-emperors was not easily accommodated within the sensitive norms of official representation. The closest parallels to Julio-Claudian imperial cameos are found in the panegyrical interludes of Augustan poetry, where the emperor and his family are praised as "gods of the boundless sea" (*deus immensi...maris*), "overwhelming" conquerors, and Jovian rulers, in words that stand close to the cameos in their intended audience and expressive technique.[290] On the cameos, this intense focus on the majesty of the emperor largely supplanted description of the gods themselves. The seven deities on the Gemma Augustea are unique among imperial cameos. Apart from the later Great Cameo of France, which includes two divinities among an eleven-figure imperial assemblage, no other imperial cameo depicts more than one god, and the majority depict divinised imperial subjects alone.[291] For cameos and their audiences, the animation of a citizen emperor by legitimising divine forces (which is often depicted on public reliefs) was of little interest: the emperors were in full god-like command themselves.

[290] Gods of the seas: Virgil, *Georgics*, 1.29. Overwhelming conquerors: Horace, *Odes*, 4.14. Jovian rulers: Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 15.843-870. Further: Horace, *Odes*, 1.12.49-52 (Augustus and Jupiter); Virgil, *Eclogues*, 4 (on the divine destiny and connections of the dynasty). On imperial cameos and their relationship with imperial poetry: Smith 2021.

[291] Deified members of the imperial family are not counted as gods in the context of this discussion.

## Conclusion

Republican reliefs, we saw, depicted gods as legitimising participants in contemporary political achievements in ways that reflected the strongly felt presence of the gods in the lives of Roman citizens and statesmen. Representations of sacrifice channelled pre-existing votive conventions to produce pious depictions of Roman rituals with living divine participants, and images of conquest visualised more direct associations between victorious commanders and protective divinities. The monuments show clearly that the religious and war-related powers of the gods formed a key component of the Republican political imagination.

Under Augustus, these varied Republican narrative strategies were redirected, as the actions of all the gods were aligned with one particular ruler. The Prima Porta Augustus, the Sorrento Base, the Boscoreale cups, and the Gemma Augustea each feature at least five or six gods. Republican monuments, on the other hand, typically incorporated only one or two. The enhanced divine cast of Augustan narrative reflects a move from a competitive Republican landscape of aspiring actors and their divine protectors to a system where the whole Roman pantheon works with one imperial protagonist.[292] This emerging field of representation split along other, context-based lines into a range of narrative formulations that helped to explain the various aspects of imperial power that now controlled Roman society. Officially, the monarchic reality of the emperor's position was not a primary concern, and commemoration of the carefully negotiated 'constitutional' character of the princeps was more important. This required a different narrative mode — captured in emblematic form on the Ara Pacis — in which mortal and divine roles were separated. Although later images, and even other contemporary artefacts such as the Boscoreale cups, in fact used interaction with gods to portray the legitimate ruler as a servant of divine will, the Augustan period seems to have undergone an experimental phase in which legitimacy was based in part on a careful dissociation of divine and imperial roles. Across the great range of surviving Augustan images, there are no official metropolitan monuments that show the emperor among the gods. Divine power was still an important component of political representation, and in the mythological and cult-related images of the Ara Pacis and the Sorrento Base, as well as in the historical epic

[292] For analogous changes in the practices of religion and ritual: Zanker 1988, 118-135.

of the Prima Porta cuirass, we see a web of 'indirect' connections between the actions of the gods and the achievements of the emperor.

The 'modesty' of monuments such as the Ara Pacis was time-specific and short-lived. Direct divine participation came to dominate imperial narrative, and the phenomenon can be found already under Augustus in private contexts, where the emperor's direct mediation with the gods was celebrated by supporters. The Boscoreale cups provide an explicit dramatisation of the divine favour that was only suggested on public monuments, while the Gemma Augustea presents a striking poetic narrative of imperial realisation. This diversity reflected the fact that Augustus was different things to different people, and, as important religious and cultural actors, the gods helped to determine how the new emperor connected with a world that viewers understood. Established Olympians such as Mars, Apollo, Diana, and Venus were significant characters in narrative and had a deep impact across Augustan culture. They were the emperor's patron divinities and supportive collaborators. Alongside them, deities such as Victory, Tellus, Roma, and Virtus emerged to animate major concepts of imperial dramaturgy. These deities were not allegories or symbols, but newly important 'imperial gods', whose victory-bringing powers and grand geopolitical associations were to become key elements in the scenography of imperial action.

The representation of gods in narrative allowed Augustus and those who designed his images to present a contingent political order as a divinely ordained civilisational paradigm. For us, this phenomenon of divinely charged narrative expresses itself in sharp monumental form first in the Flavian period, where we can access the earliest well-preserved, large-scale imperial narrative reliefs.[293] A re-assessment of the role of the gods in these images forms the subject of the following chapter, where we will see the elements of Republican and Augustan narrative reworked to craft striking new episodes in the empire's evolving imperial mythology.

[293] Notwithstanding the (purely mortal) friezes of the Ara Pacis and fragmentary or provincial images such as the Julio-Claudian reliefs from the Sebasteion: Smith 2013 (on the Sebasteion reliefs). See also the next note.

# Chapter 3: The Creation of a New Imperial Mythology in Flavian Rome

The full introduction of gods into key imperial narratives is crystallised in the Flavian period. Fragmentary Julio-Claudian monuments such as the Arcus Novus and 'Actium' reliefs show that narratives with gods continued to be produced between Augustus and Nero, but these few pre-Flavian examples are poorly preserved and without good contexts.[294] From our perspective, the full-scale intervention of gods in imperial action comes into view on the Arch of Titus and the Cancelleria Reliefs.[295] These monuments helped to launch a new imperial mythology in which the gods took a leading role. Their images should not be seen, as current opinion maintains, as historical episodes decorated with symbolic or allegorical deities, but instead as grand imperial compositions that aimed to present the emperor as a divinely manipulated imperial hero.[296] The gods did not describe the emperor's virtues, they enabled and provoked his actions, actively shaping the narratives in which they participated through the force of their own identities and roles. Presentation of the emperor as a heroic instrument of divine will is found in parallel form in the panegyrical and poetic literature of the period, and this chapter brings the earliest monumental examples of the phenomenon under investigation together with these textual sources to produce a new interpretation of the reliefs. The Arch of Titus and the Cancelleria Reliefs mark the beginning of a series of monumental narratives — departures, battles, arrivals, triumphs, sacrifices, and ceremonies — that over the next two and a half centuries would provide imperial politics with an enduring aesthetic existence.[297] It will be important to frame our approach to this material correctly from the start.

The argument proceeds from an iconographic analysis of the monuments through to an assessment of the relationship between depictions of gods in Flavian relief and representations of deities in contemporary imperial literature. The Arch of Titus, it will be argued, presents three gods as co-ordinating actors that enhance the emperor's triumph, while the Cancelleria Reliefs deploy an assemblage of ten gods that elevate the achievements of the Flavian dynasty.

[294] Julio-Claudian monuments: Torelli 1982, 63-82; Pollini 2012, 93-107. Arcus Novus reliefs: Laubscher 1976, 5-37; Koeppel 1983, 119-123; Hölscher 1988, 523-525; Kuttner 1995, 28. 'Actium reliefs': Schäfer 2002, 31-49; Lange 2016, 171-194.
[295] Other Flavian reliefs: Koeppel 1984, 1-65.
[296] Gods as virtue symbols in Flavian relief, for example: Bieber 1945, 23; Pfanner 1983, 68-67, 98-102; Stewart 2004, 36; Kleiner 2007, 131.
[297] Flavian relief and imperial narrative: Hamberg 1945, 51-53; Hölscher 1980, 265-321; Pfanner 1983, 103; Oppermann 1985, 52-62; Hannestad 1986, 129-131; Koeppel 1989, 1; Langer and Pfanner 2018, 84-85.

Frieze A presents Domitian as a divinely appointed war leader. Frieze B converts the emperor's arrival into a divinely sanctioned state event. Across the reliefs, we will see that deities help to define the complex character of the emperor as a negotiated imperial hero, who is driven by the gods to lead and serve the empire.

**The Arch of Titus**

The triumphator relief from the Arch of Titus (Figure 10) is the first well-preserved full-scale representation of an emperor and gods in the same narrative frame, and features an archetypal divine constellation, Virtus, Honos, and Victory, that orchestrates the emperor's action in the scene. We look first at the monument as a whole.

The Arch of Titus combined a traditional structure with an innovative visual programme that incorporated an unprecedented amount of relief decoration.[298] Of the surviving imagery, the primary components are the two large panel reliefs situated on the walls either side of the passageway, both of which display scenes from Vespasian and Titus' Jewish triumph of June AD 71.[299] The north panel shows Titus in a triumphal chariot processing with gods. The south panel displays the spoils from Jerusalem that preceded the emperor. Vespasian is not represented in person, and the reliefs revolve around Titus alone. It is to this emperor that the Arch was dedicated, as the inscription on the attic records: SENATUS POPULUSQUE ROMANUS DIVO TITO DIVI VESPASIANI F VESPASIANO AUGUSTO ('The Senate and People of Rome for the deified Titus Vespasian Augustus, son of the divine Vespasian').[300] The inscription refers to Titus posthumously, and consequently allows the monument to be dated almost certainly to the early years of Domitian's reign (AD 81-96).[301] The Arch then was a celebration of both the Jewish war and the deification of Titus. It transformed military achievement into a grand statement of Flavian victory, justifying Titus' newly divine status

[298] Pfanner 1983, 93-97; Roehmer 1997, 248-259. Roman arches: Kleiner 1985, 11-13, 14-19, 20-39, 69-93; Kleiner 1990, 127-136; Roehmer 1997, 7-11, 19-209, 218-246; Rich 1998, 97-115; Lange 2016, 195-205.
[299] Triumph: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 7.119-162; Suetonius, *Vespasian*, 8.1, 12; *Titus*, 6.1; *Domitian*, 2.1; Pfanner 1983, 65; Griffin 2000, 15.
[300] Inscription: Pfanner 1983, 15-16; Holloway 1987, 189-191.
[301] Dating: Pfanner 1983, 91-92.

and providing the reigning emperor Domitian with an impressive foundation for the legitimacy of his own rule.[302]

The spoils relief features no gods, and the following discussion focuses on the divinely orchestrated triumphator panel.[303] The relief shows Titus standing in a four-horse chariot, accompanied by three gods, twelve lictors, and three togate citizen-senators.[304] The lictors signify Titus' political rank and the togate participants form part of the ceremonial cast appropriate for a grand procession. The emperor appears as a triumphal office holder, wearing a toga and laurel crown, and carrying an eagle-topped staff and palm branch (both now lost).[305] The gods direct the action of the scene. Victory stands behind Titus in the chariot and places a second (oak) crown on the emperor's head: the goddess descends upon her favourite, providing imperial victory with divine sanction.[306] Two further gods, Virtus and Honos, flank the emperor's chariot. Virtus holds the reins of the horses and guides the vehicle. Honos strides alongside the chariot making a gesture of advance. Flavian victory is supported and recognised by military gods. These themes are anchored to the Jewish war by the detailed representation of the spoils from Jerusalem in the opposite panel, which also reveals the spatial setting of Titus' chariot.[307] In the historian Josephus' description of the triumph, the spoils precede the emperor.[308] Since the spoils in the relief are being taken in through a monumental gateway, Titus' chariot should be understood as behind them, that is, further outside Rome, moving towards the urban centre — a detail with implications for the interpretation of the participating gods.

Before discussing the meaning of the gods who are present, we should pause to establish more securely the identity of the two beside the chariot. Because of their similar appearance, depictions of Virtus and Roma, and Honos and the Genius of the Roman People, are not always

[302] Pfanner 1983, 98-102; Oppermann 1985, 36; Oldewurtel 2015, 135.
[303] Spoils relief: Pfanner 1983, 50-55, 71-72 (there are no 'living' gods in the image, but there is a statue of a goddess, perhaps Virtus or Minerva, depicted on top of the arch within the relief).
[304] Titus' portrait: Pfanner 1983, 48-49, 65.
[305] Pfanner 1983, 48-49. Crowns: Bergmann 2010, 37-108. Dress: Alföldi 1970, 126-127.
[306] Hölscher 1967, 81-82; Alföldi 1970, 96; Pfanner 1983, 67. Victory crowning a general in a chariot was a particular Roman version of the long-established motif of Victory crowning a mortal or god. Augustus was the first living man shown crowned in this way: RIC I, 140. Vespasian used the motif on coins celebrating the Jewish triumph: Hölscher 1967, 86-87.
[307] Pfanner 1983, 50-55.
[308] Josephus, *Jewish War*, 7.5.4-6

easy to differentiate, and the two gods flanking Titus' chariot have been variously interpreted as one or other of these pairs. In the first full publication of the Arch, Michael Pfanner argued convincingly that Virtus and Honos should be preferred, because although there is a significant iconographic overlap between the pairs, context and action are clear, decisive criteria for distinguishing them.[309] Here, the triumphal context and the dynamic motion of the figures suggest the warlike Virtus and Honos, rather than the stately city goddess and personified People. Despite Pfanner's discussion, however, there is now almost a consensus that points in the opposite direction, labelling the pair as Roma and the Genius of the Roman People.[310] Given the prevailing confusion, it will be helpful to state the full case in favour of Virtus and Honos. Their characters differ significantly from those of Roma and the Genius of the People, and so getting the names right will have an important bearing on our interpretation of the scene.

The goddess by the horses wears an Amazonian-style costume with a crested helmet and holds a spear.[311] On iconographic grounds Roma would be viable, but the figure's action makes the city goddess difficult to accept. The figure has her right foot forward and her left heel raised in a striding motion. A section of her mantle flies over the shoulders of the horse next to her, indicating swift movement. We should thus be looking for a dynamic goddess. Virtus was often depicted as such, and had been an active companion of Roman commanders since the Republic. For example, the sella curulis tomb monument from the Villa Casali (Figure 5) and the Augustus cup from Boscoreale (Figure 8) both represent Virtus in narratives of victory, and named depictions of the goddess on Republican and Flavian coins explicitly underline Virtus' strong war-related identity.[312] Later monuments also consistently show the goddess in action in military contexts: the Cancelleria Reliefs (Frieze A), the Great Trajanic Frieze, the panel reliefs of Marcus Aurelius, and the fourth-century frieze from the Arch of Constantine all feature Virtus as a close, active companion of the victorious emperor.[313] On the Julio-Claudian 'Actium reliefs' and the Antonine 'Parthian Monument' from Ephesus, Virtus is even shown leading an imperial chariot, in just the same way as the figure on the Arch of Titus.[314]

[309] Pfanner 1983, 67-71. Elisabeth Keller previously made similar arguments in relation to the Cancelleria Reliefs: Keller 1967, 198-205, 205-207. Further (with similar ideas): Bieber 1945, 23-34; Roehmer 1997, 255.
[310] Roma and the Genius: Richmond 1969, 220; Holloway 1987, 184; Kleiner 1992, 188; Stewart 2004, 34; Ramage and Ramage 2005, 165; Norman 2009, 44.
[311] Pfanner 1983, 47.
[312] Republican-Augustan coins: RRC, 403, 401, 473/2a; BMC I, 43, 255. Flavian coins: BMC II, 531, 760.
[313] See: Figures 11 (Cancelleria Reliefs), 19 (Great Trajanic Frieze), 29 (Aurelian relief), 42 (Arch of Constantine).
[314] 'Actium reliefs': Schäfer 2002, 31-49; Lange 2016, 171-194. 'Parthian Monument': Figure 35.

Roma, on the other hand, was always a static figure. She was a weighty, dignified goddess who was never associated with dynamic military action. Roma was the majestic embodiment and protector of the *urbs*, and thus nearly always appeared seated or enthroned in civic or urban contexts. Seated depictions of the goddess are found, for example, on the enclosure of the Ara Pacis, the altar of the Gens Augusta in Carthage, the Cancelleria Reliefs (Frieze B), the column base of Antoninus Pius, and the tetrarchic decennalia base, as well as on coins throughout the imperial period.[315] The goddess can stand, but her foot is almost always placed on a globe or a pile of weapons, signifying her stationary character.[316] The vigorous action of the figure on the Arch of Titus, therefore, is at variance with one of the central aspects of Roma's identity. The Gemma Augustea (Figure 9) represented Roma in a scene of triumph, but there the goddess was an enthroned, receiving partner of the returning general.[317] On the Arch of Titus, the figure in question leads the emperor in, towards Rome: it would not make sense for the city goddess to be part of the procession coming to meet herself, as it were, and with a full range of images in view we can see two clearly defined, indeed opposed, iconographic traditions. Virtus is dynamic, active, mobile, and warlike. Roma is stately, static, urban, and civic. The goddess on the Arch better suits the character of Virtus in every respect.

With Virtus' identity established, the half-draped male god by the chariot could easily be taken as Honos, her frequent partner.[318] And there are also independent indications that the figure is not the Genius of the Roman People. First, the god is represented in striding motion alongside the chariot. Since the figure's legs are now almost completely destroyed, this action does not register as it should in the eyes of modern viewers, but it is clear from the wide placement of the figure's feet that his stance was active and emphatic. This striking posture does not suit a static figure such as the Genius. On the near-contemporary Cancelleria Reliefs, for example, the Genius is represented twice (on Frieze A and Frieze B), and in both cases stands motionless as the emperor and other figures depart or arrive.[319] The same static posture is found on later monuments, such as the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum, where the Genius stands in repose

[315] Reliefs: Vermeule 1959, plate 10. Coins: Vermeule 1959, plates 1-4.
[316] Standing Roma (on coins): Vermeule 1959, plates 5-7; RRC, 391/3.
[317] Roma also appears as a seated figure in the depictions of triumph on the Arch of Septimius Severus: Brilliant 1967, 137-147.
[318] Iconography of Honos: BMC I, 255; Pfanner 1983, 69-70.
[319] Simon 1985, 543-555.

while waiting for the approaching emperor.[320] As with Roma, then, the Genius should stay still, signifying the presence of the Roman People in their urban home. In addition, the figure on the Arch is leading the emperor's triumph, a ceremony in which neither the Genius in art nor the Roman People in life took an active part.[321] Honos, on the other hand, was often shown in military and triumphal narratives. The god accompanies the victorious emperor on the Boscoreale cups and the Great Trajanic Frieze, for example, and is shown in procession with an imperial chariot on the Julio-Claudian 'Actium reliefs'.[322] The action and context of the god on the Arch of Titus, therefore, strongly indicate that Honos is the figure's correct identity.

The iconographies of the two deities thus suggest independently that they are Virtus and Honos, but their association as a pair and as a group with Victory also has strong diagnostic value. Virtus and Honos were often represented together in cult and in images, and appear with Victory on the Boscoreale cups, the 'Actium reliefs', the Cancelleria Reliefs (Frieze A), and the Great Trajanic Frieze.[323] Roma and the Genius of the People, on the other hand, are not known to have ever appeared together as a pair in Roman art.[324] The Genius of the People was always depicted with the Genius of the Senate — who is nowhere on the Arch of Titus — and Roma often appeared by herself or with the emperor alone, as on the enclosure of the Ara Pacis and the Gemma Augustea.[325] The character of the relief's divine constellation, then, combined with the dynamic actions of the figures and the military themes of the narrative, allows us to take the disputed gods as Virtus and Honos with confidence.

The relief thus shows the emperor framed by victory gods, who lead the conquering Titus into the city.[326] Victory validates Titus as a legitimate triumphator, Virtus guides the emperor's

[320] Torelli 1997, fig.20; Figure 23.
[321] Josephus, *Jewish War*, 7.5.4-7; Beard 2003, 548-552.
[322] See: Figures 8 (Boscoreale cups), 19 (Great Trajanic Frieze); Schäfer 2002, 31-49 ('Actium reliefs').
[323] For the listed monuments: see previous note, and below (on the Cancelleria Reliefs). Other images of Virtus and Honos: RRC, 403; BMC II, 531. Virtus and Honos' cult: (1) Virtus temple added to an Honos shrine by M. Marcellus, at the Porta Capena, c.205 BC; (2) temple of Virtus and Honos, c.133 BC; (3) temple of Virtus and Honos on the Capitoline built by Marius, c.103 BC; (4) shrines to Virtus and Honos, dedicated by Pompey near his theatre complex, c.55 BC. Sources: LTUR II, 30-35 (all temples); Cicero, *On the Laws*, 2.58 (Honos shrine at the Porta Capena); Cicero, *Nature of the Gods*, 2.61 (Marcellus' temple of Virtus); Vitruvius, 3.2 (Marius' temple). Further: Augustus, *Res Gestae*, 11 (linking the cult of Virtus and Honos with triumphal return).
[324] Never Roma and the Genius as a pair: Pfanner 1983, 68; Milhous 1992.
[325] Genius and Senatus: Kunckel 1974, plate 6; Figure 11 (Cancelleria Reliefs). Some have seen the Senatus in the relief on the Arch of Titus, but there is no evidence for this: Pfanner 1983, 70-71.
[326] Compare: Arrian, 2.18.1 (Alexander the Great dreams that Hercules leads him into Tyre by the hand).

chariot, and Honos directs the scene with a commanding forward gesture. Titus' supreme qualities as a military leader are rewarded and facilitated by the protection of key war gods. Honos, who originally held a cornucopia, also alludes to the future blessings that Flavian leadership will secure: the emperor's triumph is a glorious occasion on which gods participate in the world of men.[327] This active superhuman framework enables the monument to present imperial deeds as the instantiation of divine imperatives. We will return to the Arch of Titus and look at complementary literary expressions of these ideas after an outline of the second major set of Flavian narrative images: the Cancelleria Reliefs.

**The Cancelleria Reliefs**

The two Friezes from the Palazzo della Cancelleria (Figure 11) are among the most intensively studied imperial images.[328] Frieze A, we will see, presents a razor-sharp sculptural rendering of divinely charged Roman sovereignty, and Frieze B visualises a grand state ceremony attended by gods. The reliefs were found incomplete and out of their original setting in Rome between 1937 and 1939, with the portraits of the imperial protagonists re-cut. There are thus several open questions surrounding the restoration of the missing sections and the nature of the structure to which the reliefs were once attached. The main narratives and figures represented, which have also generated controversy, are however clearly legible.[329] Frieze A represents a departure for war, in which the emperor (re-cut as Nerva, but originally Domitian) is accompanied by gods, lictors, and soldiers. Frieze B shows an imperial arrival or adventus, in which the victorious emperor (again re-cut, from Domitian to Vespasian) is welcomed back to Rome by divine and mortal representatives of the city.[330] The reliefs thus capture for a metropolitan audience the two defining moments of imperial war — the emperor's auspicious departure and victorious return — and present them as divinely engineered narratives of Flavian political mythology.[331] Before coming to questions of interpretation, a closer

[327] Compare: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 7.5.6 (Titus' triumph "was a festival day to the city of Rome: celebrated for the victory obtained by their army over their enemies; for the end that was now put to their civil miseries; and for the commencement of their hopes of future prosperity and happiness."). On the divine aspects of the triumphal ceremony: Künzl 1988, 94-108.
[328] Provenance and technical aspects: Magi 1945, 3-13, 35-54; Pfanner 1981, 514-518; Langer and Pfanner 2018, 18-42 (with earlier literature).
[329] Previous scholarship: Langer and Pfanner 2018, 21-27, figs.13-14 (tables showing the range of interpretations).
[330] Portraits and re-cutting: McCann 1972, 264; Bergmann 1981, 19-28; Bergmann and Zanker 1981, 321, 334-335, 366-367, 388-389; Meyer 2000, 128-132 (proposing Neronian date); Langer and Pfanner 2018, 71-73.
[331] Defining moments of war: Hölscher 1967, n.317; Langer and Pfanner 2018, 80. Discussion of possible architectural contexts: Magi 1945, 134-141 (temple of Fortuna Redux); Last 1948, 14 (temple of Fortuna Redux

description of the Friezes will help to sharpen our understanding of the gods' roles in the scenes.

Frieze A represents seventeen figures, all of which face or step towards the missing left end of the scene.[332] This missing section, which has been restored in various ways, means that there is some ambiguity around exactly what the Frieze depicts, and some scholars have suggested an arrival as the subject of the narrative.[333] The accelerating, unidirectional movement of the figures, however, is easily read as departure.[334] Arrival scenes have two-way movement, with the motion of the incoming emperor met and arrested by figures representing Rome (as on Frieze B).[335] The clear directional impetus of the scene is complemented by a pair of deities, the Genius of the Senate and the Genius of the People, who stand towards the right end of the Frieze. The Genii are two of the only figures in the scene with both feet flat on the ground. They represent the static city of Rome from which the emperor departs and raise their right arms in a gesture of farewell.[336] The idea of departure is further confirmed by the attributes of the lictors. The two on the right, closer to the Genii, do not have axes in their fasces, whereas the two at the head of the procession do, that is, as the figures move left, they leave Rome and 'cross the pomerium'.[337]

The emperor stands as the focus of the scene, wearing knee-length travelling attire and a military cloak. He is framed by lictors, leads a column of soldiers, and is surrounded by war gods. A wing of Victory shows that the goddess flew ahead, leading the way.[338] Mars, Minerva, and Virtus stand beside the emperor and inspire his advance. Virtus places her right hand under

or the Porticus Divorum); Kähler 1950, 39-41; Koeppel 1984, 8 (temple of Fortuna Redux); Wolf 2018, 90-96 (arch-like monument).

[332] Description: Magi 1945, 13-26; Langer and Pfanner 2018, 42-50, 74-76.

[333] Restorations of missing section: Magi 1945, 27-32 (city gate); Simon 1960, 141 (enthroned Jupiter); Keller 1967, 210 (waiting horse). Arrival: Magi 1945, 98-105; Simon 1960, 135-151; Hölscher 1967, n.317; Heintze 1969, 77-83; Fehr 1998, 719.

[334] Departure: Hamberg 1945, 52; Kähler 1950, 33; Keller 1967, 210; Koeppel 1969, 138-144; Linfert 1969, 58; Oppermann 1985, 49; Hannestad 1986, 136; Meyer 2000, 128-138; Langer and Pfanner 2018, 76.

[335] Full study of sculptural and numismatic scenes of imperial departure and arrival: Koeppel 1969, 130-194.

[336] The identities of the Genii are unanimously agreed: Langer and Pfanner 2018, 75. The emperor's (travelling) costume also suggest departure: Keller 1967, 195-198, 207-209; Koeppel 1969, 193; Alföldi 1970, 126-127.

[337] Linfert 1969, 58; Langer and Pfanner 2018, 76; Koortbojian 2020, 12-13. The ornamental spear carried by a soldier on the right of the frieze may also suggest imminent campaigning. Objects of this kind were used in the field to represent the emperor's power, as seen on Trajan's Column (scene XXVII): Speidel 2006, 195-196.

[338] Gerhard Koeppel suggests the goddess held a *vexillum*, as Victory does in the probable 'departure' scene recorded on the 'extispicium relief': Koeppel 1984, 6.

the emperor's forearm in an almost-unique gesture of supportive empowerment, Minerva looks towards the emperor and adjusts her helmet, ready for battle, and Mars invites the emperor to depart with his outstretched hand.[339] The goddess touching the emperor's arm has often and recently been taken as Roma, but the urgent movement of the figure shows that Virtus is the correct reading.[340] The three gods form a protective warrior unit.

The emperor's flat-footed stance was in the past sometimes interpreted as reluctance.[341] This negative idea is now rightly seen as inappropriate. From the point of view of an imperial monument, the emperor was a tireless, invincible commander, always ready to confront Rome's enemies. The contrast in dynamism between the emperor and the gods is nevertheless a central part of the drama of the Frieze. The emperor is defined as an impassive, dignified protagonist, whose activity is set in motion by the gods. His raised arm perhaps signals affirmation of the deities' instructions.[342] Imperial war-making is thus recast as a sacred mission, and the emperor functions as the conduit through which divine agency is discharged into the world.

We can no longer tell which of Domitian's victories the Frieze commemorated.[343] The details would perhaps have been supplied to viewers via other, contextual means. The Frieze instead provides a sweeping visual description of the higher conceptual forces that drove imperial warfare: the legitimate, 'constitutional' leadership of the emperor, and the vividly imagined intervention of enabling imperial and Olympian gods.

[339] Similar gestures to the one displayed by Virtus: Simon 1961, 149-150 (Iris guides Rhea-Cybele in a Pompeian painting from the House of the Tragic Poet); Smith 1991, fig.197 (Auge is encouraged by her father on the Telephos frieze from Pergamon); Zanker and Ewald 2012, 361 (one of the Dioscuri supports Meleager's arm at the climax of a hunt on a sarcophagi frieze). Minerva's helmet-adjusting gesture is sometimes read (probably incorrectly) as a symbol of epiphany: Langer and Pfanner 2018, 74.
[340] Roma: Hamberg 1945, 52; Magi 1945, 75-76; Last 1948, 9; Richmond 1969, 226; D'Ambra 1994, 78; Pollini 2017, 117; Kleiner 2020, 655. Virtus: Keller 1969, 198-205; Koeppel 1969, 141; Langer and Pfanner 2018, 74.
[341] Hamburg 1945, 53; Last 1948, 12-14; Pollini 2017, 117.
[342] Other interpretations of the emperor's gesture: Simon 1960, 139-140 (religious awe); Koeppel 1969, 141-143 (power over enemies).
[343] For suggestions: Oppermann 1985, 58 (Capitoline war); Hannestad 1986, 136 (AD 83 campaigns against the Chatti); Meyer 2000, 136-138 (Nero's Parthian campaigns); Pollini 2017, 117 (Domitian's Northern wars). Domitian's campaigns, with sources: Langer and Pfanner 2018, n.114

Frieze B records the outcome of the campaigns that were initiated on Frieze A. Missing sections near the middle and at the right end of the Frieze mean that some details of the scene are uncertain, but the main elements are clear.[344] The victorious emperor arrives in Rome and is met by representatives of the city. The imperial protagonist stands at the right of the scene, framed by lictors and crowned by Victory. The lictors in front of the emperor, one of whom has his back to the viewer, are carefully arranged to show that they have just come into the city. As with Victory's hovering movement, the 'filing-in' postures of the lictors emphasise that this is *the* moment of imperial arrival, rather than a subsequent ceremony. Representatives of Roman civic and religious institutions fill the rest of the Frieze: at the left, an enthroned Roma watches over the scene; in the centre, imperial attendants and the Vestals gather for the occasion; and, on the right, the Genii of the Senate and People stand by the emperor and witness his arrival.[345] A final figure, wearing a toga and a fashion hairstyle, is depicted in front of the emperor. His identity is controversial, but the contemporary hairstyle shows that the figure is not a divinity.[346] He is perhaps a Flavian prince. The close, personal interaction between the figure and the emperor suggests a 'real', familiar relationship. The good emperor thus leaves the city to win victories and returns to work with the Roman authorities under whose guidance he acts.

For the Cancelleria Reliefs, as for the Arch of Titus, the drama of imperial war and peace was constructed around the imagined presence of the gods. This interaction between imperial politics and divine power was narrated in parallel textual form in the panegyrical and poetic literature of the period, and the next section looks at how these complementary sources can

[344] Lost sections: Langer and Pfanner 2018, 28-30. Interpretations of the narrative: Magi 1945, 106-115 (arrival); Simon 1960, 151 (arrival); Keller 1967, 214 (arrival); Oppermann 1985, 58 (arrival); Simon 1985, 544 (nomination of a priest); Baumer 2007, 93-106 (census ceremony); Petruccioli 2014, 109-127 (nomination of a successor); Oldewurtel 2015, 143-148 (census ceremony).

[345] The enthroned Roma is sometimes read as Virtus: Keller 1967, 213; Koeppel 1984, 7. On the Vestals: Petruccioli 2014, 111; Langer and Pfanner 2018, 52-53. Alternative interpretations of the bearded divinity near the emperor: Simon 1985, 551-552 (king Numa); Fehr 1998, 721-724 (king Numa). Alternative suggestions for the youthful divinity near the emperor: Keller 1967, 211-215 (Honos); Koeppel 1984, 7 (Honos); Simon 1985, 551 (Honos); Fehr 1998, 721-724 (Terminus). Genii of the Senate and People: Langer and Pfanner 2018, 76-78 (with earlier literature). That the iconography of the Genii differs slightly from the depiction of the same deities on Frieze A is not an issue, compare: Fittschen 1972, 742-748 (Jupiter and Hercules represented twice, in different ways, on the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum); Pfanner 1983, 79-81 (Victories with different attributes on the Arch of Titus).

[346] Suggestions: Magi 1945, 106-115 (young Domitian); Last 1948, 10 (young Domitian); Hölscher 1967, 58 (urban prefect); Oppermann 1985, 59 (Genius of the Youth); Simon 1985, 549; (priest); Petruccioli 2014, 118 (Flavian prince); Oldewurtel 2015, 140 (ideal youth); Langer and Pfanner 2018, 78 (Genius of the Equestrians); Kleiner 2020, 635-655 (young Domitian).

help to deepen our understanding of the monuments. We will see that, for both writers and image-makers, the gods were authorising directors of the emperor's achievements.

**Gods, monuments, Flavian literature**

The Flavian period has left a rich body of imperial literature — panegyrical poems and encomia inserted into epic and other texts — which functioned alongside the reliefs as an alternative context for description of the emperor's behaviour.[347] Like the designers of imperial monuments, authors such as Statius and Martial were, among other things, attempting to narrate and explain the achievements of the Flavian dynasty. The monuments created a visual world for imperial action that can still be seen and felt, but the conceptual network in which these images found their meaning no longer exists in the minds of modern viewers. Literary sources, although lacking the texture of the images, preserve this conceptual network — its vocabulary and paradigms — and can thus help us to construct a historically valid interpretation of the monuments.

A distinction needs to be made at the outset between two broad systems of imperial commemoration — between, on the one hand, highly elevated praise of the emperor's divine persona, pitched at a level far above everyday truth, and, on the other hand, description of the emperor's negotiated, official role as a senator and military leader, embedded in physical reality. The former, divinising conception of the emperor dominates the (poetic) literature that we have from the Flavian period, and its visual equivalent is found in the gleaming images of court cameos such as the Gemma Augustea, but it is not what we see on the Arch of Titus and the Cancelleria Reliefs, where the emphatically mortal emperor is placed in a real-looking dramatic framework of citizens, soldiers, and official insignia.[348] For the present discussion, then, it is the second, 'public' system of commemoration that is relevant. We are interested in those sections of the texts that connect with the representational logic of the monuments. High-toned description of the emperor's godlike nature is therefore less useful, and the following discussion focuses on literary formulations of the emperor and the gods acting side-by-side.

[347] Gods, panegyrical themes, Flavian literature: Feeney 1991, 302-312 (Silius Italicus), 313-391 (Valerius Flaccus and Statius); Hardie 1992; Henderson 1993, 162-191; Bessone 2013, 87-105; Dufallo 2013, 206-243; Fucecchi 2013, 107-122; Fucecchi 2013b, 17-32; Manuwald 2013, 33-52; Penwill 2013, 29-54; Chaudhuri 2014, 195-230; Walter 2014; Rebeggiani 2018; Baier 2020, 305-322.
[348] On the relationship between early imperial poetry and court cameos: Smith 2021.

The four Flavian epics — Silius Italicus' *Punica*, Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*, and the *Thebaid* and *Achilleid* of Statius — each include an encomium to the ruling dynasty. Valerius and Statius open their works with paeans to the emperors as victorious world-rulers, and Silius has Jupiter himself offer a glowing prophecy of the coming Flavian ascendancy.[349] The emperors have universal power on earth, and will surpass Apollo, Bacchus, and Romulus in their achievements. As mentioned, this kind of stratospheric praise does not align with the imagery of public monuments. It involves explicit elevation of the emperor to the level of — or even above — the traditional pantheon. The powers of the gods themselves are thus partly superseded by celebration of the emperor's own divine majesty. The reliefs, on the other hand, clearly show the emperor and the gods in a mutually supportive relationship, and so must express something different to the pure, extravagant praise found in these sections of the texts. The epics are closer to imperial reliefs when they narrate the activity of their leading heroes, who operate in a world governed by an interventionist divine machinery.[350] Valerius' Jason, for example, is launched on his quest by Juno and Minerva, who "move swiftly" to help the hero and provoke his activity.[351] The Cancelleria Reliefs present the initiation of Domitian's campaigns in a similar way, with enabling, physically intervening gods; and the emperor on the Arch of Titus is likewise driven by the kinetic input of protective deities. This suggests that, where high-pitched encomia and court images such as cameos were concerned with the emperor as an imperial god, public monuments were directed towards description of the emperor as an imperial hero — that is, as an exceptional mortal who was assisted by the gods. The strong divine presence in the reliefs translates Flavian achievement into a kind of 'political epic', in which contemporary events are directly generated by divine impulses.

The epics are of course different from the monuments in that their narratives are mythological or myth-historical, rather than contemporary and political, but the idea of the emperor as a god-driven imperial hero is captured explicitly in other texts. Statius, for example, dedicates a poem to an equestrian statue of Domitian, which depicts the emperor holding Minerva — his

[349] Valerius, *Argonautica*, 1.1-23; Statius, *Thebaid*, 1.1-34; Statius, *Achilleid*, 1.14-19; Silius, *Punica*, 3.594-629.
[350] Epic divine machinery, some examples: Silius, *Punica*, 3.163-173 (Jupiter and Mercury drive Hannibal's advance); Valerius, *Argonautica*, 1.246 (Jupiter directs the world), 1.579 (Boreas and wind gods intervene), 3.249-250 (Jupiter assists heroes), 5.250-258 (Mars provides aid), 6.621-631 (Jupiter inspires hero in battle); Statius, *Thebaid*, 3.218-316 (Jupiter and Mars plan war), 8.655-715 (Enyo, Pallas, and others intervene in battle).
[351] Valerius, *Argonautica*, 1.71-98 (swift-moving gods: "*accepere deae celerique per aethera lapsu diversas petiere vias*", at 1.91-92).

particular patron goddess — in his hand.[352] This divine-mortal partnership was represented on the Cancelleria Reliefs (Frieze A), and Statius' description supplies the proper terminology for its interpretation. Minerva appears in order to "spur the emperor forward" (towards new victories), and the emperor is presented as a unique focal point for divine-mortal interaction.[353] This special relationship between Minerva and Domitian — the one an authorising deity, the other a receptive imperial hero — is represented in other texts in a range of ways. For example, in a poem by Martial, Minerva's medusa-bearing aegis provides the emperor with "sacred armour" that guarantees his military success.[354] Similar ideas are present in the departure scene on the Cancelleria Reliefs, which shows Domitian wearing a gorgoneion-decorated brooch while framed by Minerva and Virtus, who display the same gorgon emblem on their clothing and shield, respectively. As in Martial's poem, the emperor in the relief is empowered by Minerva and departs for war under her protection. The Frieze's depiction of the emperor and Minerva directly facing one another drives their connection home in a uniquely immediate, visual way.

In addition, Minerva is said by the poets to have "fashioned (Domitian's) purple gown" — and by extension to have created his power — and the goddess is explicitly presented by Martial as the 'manager' or 'director' of the emperor's affairs ("*Pallada…res agit illa tuas*").[355] The emperor is clothed by the gods and becomes a vehicle for the realisation of their will. The textual juxtaposition between the stately, subordinate emperor and his guiding divine protectors is given visual expression on the Arch of Titus and the Cancelleria Reliefs, where the motionless Titus and Domitian stand surrounded by dynamic supportive gods. Flavian political success is thus remodelled in word and image as the outcome of a purposefully orchestrated divine project. The accounts in Suetonius and Dio Cassius of Domitian's pre-death vision of Minerva are also relevant in this context. Before he dies, the authors report that the goddess

[352] Statius, *Silvae*, 1.1.
[353] Statius, *Silvae*, 1.1.37-40 ("Minerva…holds out severed Medusa's neck as though to spur the horse forward; nowhere did the goddess choose a sweeter resting place").
[354] Martial, *Epigrams*, 7.1 ("*pectore cum sacro sederit, aegis erit*"). The same theme is alluded to in: *Epigrams*, 7.2 and 14.179.
[355] Minerva fashions Domitian's gown: Statius, *Silvae*, 4.1.21-22 ("*hos umeros multo sinus ambiat ostro et properata tuae manibus praetexta Minervae*"). Minerva as an 'imperial manager': Martial, *Epigrams*, 9.3.10.

appeared to Domitian, discarded her weapons, and so doomed the emperor.[356] Divine backing emerges here as an existential component of imperial power.

Alongside Minerva, relationships with other gods were also important for the emperor's role as an imperial hero. Statius, for example, creates a grand divine audience for the inauguration of the emperor's seventeenth consulship: the attendance of gods signals the approval of a "rejoicing heaven" that guarantees imperial success.[357] The assemblage of deities that receives the emperor on the Cancelleria Reliefs was perhaps understood in a similar way — not as a collection of allegories, but as an audience of divine authority that forms the proper environment for imperial celebration. Martial imagines another imperial arrival that likewise aligns with the adventus on the Cancelleria Reliefs: in both the text and the image, Domitian returns "beauteous with the dust of northern war" and is personally "greeted and saluted" (*salutavit voce manuque*) by Roma.[358] Divine participation thus validates imperial deeds.

The safe return of the emperor and the affirmation of Rome's divine favour are intimately connected in contemporary literature. Domitian's wellbeing is for Martial "the assurance that the great gods exist", and Josephus' historical account of Titus' triumph — which includes images of gods carried in a procession that begins and ends with sacrifices — describes how this relationship between imperial action and divine validation was manifested in real events.[359] On the monuments, we see the hopes of the poets and the imagined powers of state ritual realised in seductive sculptural dramatisations in which gods and men act side-by-side.

The sharp characterisation of Virtus on the Arch of Titus and the Cancelleria Reliefs also finds echoes in Flavian literature. Statius, for example, gives the goddess a full, three-dimensional identity.[360] This vivid textual articulation of Virtus as an independent deity acts as a

[356] Suetonius, *Domitian*, 15.3; Dio Cassius, 67.16.1. Also: Suetonius, *Domitian*, 4.4 (Domitian wears a golden crown with an image of Minerva and celebrates yearly games in her honour); Dio Cassius, 67.1.2 (Domitian reveres Minerva above all). On Roman cult images of Minerva: Schürmann 1985, 11-15 (Domitianic temples).
[357] Statius, *Silvae*, 4.1.45-47 ("*tunc omnes patuere dei laetoque dederunt signa polo*"). Similar ideas: Statius, *Silvae*, 4.2.57-62.
[358] Martial, *Epigrams*, 8.65.
[359] Assurance of divine favour: Martial, *Epigrams*, 2.91.1-2. Gods and ritual in Flavian triumph: Josephus, *Jewish War*, 7.5.4 (sacrifices before triumph), 7.5.5 (divine images in procession), 7.5.6 (concluding sacrifices to Jupiter).
[360] Statius, *Thebaid*, 10.632-677.

counterweight to modern assumptions that the goddess was merely an allegorical or symbolic figure, and Statius' description is worth quoting here. What follows is a compressed version of the forty-five-line set piece in which the goddess appears. Virtus descends from heaven to inspire the hero Menoeceus in battle:

> Divine Virtus, seated beside Jupiter on his throne, whence she
> is wont but rarely to be granted to the world for earth to enjoy,
> whether the almighty Father bestows her or she herself chooses to
> enter men able to receive her, even as then she leapt down in
> gladness from the celestial regions —
> and now she treads earth, yet her countenance is not far from the
> ether. But she thought it well to change her face,
> that the response may fully be believed, and by
> guile she sheds her former aspect. The grimness and force left her
> eyes, something of the beauty remained —
> yet her austere look and long strides betray the goddess.
>
> She finds you, Menoeceus, not unfitting to the sacrifice
> and worthy to be thus commanded —
> 'Great-hearted youth — leave these mean combats;
> not such is your due of valour. The stars call you.'
> So, she speaks, and as he hesitates, the goddess silently strokes
> his breast with her great hand and leaves herself in his heart.
> Not more speedily does the cypress tree blasted by lightning rays
> drink the angry fires than the youth, overwhelmed by supernatural
> power, exalted his spirit and rushed on love of death.
>
> Statius, *Thebaid*, 10.632-677,
> trans. Shackleton Bailey 2004

Virtus is presented as an independent goddess with her own will and power. She comes to earth of her own volition from the world of the gods where she resides with the Olympians. Her "fierce countenance" (*aspera ora*) and "great strides" (*nimii gradus*) proclaim her divinity as she descends to "command" (*iubere*) deserving men. Her interventions are purposeful and significant: while the mortal hero "hesitates" (*cunctantis*), the goddess sets him alight with overwhelming "supernatural power" (*multo numine*), and the hero in turn goes on to reach the acme of his warrior prowess.

This epic conception of the goddess intersects at several points with the depictions of Virtus on the monuments. First and most obviously, Virtus is for both Statius and the image-makers a fully formed flesh-and-blood god. There is no suggestion that she represents a fragment of the protagonists' virtues or personality. In the text, as on the Arch and Frieze, the goddess

herself takes the lead. She is the instigator and source of courageous human action, and mortal achievement flows from her personality, rather than the other way around. The goddess' imposing appearance and 'long-striding' movement are also integral features of both the text and the reliefs: on the Arch of Titus, Virtus uses her strength to guide the emperor's chariot, and on the Cancelleria Reliefs the deity vigorously advances to direct the emperor. The close, personal association between Virtus and the mortal protagonists is another shared aspect of her visual and literary representation. The goddess finds leading men, and marks the emperors she assists as exceptional, worthy heroes. Virtus' intervention on the Cancelleria Reliefs is particularly close to Statius' conception of the goddess: in both cases we have an almost-hesitant hero, who is inspired to future military achievement by the physical touch of Virtus' hand.

In contrast to the ideas put forward by Statius, Virtus and other gods such as Honos and Victory are often regarded in modern scholarship as allegorical figures. For example, in Michael Pfanner's influential study of the Arch of Titus, Virtus is interpreted as "not a self-sufficient goddess, but an embodiment of the emperor's virtue", and scholars such as Fred Kleiner have argued that the Arch's reliefs are transformed by the gods into "a celebration of imperial virtues".[361] Discussion of the Cancelleria Reliefs is often marked by the same approach. In the most recent study of the Friezes, for example, Virtus is interpreted as a 'virtue-symbol', and for Niels Hannestad the images were characterised by their "allegorical synthesis" of human figures and personifications.[362] Manfred Oppermann and others have also emphasised the "extensive allegorisation" of the reliefs.[363]

Ancient evidence, on the other hand, suggests that these allegorical, 'emperor-centred' views are underestimations. Virtus, Honos, and Victory were substantial war gods in Roman thought. All three deities had multiple temples in Rome by the first century AD, and those of Virtus and

[361] Virtus: Pfanner 1983, 68 ("*nicht als selbständige Gottheit...(sondern als) Verkörperung einer (Titus') 'Tugenden*"). Virtus celebration: Kleiner 2007, 131. Other allegorical or virtue-based interpretations: Oppermann 1985, 36; Kleiner 1992, 131; Stewart 2004, 36.
[362] Most recent study: Langer and Pfanner 2018, 76 ("*Die Götter und Personifikationen sind direkt um den Kaiser komponiert und versinnbildlichen die ihm zugeschriebenen Eigenschaften wie victoria und virtus*"). Allegorical synthesis: Hannestad 1986, 170.
[363] Oppermann 1985, 62 ("*weitgehende allegorisierung*"). Other similar interpretations: Hamberg 1945, 51; Koeppel 1969, 192-193; McCann 1972, 274.

Honos were repaired by the Flavian emperors personally.[364] These strong cult-based identities were reflected in their literary and visual representation: coins, reliefs, and texts such as Statius' epic depict the deities as self-sufficient gods.[365] These ideas are given new life on the monuments of the Flavian period, where Virtus, Honos, and Victory are carefully characterised as active superhuman participants. Where divinised portrait images and emperor-centred encomia had the ruler's own powers and virtues as their sole subject, narrative reliefs were designed to capture a collective understanding of the emperor's relationship with a full range of imperial actors — senators, lictors, soldiers, priests, citizens, barbarians, and gods. If deities are interpreted as allegories or symbols, their active legitimising effect is lost. Virtus, Honos, Victory, and other gods cut into the drama of Flavian narrative to define the emperor as a heavenly appointed imperial protagonist.

For contemporary poets and other imperial authors, the gods had "commanded" the Flavian emperors to rule, and the emperors in turn became "imperial avengers of the gods" (*ultorque deorum Caesar*) and "chosen subordinates of the gods on earth" (*electus…in terris deorum vice*).[366] It is even said that the emperor will "express divine will through his own mouth" (*quid…fortuna datum velit, meo ore pronuntiat*).[367] The reliefs take these ideas and use them to present imperial politics as the realisation of a divine plan in which the emperor is cast as the instrument and champion of the gods. Deities were not allegories that reflected the virtues of the emperor: Titus, Domitian, and their actions were shown to be the product of divine impetus. By depicting the emperor as an imperial agent who was activated by the gods, the reliefs were able to translate the militarised, monarchic reality of the empire into a culturally meaningful ideal of the emperor as the embodied imperial hero of a divinely sanctioned Roman world.

[364] Virtus and Honos' cults: Richardson 1978, 242-246; Davies 2017, 49, 60, 74, 80, 82, 219. Temples repaired by Flavians (Vespasian): Pliny, *Natural History*, 35.120 (noting that the temples were adorned with paintings commissioned from the top artists of the day). Temple of Victory (on the Palatine): Claridge 2010, 126. Victory's importance in cult and thought: Hölscher 1967; Fears 1981, 804-824.

[365] Independent relief representations of Virtus and Honos (on the keystones of the Arch of Titus): Pfanner 1983, 79-82; Roehmer 1997, 256. Further, on the character of Virtus and Honos: Spannagel 2000, 249-260 (Virtus, for example, was often given a specific archaic-Italic helmet to express her venerable age). Coin images (pre-Flavian): RRC, 403, 401, 473/2a; BMC I, 43, 255. Fragmentary Flavian relief representing an emperor in triumph with Virtus: Koeppel 1989, 3-4.

[366] Emperor commanded to rule: Statius, *Silvae*, 4.3.128-129; Martial, *Epigrams*, 7.60 (emperor and Jupiter). Imperial avenger: Statius, *Silvae*, 5.3.203-204. Chosen subordinate: Seneca, *On Clemency*, 1.1.2-4 (although directed at Nero, Seneca's words are applicable to a general early imperial context).

[367] Virtuous emperor able to express divine will: Seneca, *On Clemency*, 1.1.2-4 (the author puts a flattering, ideal pronouncement in the mouth of the emperor, hence "*meo ore*").

## Conclusion: a new imperial mythology

Flavian monuments gave a concrete imperial form to the visual language of divinely enabled political action that emerged in the Republican and Augustan periods. The Arch of Titus reworked state ceremony into a divinely driven victory celebration, and the Cancelleria Reliefs represented divine actors as the authors of imperial war and peace. The images preserve episodes of a new imperial mythology that helped to define the emperor as a uniquely Roman ruler, who was simultaneously an exceptional imperial leader and a negotiated divine servant. These ideas were in many ways elaborated visual interpretations of concepts that are also found in contemporary literature, and in the next chapter we will see how this visual imperial mythology developed in new ways that continue to intersect with ancient texts on the monuments of the Trajanic period.

# Chapter 4: A World Full of Gods: Trajan's Arch, Trajan's Frieze, the Imperial Columns

Monuments produced under Trajan preserve an unprecedented range of divine narrative roles. New visualisations of battle and ceremony took shape alongside a new monument category — the imperial column — on which an innovative 'documentary' style of divine representation was developed. The Column of Trajan, the Great Trajanic Frieze, and the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum created a world full of gods in which the emperor was mobilised by active divine forces.[368] These monuments have been intensively studied in previous scholarship, but their multi-layered treatment of the gods has not been systematically investigated. This chapter provides an integrated analysis of the divine component in Trajanic narrative and describes the diverse functioning of the gods as part of a genre-based system of dramatic representation. The discussion looks first at the Column of Trajan and argues that the monument's portrayal of deities was shaped by a distinctive 'documentary' conception of imperial action. This manner of representation was category-specific and belongs almost exclusively to the extended 'campaign epics' on the Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. The latter monument is thus also discussed here, alongside its Trajanic predecessor. The chapter then turns to look at two key monuments that were informed by a radically different narrative logic — the Great Trajanic Frieze and the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum — and argues that the gods in these reliefs act alongside the emperor in a way that corresponds with the relationship of Trajan and the gods presented in contemporary panegyric. We will see throughout the narratives that the gods took on a full range of roles that helped to co-ordinate the emperor's actions and animate the world of imperial mythology in which his achievements took place.

## The Column of Trajan

In quantitative terms, the Column of Trajan is the most significant Roman artwork to have survived from antiquity. The monument was dedicated in AD 113 and stood in Trajan's Forum, where its unprecedented 190-metre-long spiral frieze provided viewers with an extraordinary

[368] Other monuments from this period, such as the Anaglypha Traiani and the 'extispicium relief', are without good contexts. Anaglypha Traiani: Torelli 1982, 89-109; Smith 1983, 227-228; Hölscher 2002, 141-142; Hölscher 2018, 59-60. 'Extispicium relief': Zanker 1970, 516-517; Koeppel 1985, 204-212.

visual rendition of the emperor's signature Dacian conquests.[369] The 155 scenes of the frieze are split roughly equally between the first and second of Trajan's Dacian wars (AD 101-102 and 105-106).[370] Depicted are varied images of campaigning: troop movements, war councils, rituals, construction, battles, and the emperor's recurring activity as a military leader and administrator. These individual scenes are put into a coherent overarching narrative of alternating offensive and counter-offensive Roman campaigns, through which the Dacians are comprehensively defeated.[371] The striking extent and detail of the frieze provide a compelling, real-looking texture, and the narrative is articulated by a highly developed stagecraft. The frieze has protagonists (Trajan and his generals), antagonists (the Dacian king Decebalus and his collaborators), and a broad cast of supporting characters (Roman allies, local peasants, industrious soldiers, and powerful gods). The scenes are set in a varied 'real-world' environment and range from dense and fast-moving images of war action to calmer moments of campaign planning and provincial ceremony. A carefully managed narrative rhythm shifts between rapidly changing sequences and more extended episodes such as major manoeuvres and decisive battles.[372] The Column's flowing relief thus represents the most sophisticated visual narrative we have from the Roman world — an unmatched 'documentary epic' that functioned simultaneously as a highly detailed war report and as an ideologically filtered political monument.

The gods play an important role in the frieze, but they have not often been discussed in detail.[373] The frieze depicts five gods: Danube, Jupiter, and Victory (all securely identified), and two controversial goddesses, whose ambiguous iconography makes their precise interpretation difficult. We look first at the deities individually, before discussing their character in connection with the closely related Column of Marcus Aurelius and the parallel literary genre

[369] Dedication: Zanker 1970, 504. Inscription: Weber 2017, 194-197. Forum: Zanker 1970, 499-544; Strobel 2017, 59-66. Date of the frieze: Claridge 1993, 5-22; Claridge 2007, 467-468 (Hadrianic); Stevenson 2008, 43-58 (against Claridge). Unprecedented: Faust 2012b, 35-36. Key studies: Cichorius 1896-1900; Jones 1910, 433-459; Lehmann-Hartleben 1926; Gauer 1977; Hölscher 1980, 291-297; Bode 1992, 123-174; Coarelli 2000; Faust 2012b, 35-91; Hölscher 2017, 15-38; Hölscher 2019, 293-310. Technical aspects: Lancaster 1999, 419-439; Martines 2017, 41-46.
[370] Lepper and Frere 1988, 121-122. Trajan's Dacian wars: Strobel 1984.
[371] Narrative structure: Faust 2012b, 35-91; Faust 2017, 121-127.
[372] Extended episodes, some examples: XL-XLI (battle), CXIII-CXVI (siege), LXXIX-LXXX (imperial journey).
[373] Key discussions of the gods: Hamberg 1945, 119; Bode 1992, 142-143; Faust 2012b, 39-41, 48-51; Hölscher 2017, 22-23; Kovács 2017, 47-58 (Danube and Jupiter).

of historical writing. A picture will emerge of a distinctive 'documentary' style of divine representation that was shaped by its own set of norms.

**Danube (scene III)**

The first set piece of the frieze shows the Roman army crossing the Danube on a pontoon bridge (Figure 12).[374] A figure of superhuman size rises from the water below. The figure is characterised as a primordial nature divinity, with a mantle, a wreath of reeds, and a long, shaggy hairstyle and beard. In the light of the aquatic setting and the northern frontier context this can only be the personified Danube.[375] The river god extends his right hand towards the bridge in a gesture of encouragement and functions as a topographical anchor for the narrative and as a divine protector of the Roman army.[376] In his description of Trajan's campaigns, Pliny writes that the mountains, the rivers, and the seas — "the forces of the land itself" (*terras ipsas*) — will help to defeat the Dacians.[377] The same author contrasts this divine assistance with the "rejoicing" of the Danube and other rivers at the sight of Domitian's failures.[378] So, too, on the Column, while Trajan's army is protected, a later scene (XXXI) sees Rome's Dacian opponents founder in their attempted crossing of the same, now turbulent, river.[379] The river-crossing is thus not simply a neutral or objective starting point for the narrative — other episodes, such as Trajan's departure from Rome, could have been chosen — and the scene serves to highlight key narrative themes: the effective action of the Roman army in foreign lands, their mastery of nature (the bridge), and the enabling support of local deities (Danube).[380] The presence of the gods at the outset inaugurates the war as a divinely authorised enterprise.

[374] The preceding scenes (I-II) show preparations for the river-crossing.
[375] Danube's identity is unanimously agreed: Hamberg 1945, 108; Hölscher 1980, 292; Lepper and Frere 1988, 50; Coarelli 2000, 48; Kovács 2017, 48-50. Iconography: BMC III, 84-85, 395-399 (Trajanic coins depicting Danube); Kovács 2017, 48.
[376] Gesture: Lepper and Frere 1988, 50; Bode 1992, 134; Kovács 2017, 49-50. An open-handed gesture of divine encouragement is exhibited by figures such as Honos on the Arch of Titus (Figure 10: hand missing but arm extended) and Mars on the Cancelleria Reliefs (Frieze A: Figure 11).
[377] Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 16.5 ("*terras ipsas*"). Further: Strack 1931, 126, no.383 (coin showing Danube fighting Dacia).
[378] Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 82.4 (Danube witnesses the disgrace of Domitian).
[379] Scene XXXI: Faust 2012b, 42-44; Kovács 2017, 47.
[380] Hölscher 1980, 292. Post-Trajanic cult for Danube is attested in the northern provinces: Kovács 2017, 49-50 (with a range of media describing Danube as a god).

**Jupiter (scene XXIV)**

Following the march over the Danube, the opening campaign proceeds through a series of key scenes, culminating in a decisive battle in which Jupiter takes part (Figure 13). These scenes of strategic planning (VI), sacrifice and omen (VIII, IX), imperial address (X), construction and forest clearing (XI-XII, XV), and the organisation of troops (XXI-XXII) provide an ideal foundation for the war, demonstrating among other things the careful planning of the generals, the piety of the emperor, the good relations between Trajan and his soldiers, and the hard-working preparation of the army.[381] Through these actions, the Romans 'earn' the intervention of Jupiter, who appears in the most significant episode of the narrative so far: a large infantry and cavalry battle (XXIV), the first of the frieze, that is watched on one side by Trajan, on the other by the Dacian king Decebalus, and at the centre driven forward by the figure of Jupiter.[382]

Jupiter is shown as a half-figure emerging from the sky.[383] The god is framed by dramatic, billowing drapery that had long been used in this configuration to represent swift-moving divine epiphany and flight, particularly for celestial, aquatic, and elemental deities.[384] Jupiter is thus depicted above the battle in rapid, aerial movement through the landscape. He appears, like Danube, as a divine force that is closely connected with the environment. A forward-flaring section of the mantle is balanced behind by the god's outstretched arm, which probably held a thunderbolt (now lost). Jupiter is thus not merely observing, but conceptually participating in the battle. The god is positioned over the Romans' front line and wields his lightning in the direction of their Dacian opponents. These features, the lightning and the god's embedded, 'elemental' habitus, suggest that Jupiter appears here in his aspect as the thunderer (*tonans*) and that his intervention was perhaps understood as a kind of 'weather miracle', akin to the lightning and rain episodes on the later Column of Marcus Aurelius.[385] Given the nature-related

[381] Hölscher 1980, 295-296; Faust 2012b, 37; Hölscher 2017, 18-23, 29-30. Omen: Dio Cassius, 68.8.1; Hölscher 1980, 294.
[382] Gauer 1977, 25; Lepper and Frere 1988, 68-69; Faust 2012b, 37-41. The scene was perhaps intended to depict the historical battle at Tapae in AD 101: Dio Cassius, 68.8.
[383] Iconography: Faust 2012b, 38-39; Kovács 2017, 50.
[384] Examples: Bergmann 1994, fig.26 (Poseidon from the Villa di Carmiano); Boardman 1995, figs.218.4-218.5 (Nereids from Xanthos); Smith 2013, figs.40-41 (Hemera and Okeanos from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias).
[385] Jupiter's '*tonans*' identity has been read out of the frieze by many scholars: Hamberg 1945, 117-118; Gauer 1977, 25; Lepper and Frere 1988, 68-69; Baumer, Hölscher, and Winkler 1991, 291; Bode 1992, 141-142; Coarelli 2000, 68; Hölscher 2017, 22-23; Kovács 2017, 50; Fox 2018, 12-13 (suggesting the lightning is aimed at the hiding Decebalus). Against: Lehmann-Hartleben 1926, 94 n.11; Faust 2012b, 39-40, n.249 (arguing for 'Jupiter *propugnator*' because of the god's aggressive action). Against Faust: Hölscher 2017, 22-23. For the (Augustan) cult image of Jupiter *tonans*: RIC I, 64 (the figure shares the lightning bolt and nude upper body of the god on the frieze).

character of the other gods that participate in the frieze, a connection between Jupiter's appearance and a beneficent storm is attractive. We will see that the gods functioned in a similar elemental manner in documentary texts.[386] Jupiter's intervention thus answers the earlier scenes of sacrifice and omen, and realises in dynamic form the victory-bringing divine protection that Trajan and his army were imagined to have received.[387] The participation of the god provides a divine justification for the unfolding war.[388]

**Nox (scene XXXVIII)**

Following the appearance of Jupiter and the Romans' first victory (XXIV), the Dacians carry out retaliatory raids on Roman fortifications (XXXII). These attacks precipitate a Roman counter-offensive (XXXVI), in the course of which the gods intervene for a second time to help the Romans in battle (XXXVIII: Figure 14).[389] In the scene, Romans and Dacians fight before a rock face. In the background are loaded wagons, which are marked as Dacian by the dragon-headed object on the central cart. The barbarians defend themselves and their cargo by forming a semi-circular line through the middle of the scene. The Romans move in from all sides in a corresponding semi-circular attack ring, of which the participating goddess is compositionally and conceptually a part.[390] The deity emerges from behind the rock face on the left as a half-figure. She wears a peplos and holds a mantle with both hands above her head. There has been some debate over her identity, but it is perhaps easiest to take the figure as Nox, the goddess of night.[391] The figure's integration with the landscape suggests a nature divinity (in line with the other gods on the frieze), and the way the goddess holds her mantle evokes a protective or celestial canopy. The fact that the Dacians are backed into a corner indicates a surprise attack, and the most logical reading of the scene is that the Romans are executing a stealthy, night-time assault, aided by the darkness of Nox. As with the Danube crossing, this

[386] For example: Sallust, *Jugurthine War*, 75.9 (divine storm); Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.28 (divine eclipse), 13.17 (divine storm); Dio Cassius, 68.31.1-4 (divine lightning).
[387] Hamberg 1945, 117-118; Gauer 1977, 25; Baumer, Hölscher, and Winkler 1991, 267-271.
[388] Becatti 1982, 555; Hölscher 2017, 23 ("*die Grundlage des gesamten weiteren Krieges*"). The importance of Jupiter's appearance may have been subtly emphasised by the designers of the frieze, as the conclusion of the first war (LXXVIII) and the suicide of the Dacian king (CXLV) are positioned on the same vertical axis: Baumer, Hölscher, and Winkler 1991, 291; Bode 1992, 168-172; Faust 2012b, 48-51.
[389] Faust 2012b, 50.
[390] Faust 2012b, 47-48.
[391] Nox: Becatti 1982, 557; Lepper and Frere 1988, 85; Koeppel 1991, 165; Bode 1992, 142; Coarelli 2000, 83; Kovács 2017, 47. Against: Pollen 1874, 63 (Diana); Petersen 1899-1903, 45 (Luna); Rossi 1971, 150 (Selene). Compare: *LIMC* Nyx, 1 (goddess with billowing veil 'emerging' from the landscape, as on the Column).

episode shows the Romans protected by divine natural forces. Attack-by-night would also express with dramatic effect the tireless, round-the-clock efforts of the conquering army.[392]

**Victory (scene LXXVIII)**

After an extended sequence of battles and advances, the narrative reaches its half-way point at the end of the first war (LXXVIII), where Victory appears flanked by trophies in an emblematic scene that proclaims Roman success and connects the two halves of the frieze (Figure 15).[393] The goddess is depicted in a modified Capuan Aphrodite figure type, and is writing on a shield which she supports on a pillar.[394] Trajanic conquest is thus validated by the gods. Strikingly, the goddess fills the height of the frieze (in all the other scenes the figures are smaller, allowing for landscape). Victory's superhuman scale suggests that her action takes place on a different, higher plane: her appearance helps to elevate the emperor's achievements. Together, Danube, Jupiter, and Victory articulate the opening, high point, and conclusion of the first war.

**Goddess (scene CLI)**

The final deity in the frieze is an enigmatic goddess who highlights the end of the narrative. The scene (CLI) takes place at the close of the second war after the decisive action of Decebalus' suicide (CXLV), and depicts the extinguishing of remaining Dacian resistance in a wild, mountainous setting that was probably intended to represent the extreme edge of the Roman world (Figure 16). The goddess emerges from behind a mountain ridge surrounded by an impressive circular veil and turns sharply to look at the action below, where captured Dacians are being seized by Roman soldiers and led towards a small building or forest hut. The exact meaning of the scene is not certain — the Romans are perhaps taking captives to a prison or clearing the woods of an enemy outpost — and the precise role and the identity of the goddess are also unknown.[395] The deity's veil and her connection with the landscape suggest respectively a celestial divinity or geographical goddess, and Nox, Dacia, a forest goddess, and

[392] Faust 2012b, 47-48. Dramatic night attacks were a part of the repertoire of ancient battle representations: Hölscher 2004, 38.
[393] Hamberg 1945, 116; Becatti 1982, 559-560; Koeppel 1991, 197; Coarelli 2000, 136; Faust 2012b, 36. Trophies: Lepper and Frere 1988, 121-122.
[394] Becatti 1982, 559-560. Figure type: Hölscher 1970, 67-79; Kousser 2008, 58-74. Shield motif: Hölscher 1967, 99-102.
[395] On the action of the scene: Faust 2012b, 86-88; Strobel 2017b, 323.

the personified far north have all been suggested.[396] The goddess' open-ended iconography makes a firm identification difficult, but her probable range of meaning can perhaps be narrowed down.[397] The point of the final scenes is not just battle and victory, but military action in the depths of the new province. Even the emperor is not depicted travelling this far.[398] The goddess, then, perhaps served to highlight this aspect of the narrative, and may have been intended as a geographical deity inhabiting the limits of the empire, balanced by the iconic figure of Danube at the start of the frieze.[399] The goddess perhaps shows that the pioneering efforts of the legions in new lands continue to operate under a horizon of divine protection.[400] The gods would then mark the auspicious beginning, the victorious mid-point, and the far-reaching end of the narrative.

**The Column of Marcus Aurelius**

Before attempting an interpretation of the gods on the Column of Trajan, it will perhaps be helpful to outline the deities that are represented on the Column of Marcus Aurelius. Although the Aurelian Column was not produced until later in the second century, it stands close to its Trajanic predecessor in its format, narrative themes, and especially in its depiction of the gods. A description of the Column can thus help to sharpen our feel for the distinctive style of divine representation found in 'documentary' narratives and will allow the argument to better sustain generalisations.

The Column of Marcus Aurelius stood in the Campus Martius and was dedicated at some point between the emperor's northern triumph of AD 176 (the preceding campaigns to which form the subject of the monument's frieze) and AD 193, when an inscription referring to a curator of the Column was set up, providing a terminus ante quem for its construction.[401] The frieze

[396] Nox: Hamberg 1945, 118-119 (Luna-Nox); Becatti 1982, 573 (northern Nox); Faust 2012b, 86-88 (Nox or Dacia); Kovács 2017, 47; Strobel 2017b, 323. Dacia: Lehmann-Hartleben 1926, 54 n.1, 112. Forest goddess: Rosi 1971, 210; Coarelli 2000, 219 (Diana). North: Bode 1992, 142-143 (North/Nox).
[397] Karl Strobel, in a recent reassessment of the second half of the frieze, sees Nox protecting hiding Dacians: Strobel 2017b, 323. This is perhaps difficult to accept, as the Column has shown repeatedly that the gods are on the side of the Romans.
[398] Trajan's final appearance occurs in scene CXLI.
[399] The veil suggests the deity had a celestial as well as a geographical aspect: Bode 1992, 142-143, 168-172.
[400] Frank Lepper and Sheppard Frere view the goddess as a "space-filler": Lepper and Frere 1988, 132.
[401] Key studies: Petersen 1896; Hamberg 1945, 149-158; Becatti 1957; Bergmann 1991, 201-223 (with earlier scholarship); Pirson 1996, 141-168 (battle iconography), 168-177 (style and historicity); Hölscher 2000, 89-105; Coarelli 2008; Ferris 2009; Faust 2012b, 92-120; Griebel 2013; Barrett 2017, 304-321; Thill 2018, 277-308. Date:

displays a detailed dramatic representation of Marcus Aurelius' German campaigns — marches, speeches, battles, barbarian submissions, and wartime executions and destruction.[402] The systematic organisation and thematic variety found on Trajan's Column are subordinated to a heightened message of Roman superiority: the proportion of the frieze dedicated to battle scenes has doubled, and the emperor's visibility and bold images of barbarian punishment and defeat are privileged over historical-looking detail and narrative structure.[403] The fact that the frieze was willing to reformulate its Trajanic model in these ways makes the pronounced similarity of the gods on the two monuments striking. The way deities behaved in extended campaign narratives seems to have been governed by a firm set of rules and expectations.

The frieze contains four scenes of divine action: (1) the crossing of the Danube under the protection of the river god (scene III); (2) the destruction of a barbarian siege engine by a miraculous thunderbolt, sent by an (unseen, assumed) Jupiter (scene XI); (3) the defeat of a barbarian army by a divine storm, represented in the form of a much-disputed winged rain god (scene XVI); and (4) the appearance of the goddess Victory at the end of the first half of the frieze (unnumbered, between scenes LV and LVI).[404]

The gods follow the same logic as those on the Trajanic Column. The scene with the river god Danube (Figure 17) is essentially a re-staging of the same episode on the Column of Trajan. There are minor adjustments, such as the placement of the deity's left hand, but overall the two scenes are remarkably alike. The river god is again situated beneath a pontoon bridge and once more gestures for the Roman army to enter barbarian territory. The representation of Victory is likewise almost a reproduction of its Trajanic antecedent. The goddess' pose, action, and position half-way along the frieze all recall her depiction on the Column of Trajan.

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Hamberg 1945, 149-150 (AD 176-193); Ferris 2009, 90 (180-193); Löhr 2009, 123-132 (180-193); Beckmann 2011, 19-36 (176); Faust 2012b, 92 (176 or 180); Griebel 2013, 23-26 (176-193) Marcus' northern wars: Kerr 1995.

[402] Faust 2012b, 92-120; Griebel 2013.

[403] Pirson 1996, 140, 149; Hölscher 2000, 95, 97-98; Coarelli 2008, 47; Ferris 2009, 81; Beckmann 2011, 155; Griebel 2013, 196-200; Hölscher 2019, 310-320.

[404] Danube: Coarelli 2008, 114; Beckmann 2011, 89-98; Faust 2012b, 100; Griebel 2013, 224-226; Kovács 2017, 47-50. Thunderbolt: Hamberg 1945, 152; Becatti 1957, fig.9; Coarelli 2008, 50-51, 132; Ferris 2009, 81-83; Beckmann 2011, 133-134, 140; Faust 2012b, 96, 102; Griebel 2013, 240-242; Kovács 2017, 52. Rain god: Hamberg 1945, 152-153; Coarelli 2008, 140-142; Ferris 2009, 83-93; Kovács 2009, 155-180; Beckmann 2011, 133-134; Griebel 2013, 247-251; Kovács 2017, 52-56. Victory: Becatti 1957, fig.29; Beckmann 2011, 98-102; Griebel 2013, 321-322.

The other scenes of divine action, the so-called lightning and rain miracles, have their own freshly created iconography, but their basic narratives follow the pattern set by the Trajanic frieze.[405] On both monuments, elemental deities assist the Romans in two important early battles. The lightning miracle does not include a deity as such, but a divine interpretation of the scene is suggested by the *Historia Augusta*, which reports that Marcus Aurelius "by prayers summoned a thunderbolt from heaven against a war engine of the enemy".[406] The shared defining features of this passage and the scene on the frieze — the dramatic lightning strike and the presence of a barbarian siege engine — indicate that the episode was a known event in which the (unseen) gods were held to have delivered a miraculous weather-related victory.[407]

The rain miracle develops these themes and provides a striking vision of divine assistance in battle. The scene (Figure 18) is at a basic level a typical juxtaposition of the well-ordered Roman army with defeated barbarians. The cause of this defeat, however, is a colossal, primeval, winged rain god, who flies across the scene unleashing a storm that drowns the German forces. The identification of the deity is controversial,[408] but the iconography suggests that the figure in question is a rain or weather god of some kind, and the closest parallel is perhaps found in Ovid's description of the wind god Notus:

> Forth flies Notus with dripping wings,
> his awful face shrouded in pitchy darkness. His beard is heavy with
> rain; water flows in streams down his hoary locks; dark clouds rest
> upon his brow; while his wings and garments drip with dew. And,

[405] For a description and analysis of these scenes: Griebel 2013, 120-130.
[406] *Life of Marcus*, 24.4 ("*fulmen de caelo precibus suis contra hostium machinamentum extorsit*").
[407] The episode is perhaps also reflected on coins depicting the emperor holding a thunderbolt while being crowned by Victory that were produced in commemoration of Marcus' German conquests: RIC III, 264-266. There is also a contemporary medallion that depicts Jupiter attacking a giant with lightning: Gnecchi 1912, 28, nr.11. Further: Coarelli 2008, 50-51; Kovács 2009, 107-111; Faust 2012b, 96; Griebel 2013, 121-122.
[408] The historical event that inspired the scene is discussed in thirty-nine literary sources: Kovács 2009, 23-93. The most significant are: *Life of Marcus*, 24.4; Dio Cassius, 72.8.1-3, 72.10.1-5. This complicated literary tradition attributes the rain miracle to a number of deities (including Jupiter and the Christian God) and has often been used as a basis for an open-ended interpretation of the god on the frieze, with some arguing that the figure is intentionally vague: Rubin 1979, 367 (the god is as "obscure as possible"), 379 (the scene "gives free scope for any prospective viewer"); Coarelli 2008, 56 (a "deliberate decision to take a neutral position towards the diverse interpretations diffused by the various religious sects"); Israelowich 2008, 87, 102; Ferris 2009, 84 ("anonymous god"); Kovács 2009, 166. These confused literary sources are probably not helpful for interpreting an imperial monument, and we may doubt the idea that conflicting rumours about the divine authorship of the event found expression in official art. The deity is best taken as it appears — as a carefully rendered pagan rain god that helps the Romans in battle.

> when he presses the low-hanging clouds with his broad hands, a
> crashing sound goes forth; and next the dense clouds pour forth their rain.
>
> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1.264-269,
> trans. Miller 1916.

Ovid's Notus and the Aurelian divinity share a number of features.[409] Both possess streaming wings, a thick beard, wild saturated hair, and severe meteorological power — and the frieze clearly represents a carefully characterised punishing god of rain. The deity is merged with the downpour he generates, and consequently appears like many of the other gods on the Columns as a 'half-figure' nature divinity.

We may summarise the ways in which the Aurelian gods recall their predecessors on the Column of Trajan.[410] Both friezes open with a divinely sanctioned crossing of the Danube, proceed through a series of key battles in which elemental deities intervene at two decisive points, and conclude their opening sections with emblematic depictions of Victory.[411] The behaviour of the gods is remarkably consistent: all the deities that participate appear as 'emerging' weather or nature-related figures that are often only covertly involved in the action.[412] Their interventions are never directly associated with the emperor, and in most cases Trajan and Marcus are not involved in the scenes at all. This conception of divine action, in which 'half-figure' nature divinities influence events independently of imperial protagonists, differs from that found on the majority of Roman monuments, where gods usually appear as full-figure actors who work closely with the emperor. The distinctive character of the gods on the Columns suggests that we are dealing with a specific genre of visual narrative that had its own expressive concerns. We look in the next section at how parallel literary evidence can help us to interpret this phenomenon.

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[409] Notus in art: *LIMC*, Venti, 3, 12, 128-129. Notus on the Column: Hamberg 1945, 153; Kovács 2009, 166; Faust 2012b, 96-97 n.536; Griebel 2013, 122-130 (discussion), n.315 ("*Personifikation des Regens*").

[410] Some recent studies have argued that the Column of Marcus Aurelius "differed significantly" from its Trajanic predecessor in its conception of war: Thill 2018, 298. The consistency in the portrayal of gods on the two monuments is therefore perhaps especially significant.

[411] Hölscher 2000, 99-100; Faust 2012b, 98. The main difference is the absence of a fifth divinity at the end of the Aurelian frieze to balance the final goddess on the Column of Trajan. The designers of the Antonine monument perhaps no longer remembered or were unable to see the covert goddess at the top of the earlier frieze. Alternatively, the decision to represent only four scenes of divine action may have been a conscious 'rationalisation', driven by the later Column's increased emphasis on clear narrative messages. The gods on the Column of Marcus Aurelius are also shown manifesting more direct material effects (lightning and rain) in comparison with the deities on Trajan's Column. This was perhaps connected with the enhanced dramatic style of the later frieze: Griebel 2013, 122-130.

[412] The scenes depicting Victory are the only exceptions.

**'Documentary' divine representation**

The Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius are shaped by documentary concerns to a greater degree than any other monument.[413] The friezes provide detailed *commentarii*-style representations of the emperors' northern wars, and their campaigning themes, real-looking texture, and continuous narrative structure recall historiography.[414] This was a new narrative conception designed for an imposing new monument category — the relief-decorated imperial column — and the extraordinary scale and painstaking elaboration of the friezes aimed to convey the concrete reality of the emperors' unprecedented but otherwise distant military achievements.[415] The way that the gods are represented was a fundamental part of this 'documentary' conception of imperial narrative, but has been largely overlooked in previous scholarship. Amanda Claridge, for example, has argued recently that "both the narrative style and the artistic vocabulary used on the Column (of Trajan) can be matched to the rhetorical language of contemporary *panegyric*", and the gods have sometimes been seen by others as elevating allegorical deviations from the reality that otherwise marks the friezes.[416] In the following discussion, the evidence provided by historiographical texts is used to argue that the representation of gods on the Columns was in fact carefully calibrated to enhance the 'documentary' narrative logic of the monuments.

Gods in historiography were defined by three main features: (1) they were always invisible or imperfectly perceived; (2) they manifested primarily through natural events, such as storms and eclipses; and (3) they intervened only occasionally, but usually in significant episodes.[417] These characteristics were rarely deviated from by Roman authors. Describing the gods in anonymous, 'natural' terms was an ingrained component of historical writing designed to

[413] Bode 1992, 123.
[414] Jones 1910, 435-440; Zanker 1970, 525-528; Gauer 1977, 53-54 (suggesting that the Trajanic frieze drew directly on the emperor's *commentarii*); Hölscher 1980, 291; Smith 1989, 217; Baumer, Hölscher, and Winkler 1991, 262; Bode 1992, 123; Kuhoff 1993, 293; Coarelli 2000, 176; Stewart 2004, 47; Faust 2012b, 39; Hölscher 2017, 15-18, 29 (arguing that, while Trajan's Column has strong 'historical' aspects, the idea that the frieze directly reflects the emperor's *commentarii* is "*ein philologischer Wunschtraum*").
[415] The narrative style of the Columns was perhaps prefigured in now-lost triumphal paintings: Lusnia 2006, 272-296.
[416] Quotation (emphasis added): Claridge 2013, 11. Allegorical deviations: Toynbee 1934, 13-14; Hamberg 1945, 116.
[417] Gods in historiography: Walbank 1960, 222; Parker 1987, 190; Woodman 1988, 87; Feeney 1991, 180-184, 256-260; Levene 1993, 243; Feeney 1998, 80-81; Feeney 2007, 173-202; Davies 2009, 171.

reinforce its authenticity and documentary power. Personalised description of the gods was the responsibility of epic poets, not recorders of historical truth. We may pass some examples in review to show how this documentary manner of divine representation worked in practice.

The primary context for historiographical divine action was miraculous weather events. In Sallust's account of the Jugurthine wars, for example, the Roman army is assisted by a heaven-sent downpour that relieves the troops' thirst and convinces them that they are "cared for by the gods" (*rati sese dis inmortalibus curae esse*).[418] The divine forces responsible are assumed and unseen. Tacitus, in a similar vein, describes a sudden eclipse that overawes mutinous soldiers on the northern frontier. Again, the deity responsible is not observed directly, but the soldiers understand the event to be the work of the "moon goddess" (*Luna…deae*).[419] Tacitus also reports a divinely inspired storm that occurs after the death of an imperial prince in similar terms: the storm is an expression of "divine anger" (*iram deum*), but the gods themselves are not seen.[420] A third episode from Tacitus has several points of interest in the present context and is worth quoting at greater length. The Neronian general Corbulo has just captured Artaxata, the Armenian capital:

> Artaxata was fired, demolished, and razed to the ground…In addition, there was a marvel, sent apparently by Heaven: up to Artaxata, the landscape glittered in the sunlight, yet suddenly the area encircled by the fortifications was so completely enveloped in a cloud of darkness and parted from the outside world by lightning flashes that the belief prevailed that it was being consigned to its doom by the hostile action of the gods. For all this, Nero was hailed as Imperator.
>
> Tacitus, *Annals*, 13.41,
> trans. Jackson 1937.

This episode brings together many of the key features of documentary divine action and sets them squarely in a campaigning context. The powers of the invisible gods are projected through miraculous clouds and lightning, and this striking divine act validates Roman success. The Aurelian rain miracle was recorded by historians in a similar way. Dio Cassius, for example, writes that, when the Romans were "in a terrible plight from fatigue (during battle)…a mighty rain, not without divine intervention, burst upon them", ensuring the swift defeat of their

[418] Sallust, *Jugurthine War*, 75.1-10.
[419] Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.28.
[420] Tacitus, *Annals*, 13.17

opponents.[421] In this and the other examples we see that gods in documentary texts always arrived in a 'realistic' or 'distanced' form, as natural effects, and that, unlike in epic and panegyric, they did not directly empower or physically interact with mortals.[422]

The gods on the Columns are consistently represented in this same 'documentary' manner.[423] We have seen, for example, that the deities all have 'documentary'-style elemental effects. Danube's aquatic sanction, Jupiter's thundering assistance, Nox's protective darkness, the rain god's devastating storm, and the forest goddess' beneficent presence could each come from the pages of Tacitus or Dio Cassius. In addition, the participating deities are all depicted as half-figures who emanate from the natural environment — from rivers, trees, mountains, and the sky.[424] These qualified epiphanies were surely a visual translation of the divine invisibility found in historical texts, and the gods appear to be conceived throughout as an unseen presence. They are not witnessed or interacted with by any of the human participants, and they appear primarily in the background or at the edge of the scenes in which they act. This contrasts sharply with the gods' normal narrative function. Monuments such as the Arch of Titus, the Cancelleria Reliefs, and the Great Trajanic Frieze, for example, all present the gods as central, leading participants. Moreover, while on most monuments the gods interact closely with the emperor, Trajan and Marcus' only 'contact' with the divine on the Columns is through indirect ritual activity. The friezes also correspond with historiography in the frequency of their divine representations. Of the hundreds of scenes on the Columns, only nine have an explicit divine element. The gods nevertheless help to structure the narratives and are concentrated around significant episodes — campaign beginnings, decisive battles, and the closing sections of the wars. This economical divine deployment aligns with other 'realistic' aspects of the friezes,

[421] Dio Cassius, 72.8.1-3 (quotations and description of event), 72.10.1-5 (more details and aftermath). The same event and the lightning miracle are recorded briefly in the *Historia Augusta*: *Life of Marcus*, 24.4.
[422] Further examples: Sallust, *Jugurthine War*, 87.48; Caesar, *Gallic War*, 2.31; Livy, 1.23, 5.51.
[423] The emblematic scenes of Victory are the only exceptions. The Column narratives are also different from those of the historians in that their divine interventions are entirely positive. Writers, on the other hand, aimed to record dramatic details, some of which would be out of place on an official monument. For example: Dio Cassius, 68.31.1-4 (divinely inspired "peals of thunder…lightning, rain-storms, hail, and thunderbolts descended upon the Romans as often as they made assaults"). The historians also often frame the intervention of the gods in terms of 'belief' or 'perception' or 'rumour'. The monuments, on the other hand, assert unequivocally the reality of the emperor's divine support.
[424] An early historical image of a real military event, the famous Athenian painting of the battle of Marathon, portrayed the gods with similar characteristics: Pausanias, 1.15.3 ("Here is also a portrait of the hero Marathon, after whom the plain is named, and of Theseus represented as coming up from the under-world").

such as Trajan's and Marcus' mundane military roles. As in real life, neither emperor physically leads troops in battle.[425]

The connections between the friezes and historical texts suggest that, in Roman thinking, the Columns' presentation of the gods was plausible and appropriate to an everyday understanding of their character. The gods do not appear as allegorical or panegyrical intrusions, but as potent elemental forces, whose unseen interventions were tailored to and expressive of a compelling 'documentary' narrative fabric.[426] This 'true-to-life' handling of the gods helps to anchor the action of the friezes in the here-and-now, and will have increased the credibility and effectiveness of the monuments as visual memorials. The Columns thus capture a distinct strand of the wider project of imperial realisation in images that we have been discussing. Their extended campaign friezes use a specific conception of divine action to articulate the 'authentic' or 'historically real' aspects of the emperor's role. Other welcome yet conflicting ideas, such as the emperor's special personal relationship with the gods, were the responsibility of other monuments, and we turn now to two examples of a different, 'panegyrical' genre of imperial narrative: the Great Trajanic Frieze and the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum.

**The Great Trajanic Frieze**

The Great Trajanic Frieze provides a thunderous vision of battle and victory in which the gods play an important role.[427] The monument survives in eight consecutive slabs, which were reincorporated into the Arch of Constantine, and a number of fragments.[428] We have around twenty metres of a minimum original total of at least forty, but there was perhaps much more.[429] This length, combined with an impressive height of nearly three metres and an explosive artistic style, makes the Frieze one of the largest and most powerful sets of imperial reliefs in existence.

[425] Lehmann-Hartleben 1926, 89.
[426] Compare Josephus' description of Vespasian and Titus' realistic triumphal campaign paintings (emphasis added): Josephus, *Jewish War*, 7.5.5 ("the workmanship of these representations was so magnificent and lively…that it exhibited what had been done to those that did not see it *as if they had really been there*"). John Scheid has suggested that the restricted depiction of gods on Trajan's Column may indicate a lack of divine support, in line with the fact that some state votive rites were not carried out in the years AD 101-105: Scheid 2017, 145-149. That this (negative) idea would be detectable in the frieze is highly questionable.
[427] Key studies: Hamberg 1945, 56-63, 168-172; Gauer 1973, 318-350; Touati 1987; Smith 1989, 216-217; Phillip 1991, 11-30; Hölscher 2002, 141; Faust 2012b, 9-28; Hölscher 2019, 320-323.
[428] Fragments: Gauer 1973, 328-337; Koeppel 1985, 182-195; Touati 1987, 96-110 (included are further scenes of battle (Berlin fragment), battle or pursuit (Medici fragment), and barbarian submission (Borghese fragment)).
[429] Estimations of length: Gauer 1973, 318-319 (over thirty-six metres); Touati 1987, 111 (over forty-one metres).

Like the Column, its main subject was Trajan's Dacian wars, but this theme is mediated through the Frieze in a strikingly different way: Trajan leads his army in the style of a Hellenistic warrior-king, mixes freely with the gods, and is embedded in a narrative equipped with the apparatus of panegyrical historical epic — the bird's-eye perspective of the Column is supplanted by over-life-size figures that fill the visual field in the manner of a classical gigantomachy.[430] The Frieze is a vivid, heroic counterpart to the detailed and down-to-earth narrative of Trajan's Column.[431]

The key surviving section shows two main overlapping scenes: at the left, an adventus, and, across the rest of the section, a battle.[432] The rapid shift between urban arrival and frontier warfare suggests that the Frieze employed an elevating technique of narrative elision. The methodical unfolding of the Column is replaced by a seamless vision of decisive scenes: comprehensive historical-looking documentation becomes selective panegyrical celebration.

The gods appear in the adventus scene (Figure 19) and surround the emperor in the same constellation seen on the Arch of Titus, that of Virtus, Honos, and Victory. The scene is not complete — the shoulders of figures who continued onto the next, now-lost section can be seen at the left edge of the slab — and we are left with the right half of the scene.[433] The emperor is framed by gods and soldiers and is shown arriving at an urban location, probably Rome, which is indicated by an arch carved across the background. Virtus and Honos stand to the left of the

[430] Hamberg 1945, 61-62; Touati 1987, 27, 29-31; Smith 1989, 216-217; Phillip 1991, 14; Kuhoff 1993, 297-298; Faust 2012b, 11-16, 27-29; Strobel 2017b, 323-329. The contrast between the Frieze and the Column prompted Werner Gauer to argue that the Frieze was produced under Domitian: Gauer 1973, 321-325, 344. The attribution of the Frieze to the Trajanic period has also been a point of contention for others: Hamberg 1945, 168-170; Gauer 1973, 319-320; Faust 2012b, 10 (discussion); Claridge 2013, 11 n.71 (Domitianic). The Frieze is probably Trajanic for the following reasons: (1) the fact that a piece of the Frieze (the so-called Medici fragment) was allegedly found in Trajan's Forum; (2) the correspondence in style, iconography, and subject matter between the Frieze and known Trajanic monuments, such as the Column; (3) the fact that the Arch of Constantine, from which the main slabs of the Frieze were recovered, incorporated other material certainly from Trajan's Forum, and none from Domitianic monuments; and (4) the (re-carved) portrait heads, which suggest Trajan rather than Domitian as the original protagonist: Zanker 1970, 513-516; Touati 1987, 91-95 (portraits), 112-121; Faust 2012b, 10.
[431] Zanker 1970, 513-516 (suggesting that both monuments may have been connected with the emperor's forum).
[432] Battle: Hamberg 1945, 168-172; Touati 1987, 17-26; Faust 2012b, 11-16.
[433] Touati 1987, 16.

emperor to lead him into the city. Victory hovers behind to crown the emperor.[434] Trajan's military success is thus directly authenticated by the gods.

As often with depictions of Virtus and Honos, there has been debate over whether the figures are in fact Roma and the Genius of the Roman People.[435] The two warrior gods are to be preferred. We saw in Chapter Three that the pairing of Roma and the Genius is unattested, and there are several features of the Frieze that independently suggest Virtus and Honos. First, the figure labelled as either Honos or the Genius is represented as an armoured lictor, with cuirass and fasces. Lictors accompanied the emperor and formed part of his bodyguard on campaign.[436] The figure should therefore have a mobile, military character, like Honos, rather than a grounded, civic character, like the Genius of the Roman People. Second, the goddess standing beside Trajan is not, as would be appropriate for Roma, a representative of the city coming to meet the emperor, but a part of his entourage. This is indicated by her posture and placement in the scene. The goddess is on the outer side of the arch, in a non-urban setting, and her bent leg and the torsion between her body and head show that she is with Trajan and Honos about to move in, towards Rome. Roma should be inside the city, and if present would be better placed in the lost left-hand section of the scene, which perhaps included figures representing the city, its gods, or institutions.[437]

The deities are thus protecting the emperor and escorting him home. The idea of the gods as imperial guardians is explicitly underlined by the conversion of Honos into a divine lictor. Trajan's close visual relationship with the gods represents the combination of mortal leadership and divine authorisation that formed the basis of successful imperial action in Roman thought.[438] We know also that the intervention of the gods in the adventus scene was not an

[434] The goddess holds an oak crown: Hölscher 1967, 64; Touati 1987, 15. Victory perhaps also held a palm branch: Faust 2012b, 16-17. Stephan Faust suggests that Victory's juxtaposition with the fighting anticipates the battle report to be given by the emperor following his arrival in Rome: Faust 2012b, 17.
[435] Roma and the Genius: Hamberg 1945, 56-63; Hölscher 1967, 52, n.314; Gauer 1973, 327 (Roma and ideal youth); Koeppel 1985, 173 (Roma or Virtus and lictor proximus). Virtus and Honos: Touati 1987, 15-16; Hölscher 2002, 141; Faust 2012b, 16-17.
[436] See, for example, scenes VI and CIV on Trajan's Column.
[437] Reconstructions of the lost section: Gauer 1973, 328 (Capitoline triad); Faust 2012b, 17 (civic Genii or the Capitoline triad). For civic welcoming figures waiting in the city, good parallels can be found on the Cancelleria Reliefs (Frieze B: Figure 11) and on the lower panel reliefs on the western facade of the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum (Figure 23).
[438] As preserved in texts such as Pliny's *Panegyricus* (discussed below).

exception: one of the fragments of the Frieze features another deity, who is perhaps the Genius of a military camp.[439] The Frieze thus picks up and breathes new life into the god-driven imperial mythology that we saw emerging in the Flavian period. The pragmatic efforts of Trajan as a campaigning general that were illustrated on the Column have been re-imagined. The narrative is now one of mythologised achievements that exist in a divinely charged dramatic landscape. Some writers of the period were engaged in the same kind of legitimising panegyrical description, and works such as Pliny's *Panegyricus* can help us to locate ancient concepts that are likely to have informed monuments such as the Frieze. Before looking at this phenomenon in detail, it will be helpful to substantiate our picture of Trajanic narrative through a discussion of another key monument: the uniquely complex Arch of Trajan at Beneventum.

**The Arch of Trajan at Beneventum**

The Arch of Trajan at Beneventum displays a world of imperial action that is saturated with gods.[440] Static narratives of Trajanic peace and prosperity are staged across the Arch in fourteen large panel reliefs with an exceptional thematic range. We see religious rituals, frontier operations, agricultural administration, state ceremonies, and ambitious images of the emperor alongside the Olympian pantheon.[441] More than forty deities are represented throughout the reliefs, and nowhere is the role of the gods in imperial narrative depicted in greater detail.

The Arch has been well-discussed in previous scholarship, and its visual programme, narrative messages, and divine imagery have all been the subject of detailed studies.[442] Some of the reliefs and the deities they represent are understood and agreed, but a number are controversial,

[439] Gauer 1973, 329.
[440] Key studies: Domaszewski 1909, 25-52; Hamberg 1945, 63-75; Hassel 1966; Fittschen 1972, 742-788; Lorenz 1973; Gauer 1974, 308-335; Simon 1981, 3-10; Torelli 1997, 145-177. More recently: Heitz 2006, 207-224; Speidel 2006, 189-206. The monument was produced in AD 114, perhaps in response to the emperor's construction of a local road, the *via Traiana*, which was completed around AD 109: Hassel 1966, 1-9; Fittschen 1972, 743; Gauer 1974, 312-313. The Arch is therefore unusual in that it is a senatorial commission set up outside Rome, but joins a tradition of monuments commemorating imperial infrastructure projects: Hölscher 2002, 142. Mario Torelli, on the other hand, connects the entire monument with the *alimenta*: Torelli 1997, 170. Some posit a second, Hadrianic building phase, for which there is no evidence: Currie 1996, 167 (Trajan is elevated in the attic reliefs to the "status of a god", so these parts of the monument must be posthumous). This line of thinking is probably not justified: Trajan is shown among the gods as their mortal partner, not as a god himself.
[441] Thematic range: Hamberg 1945, 63; Fittschen 1972, 742. For the Arch's other decoration (which includes a small triumphal frieze marking the Dacian wars and various freestanding divinities): Fittschen 1972, 783-784; Simon 1998, 191.
[442] Programme and narrative: Hassel 1966, 22; Fittschen 1972, 742-788; Gauer 1974, 308-335; Hölscher 2002, 143-144. Gods: Simon 1981, 3-10.

and it should be said that many of the gods cannot be securely identified. The names of the ten mural-crown-wearing deities that populate the reliefs, for example, can be hypothesised, but not pressed with certainty. We will nevertheless see that the gods were a defining component of a carefully constructed narrative programme. The discussion first outlines the reliefs individually, before analysing the Arch's divine representation in the light of the contemporary panegyric of Pliny the Younger. Both the Arch and the text, it will be argued, aimed to celebrate Trajan by presenting him as a ruler who worked closely with the gods. Pliny sets out a range of contemporary ideas that help to illuminate the Arch's programme. The Arch, however, emphasises the contribution of the gods to imperial action in a way that we perhaps would not have predicted based on Pliny's text. The monument goes further than the literature of its period, and forges its own powerful marble assertion of the vitality of the emperor and the gods' extensive collaboration.

**Passageway reliefs**

Two long panel reliefs are displayed on the walls of the Arch's passageway (Figure 20). The relief on the south wall dramatises the institution of the *alimenta* and depicts the emperor handing out food to his people.[443] Standing among the recipients are four goddesses, whose mural crowns suggest that they are connected with towns. The divinity closest to the emperor, who wears an additional veil over her headgear, is probably a local guardian deity of Beneventum, and the other three deities are probably connected with other Italian cities.[444] The goddesses are the divine forces that protect the territory in which the emperor's generosity operates. The other passageway relief, on the north wall, represents a scene of sacrifice. Trajan oversees the slaughter of a bull and is surrounded by attendants, citizens, and senatorial companions. Among the crowd stands a prominent togate figure with a divine hairstyle and beard, who is certainly the Genius of the Senate.[445] The scene is therefore set in a metropolitan context and shows a harmonious state ritual.[446] Taken together, the passageway reliefs

[443] *Alimenta*: Torelli 1997, 145-147. Trajan's generosity and distributions: Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 25-28.
[444] Domaszewski 1909, 50; Fittschen 1972, 748-750; Lorenz 1973, 27; Currie 1996, 169 (Tyches of Italian cities); Torelli 1997, 145-148. Against: Fittschen 1972, 748-750 (interpreting the veil-wearing deity as Roma). Roma should not have a mural crown: Simon 1981, 4.
[445] Fittschen 1972, 747-748; Lorenz 1973, 26; Simon 1981, 4.
[446] Gauer 1974, 316. Erika Simon suggests Jupiter as the recipient of the sacrifice because of the god's prominence in some of the other reliefs on the Arch: Simon 1981, 4.

announce the major themes of the Arch's programme: the emperor's civic deeds, and his wide-ranging care for gods and men in the city and the country.[447]

**Eastern facade**

The eastern or country-facing facade is decorated with six panel reliefs (Figures 21-22).[448] The two panels on the lowest storey concern security operations on the frontier. On the left, Trajan agrees a treaty with northern barbarians under the supervision of Jupiter, who is identified by his hairstyle, thunderbolt, and powerful exposed body.[449] The limbs of the figures in the scene are damaged, but Trajan and the barbarian leader appear to have been shaking hands, signifying concord and good relations. As a god responsible for oaths and as the ultimate protector of the empire, Jupiter is a doubly appropriate participant in the scene.[450] His authoritative full-scale presence — standing in majesty, on earth, at the heart of the relief — signals that this is an elevated visual world far beyond that of Trajan's Column or everyday experience. The relief on the right, which shows the emperor's concern for his troops and their efforts to ensure the safety of the empire, is the only narrative on the Arch without gods.[451] The significance of the panels increases as one moves from the lower storey to the attic, and the purely mortal cast of the Trajan-and-soldiers relief perhaps reflects its 'low-ranking' placement.[452] Next to this entirely human image, Jupiter was perhaps intended as the 'first' god of the Arch. The panels on the attic storey of the opposite facade form the culmination of the monument's visual programme and also feature Jupiter in a central role. Trajan's activity with the gods throughout the reliefs is thus conceptually bound by two interactions with Rome's chief deity.[453]

[447] Fittschen 1972, 750; Torelli 1997, 145-148.
[448] On the issue of the thematic separation of the facades: Fittschen 1972, 750; Currie 1996, 181; Torelli 1997, 149, 163-171. Against: Hassel 1966, 22 (chronological sequence); Gauer 1974, 316-317 (no sharp separation between facades); Simon 1981, 3.
[449] Domaszewski 1909, 46; Fittschen 1972, 751; Lorenz 1973, 14; Gauer 1974, 317-318.
[450] Jupiter and oaths: Livy, 22.53. Ultimate protector: Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 1.6 ("*conservatorem imperii nostri*").
[451] Fittschen 1972, 751-754; Gauer 1974, 318-319; Simon 1981, 4-6. Against: Speidel 2006, 200 (the scene shows Trajan welcoming allied warriors: the standard-bearer is in fact a bear-skin-wearing barbarian). Some identify the skin-wearing figure as Hercules: Domaszewski 1909, 44; Lorenz 1973, 14-15. The figure's tunic and shoes show that he is a mortal: Torelli 1997, 150; Hölscher 2002, 143.
[452] Simon 1981, 5. The corresponding relief on the other facade likewise has no gods, but is part of a two-panel scene that includes several deities.
[453] For this idea: Simon 1981, 5.

The reliefs on the middle storey illustrate the protection of Italy's people and soldiers under the aegis of divinely backed imperial power. The panel on the right depicts an unusual scene. Mars, Trajan, two female deities, and a pair of kneeling children look towards a goddess with a mural crown, who holds a plough. The plough indicates that the goddess is connected with the land and her mural crown suggests that she is perhaps Italia.[454] The two other goddesses have a number of possible identities. The one holding a cornucopia is perhaps Felicitas or Fortuna, and the one beside Trajan is possibly Providentia.[455] Whatever their names, the goddesses form part of the supportive divine apparatus of imperial prosperity. Most scholars see Trajan presenting the children to the gods, symbolising divine care for the young or the foundation of a colony.[456] These ideas are probably correct, but they perhaps do not fully explain a couple of features of the relief. The first is the section of the relief beneath the children, which is carved to look like ploughed ground. The second is the collaborative action of Mars and Italia. The war god strides into the scene and places his arm around the goddess' shoulders in a gesture of support, as if the pair were driving the plough. This dynamism is difficult to explain if the gods are simply receiving the children, and with the earth-like groundline in mind, the scene was perhaps designed to suggest the idea of Mars and Italia raising a new generation of Romans out of their own soil. In Pliny's panegyric, citizens are encouraged to love their country "not only as a homeland, but as a sustaining nurse" (*altricem*).[457] This idea of the land's cultivation of the people was perhaps also expressed through the ploughing action of the relief.

The adjacent panel shows the recruitment of soldiers. A young man stands to attention beneath what is perhaps a measuring frame and is presented to the emperor by a youthful armoured god.[458] A female deity with a military standard and a mural crown stands in the background. The male divinity has been interpreted in a number of ways but is most easily taken as Honos. The iconography of the figure overlaps extensively with the securely identified depiction of

[454] Italia: Fittschen 1972, 758-759; Lorenz 1973, 18-19; Currie 1996, 178-179. Other suggestions: Domaszewski 1909, 48 (Roma); Hassel 1966, 14-15 (Roma); Gauer 1974, 328 (Roma-Italia); Simon 1981, 6-7 (colony personification); Torelli 1997, 150 (colony personification). Roma should not have a mural crown.
[455] Various suggestions: Hassel 1966, 14-15 (Italia and Indulgentia); Fittschen 1972, 758-759 (Felicitas and Abundantia); Simon 1981, 6-7 (Felicitas and Providentia); Currie 1996, 178-179 (Liberalitas and Felicitas); Torelli 1997, 150 (Fortuna and Providentia).
[456] Simon 1981, 6-7; Currie 1996, 178-179; Torelli 1997, 150; Heintz 2006, 212-216.
[457] Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 28.5. Mars had important agricultural associations: Simon 1990, 141; Beard, North, and Price 1998, 15.
[458] Description of the scene and its components: Fittschen 1972, 756-758.

the god on the Great Trajanic Frieze, and the military themes of the narrative are appropriate for Honos' martial character.[459] The attributes of the female deity (mural crown and standard) show that she is a protective goddess of a military location, perhaps the Fortuna of the camp.[460] The relief proclaims that the powers of the emperor and the gods are responsible for the production of worthy soldiers.

The attic reliefs represent the culmination of the themes of the security of the provinces and the people of Italy visualised in the scenes below. On the right, Trajan restores a kneeling personification, who is identified as Dacia by the iconic Danube bridge in the background.[461] The scene is flanked by reclining river gods, and settler-citizens are shown standing on the bridge: the land has been made safe by Trajan's actions and will flourish in harmony with the forces of nature (the river gods).[462] The relief on the left of the attic is fragmentary, but can be confidently restored as the meeting of Trajan with the gods of the countryside. The left half of the panel is missing, but a fragment depicting a lictor confirms the emperor's presence and his presentation as a mortal magistrate. On the right stand four preserved gods, who are securely identified by their attributes as Bacchus, Ceres, Diana, and Silvanus, from left to right.[463] The emperor's partnership with these rural gods is presented as the reward and basis for his achievements in the narratives below, which took place in the rural zones of the provinces and Italy.[464] The purely mortal relief on the lower storey which initiated Trajan's actions is transcended here through the emperor's participation in an elevated, almost wholly divine scene.

[459] Honos: Hassel 1966, 14; Simon 1981, 7; Hölscher 2002, 143. Alternatively: Domaszewski 1909, 47 (Mars Ultor); Lorenz 1973, 19 (personification of army); Torelli 1997, 152 (Genius *castrorum*).
[460] Lorenz 1973, 19; Simon 1981, 7; Torelli 1997, 152. Alternatively: Domaszewski 1909, 47 (Virtus); Hassel 1966, 14 (Roma); Fittschen 1972, 756-758 (Roma or Italia); Heintz 2006, 221 (Oikoumene). The (non-Amazonian) iconography of the figure is wrong for Virtus or Roma.
[461] Hassel 1966, 18; Fittschen 1972, 759-765, fig.18 (coin with bridge); Gauer 1974, 320-321. Against: Domaszewski 1909, 42 (Mesopotamia); Hamberg 1945, 74-75 (Parthia or Mesopotamia); Simon 1981, 8-9 (Italia); Torelli 1997, 153 (Italia); Hölscher 2002, 144 (Italia).
[462] Fittschen 1972, 759-765. River gods: Gauer 1974, 320-321.
[463] Fittschen 1972, 765-766; Torelli 1997, 153. The hair of a fifth deity is visible on the background near the break and perhaps belonged to Libera, who as the wife of Bacchus may be restored to the missing section: Simon 1981, plate 14 (restoration). Some scholars have seen in the group of gods an allusion to a set of regions or provinces: Domaszewski 1909, 40-41 (Bacchus-Dacia, Diana-Moesia, Silvanus-Illyricum); Hassel 1966, 17; Lorenz 1973, 38; Gauer 1974, 321. Erika Simon connects the gods with the 'Plebian triad': Simon 1981, 9.
[464] In the plough and recruitment reliefs the emperor wears travelling dress. On the emperor's role in securing the bounty of the land: Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 32.

**Western facade**

The western or city-facing facade is decorated with six panel reliefs (Figures 23-24). The two reliefs on the lowest storey form a pair, with a single scene of adventus represented across both panels. On the right, Trajan and his entourage arrive at an arch. On the left, representatives of the city of Rome, including the Genii of the Senate and People and an uncertain third divinity with a mural crown, stand in an urban setting.[465] The Genius of the Senate turns towards Trajan and appears to present a now-lost object with his right arm. Based on comparable scenes found on coins, the object was probably a globe.[466] The conferral of this power symbol dramatises the source of Trajan's official 'constitutional' authority: the emperor can only rule with the assent of the senate and people. Taking the two reliefs together, the scene includes three divinities, but we may note that, as on the other facade, the right-hand relief is entirely human. We see then on both facades an increasing divine presence from the lower right-hand panel to the left-hand relief of the attic, which on both facades is almost or entirely composed of gods.

The reliefs on the middle storey show further civic and administrative actions. On the right, the emperor interacts with merchants in the Forum Boarium. The location is identified by three 'topographical' gods with temples in the area — Portunus, Hercules, and Apollo — who are depicted at reduced scale in well-known schemes in the background.[467] The emperor's leadership ensures good production and trade, and is sanctioned by the gods responsible for those zones of life.[468] The other middle-storey relief, on the left, shows Trajan and a group of deities overseeing the release of veterans, who stand before the emperor. The martial aspect of the scene is signalled by a military standard held by one of the gods. This deity stands behind the veterans and matches the iconography (standard, mural crown) of the goddess in the 'recruitment' relief on the eastern facade. She is therefore connected with a military location, and may like her counterpart be the Fortuna of the camp.[469] A second goddess stands next to

[465] Descriptions (with interpretation of the unusual divinity): Domaszewski 1909, 33 (equestrian Genius); Fittschen 1972, 767-770; Gauer 1974, 321 (equestrian Genius); Simon 1981, 6 (Genius *castrorum praetorum*); Torelli 1997, 156 (Genius *municiporum*).
[466] Fittschen 1972, 767-770.
[467] Domaszewski 1909, 38-39; Fittschen 1972, 772-773; Lorenz 1973, 20; Simon 1981, 8; Torelli 1997, 158. The poses of the gods may recall cult statues: Simon 1981, 8; Martin 1992, 83-84 (Portunus perhaps holds an anchor). Against, locating the scene in Ostia: Hassel 1966, 16; Currie 1996, 166. Trajan is perhaps securing the grain supply for the army or the urban people: Torelli 1997, 158 (people); Speidel 2006, 203 (army).
[468] On Trajan's public works and management of the corn supply: Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 29-31, 41-50.
[469] Domaszewski 1909, 36 (identifying her headgear as the *corona vallaris* or 'camp crown'); Fittschen 1972, 771 (Roma, Virtus, Italia, or a province personification); Torelli 1997, 160 (colony personification).

the emperor, and is securely identified by her quiver and knee-length costume as Diana, a rural goddess who will protect the veterans as they begin their new (agricultural) lives.[470] A third figure in the scene, a bearded male with a dog, should probably by interpreted as Silvanus, who like Diana serves as an appropriate protective deity for the veterans.[471] We may note finally that the goddess with the standard is actually touching one of the veterans. Gods in narrative reliefs usually interacted exclusively with the emperor, and the action of the goddess here emphasises her 'real' protective presence.

The attic reliefs repeat the themes of arrival and imperial authorisation that we saw on the lower storey. A single scene of adventus is again spread across both panels.[472] On the right, Trajan arrives in Rome and is welcomed by a six-figure group of men and gods.[473] Two of the figures are togate and are depicted at a smaller scale than the others. They are therefore probably the mortal consuls.[474] Behind them stands a pair of youthful gods, whose twin appearance suggests they are the Dioscuri or the Penates, the household gods of the city.[475] To their right, a goddess with a mural crown is perhaps Fortuna Redux, who would highlight the positive connotations of the emperor's return.[476] Finally, an armoured male god stands next to Trajan and completes the welcome party. His identity is uncertain, but his position in the scene shows that he has come from the city to meet the emperor, and his iconography (cuirass, short beard) is appropriate for Romulus-Quirinus, who would be an appropriate archetypal Roman representative.[477] Alongside these welcoming figures and the emperor himself are two lictors. One of the lictors has an emphatically divine hairstyle and is surely Honos, who appeared in

[470] Fittschen 1972, 771; Torelli 1997, 160.
[471] Silvanus: Domaszewski 1909, 36; Hassel 1966, 15-16; Fittschen 1972, 771; Lorenz 1973, 21; Torelli 1997, 160. Alternatively: Simon 1981, 7 (veteran-linked personification). Silvanus with dog: *LIMC* Silvanus, 1-2, 4, 14, 19-20.
[472] Interpretations (with connections to specific events or dates): Hamberg 1945, 65-71 (departure, not arrival, before the emperor's Parthian campaigns); Hassel 1966, 19-20 (AD 107, after the Dacian wars); Fittschen 1972, 773-782; Gauer 1974, 322 (AD 107); Simon 1981, 9-10 (AD 107).
[473] On the architectural background of the scene: Fittschen 1972, 776-778 (Capitol); Gauer 1974, 322 (Temple of Mars); Simon 1981, 9-10 (Porta Capena and temple of Virtus and Honos); Torelli 1997, 160-161 (*area capitolina*).
[474] Fittschen 1972, 775; Torelli 1997, 161.
[475] Domaszewski 1909, 31 (Penates); Fittschen 1972, 776 (Dioscuri or Penates); Lorenz 1973, 39-40 (Dioscuri or Penates); Gauer 1974, 323 (Dioscuri or Penates).
[476] Simon 1981, 9-10. Most scholars see Roma: Domaszewski 1909, 32; Fittschen 1972, 776; Lorenz 1973, 39-40; Gauer 1974, 323; Torelli 1997, 160-161. The mural crown is not appropriate for Roma.
[477] Fittschen 1972, 776-778; Simon 1981, 9-10; Torelli 1997, 160-161. Some see Hadrian, but an appropriate portrait is lacking: Domaszewski 1909, 32; Hassel 1966, 19-20; Lorenz 1973, 39-40; Gauer 1974, 327-329 (Hadrian-Mars).

the same role in the arrival scene on the Great Trajanic Frieze.[478] The gods thus bring Trajan safely home, where he is met by representatives of the city — the consuls, Penates, Fortuna, and Romulus-Quirinus — who form an impressive assembly of Roman guardians.

This welcoming group is extended into the neighbouring relief, which shows seven major gods or 'Olympians' standing in majesty.[479] Trajan and the city representatives were depicted in front of a real-looking architectural background. The Olympians, on the other hand, are arranged in an empty 'infinite' relief space, suggesting that they are situated in an elevated divine sphere.[480] All the gods can be easily recognised by their costumes and attributes. In the foreground we see the Capitoline triad of Minerva, Jupiter, and Juno, and in the background stand Hercules, Bacchus, Ceres, and Mercury, from left to right.[481] As with the Genius of the Senate on the lower storey, the central god here, Jupiter, turns to present an object across the relief to Trajan. The object is a thunderbolt, and again we have a dramatisation of one of the foundations of imperial authority. Trajan's position is given divine justification, and the emperor is cast as a Jovian regent.

The action of handing over a thunderbolt is unparalleled in Roman art, but clearly signifies the conferral of Jupiter-like power and the right to rule.[482] Some scholars have gone further and interpreted the scene as a representation of the emperor's apotheosis or even of the "abdication of Jupiter".[483] The relief, however, is careful to show that this is not the case. Jupiter retains his sceptre, the symbol of ultimate authority, and is separated from the emperor across the face of the Arch, avoiding any suggestion of Trajan's introduction to Olympus or deification. In

[478] First recognised as divine, but labelled as the Genius of the Roman People: Fittschen 1972, 776. Noting that the figure arrives with Trajan, and so cannot be the waiting Genius of the People: Gauer 1974, n.55; Simon 1981, n.142 (both leave the figure's identity open).
[479] Hercules and Bacchus were not technically 'Olympians': Long 1987, 279-280.
[480] Simon 1981, 9-10.
[481] This grand congregation of gods combines the state triad with deities responsible for the land, production, and trade, thus synthesising the main themes of the Arch. None of the identities of the figures are disputed: Torelli 1997, 161-162. On Minerva and the Capitoline triad: Schürmann 1985, 6-7.
[482] Domaszewski 1909, 28-29; Fittschen 1972, 787-788; Simon 1981, 9-10. Compare: BMC III Trajan, 493-497 (contemporary coins depicting Jupiter holding a thunderbolt over a diminutive figure of Trajan). Domitian was the first emperor to hold a thunderbolt (on coins), and its use as an attribute goes back to Alexander the Great: Pliny, *Natural History*, 35.92 ("Apelles…painted Alexander the Great holding a thunderbolt"); Gauer 1974, 324-326; Bergmann 1998, 95-96, plate 19.1 (both on Domitian, coins, and further sources). See also: Plutarch, *Sulla*, 9.4 (Sulla dreams that a goddess empowers him by handing him a thunderbolt).
[483] Apotheosis: Lorenz 1973, 43-44; Currie 1996, 167; Torelli 1997, 160-161. Abdication: Strong 1915, 86. The reliefs contain none of the main components of apotheosis representation, for which: Beard and Henderson 1998, 200-219; Alföldi 1999, 74-82; Hallett 2005, 224-230.

Jupiter's 'first' appearance on the monument, in the lower relief on the country facade, the god carried a thunderbolt as a mark of his power over the action. In the attic reliefs, the god empowers the emperor for the fulfilment of his executive imperial role.[484] The attic reliefs thus represent the climax of the Arch's programme. Trajan's divinely guided deeds in the city and country were demonstrated throughout the narratives, and in the lower and attic reliefs of the western facade the emperor is directly authorised by metropolitan and Olympian gods.[485]

**The Arch of Trajan at Beneventum: discussion**

We have seen around forty divine figures in action in the reliefs, and it may be helpful at this point to reiterate the gods that are represented and to comment on their overall significance. Some of the gods are identified with certainty. These are, in the order in which they were discussed: the Genius of the Senate (twice), Jupiter (twice), Mars, Bacchus (twice), Ceres (twice), Diana (twice), Silvanus (twice), the Genius of the People, Portunus, Hercules (twice), Apollo, Honos (secure in the attic adventus), Minerva, Juno, and Mercury. There are then around twenty gods whose names are merely possible or unknown. These are, again in the order in which they were discussed: four city goddesses (possible, but with unknown names apart from the probable Beneventum figure), Italia (possible), two goddesses (perhaps Fortuna and Providentia, but other names equally possible), Honos in the recruitment relief (possible, but action and precise iconography otherwise unattested), the Fortuna of the camp (twice, both times merely possible but certainly a martial location-based deity), Dacia (possible), two river gods (certain, but names unknown), a divinity with a mural crown in the lower adventus (multiple names possible, iconography otherwise unattested in imperial relief), the Penates (possible, but surely either them or the Dioscuri because of the twin appearance of the figures), Fortuna Redux (possible, but other names viable), and Romulus-Quirinus (possible, because of the appropriate iconography and the subject of the scene, but otherwise unattested in imperial narrative).

We know the names then of around half of the Arch's gods, and for most others we can be confident about what kind of figure we are dealing with — that is, whether they are civic,

[484] Trajan's Jupiter-like position in the relief is reflected in the inscription on the Arch, where he is proclaimed as "supreme emperor" (OPTIMO…PRINCIPI): Domaszewski 1909, 28-29; Fittschen 1972, 782.
[485] Fittschen 1972, 780-781.

topographical, rural, or martial. The securely identified figures include all the 'Olympian' gods, such as Jupiter, Mars, Diana, and Silvanus, whose names can be read easily because of their well-established, distinctive iconographies. Also securely identified are imperial deities with clearly defined roles in narrative, such as the Genius of the Senate and Honos. The divinities that cannot be named with confidence are of a different character. They are primarily protective topographical deities, such as Italia, Fortuna, and the city goddesses, who shared an open-ended set of attributes such as mural crowns and were identified partly through external knowledge of the scenes that now escapes us. The remaining uncertain deities (such as the Penates and Romulus-Quirinus) are difficult to place because their iconographies are mostly unattested in imperial sculpture. All the gods however are easily recognisable as divine because of their long, elevated hairstyles, 'un-real' attributes, or ideal-divine bodies and faces.

It might be tempting from a modern perspective to draw a line between the 'real' Olympian gods and the less well-established 'personifications'. This, however, would be to present the real variation in the powers of Roman deities in too rigid a frame. The ancient world was flooded with gods that were freely imagined in art and literature in all sorts of ways, and there need not be a strict relationship between the (perhaps allegorical) conception of a deity found in literature and the instantiation of that deity on a state monument, particularly if there is countervailing visual evidence. Reliefs and texts were independent manifestations of a shared cultural repertoire, and even figures such as river deities and Genii received cult in the Roman world.[486] All the non-mortal figures on the Arch are therefore perhaps better interpreted as they appear in the reliefs — not as 'gods' and 'allegories', but as a full range of active deities that support the emperor.[487]

The Arch, then, represents a rich network of gods with a wide array of roles — protective, agricultural, military, civic, topographical — that sanction the emperor's actions in the city, the country, and the provinces. The reliefs present a developed visual statement of the emperor's duties and introduce for us a series of peacetime narratives that are repeated on surviving monuments nowhere else. With this subject matter came an expanded cast of deities,

[486] Genii: Kunckel 1974, 8-13. River gods: Ostrowski 1991, 10-14; Kovács 2017, 49-50.
[487] The figure of Dacia was probably an exception, that is, she was probably not considered a 'god' and did not receive cult as figures such as Diana, the Genius of the Senate, and river deities did.

some of which are rarely found on other monuments. The Arch also 'excludes' two normally crucial imperial companions: Virtus and Victory. These military gods, particularly the latter, are found in action on nearly every other imperial monument, but they are nowhere among the Arch's fourteen main narratives.[488] The idea that the Arch presents a peaceful programme has been challenged by some scholars, including by Erika Simon in her monograph on the Arch's gods, but the striking absence of Virtus and Victory from the main panels seems to confirm that the reliefs were focused on a civic understanding of the emperor's role.[489]

Taken together, the Great Trajanic Frieze and the Arch at Beneventum represent varied episodes of Trajanic war and peace. The final section of this chapter pursues the conceptions that shaped the roles of the gods in these reliefs through a comparative analysis of a uniquely relevant contemporary text: Pliny the Younger's *Panegyricus*.

**Gods, narrative, panegyric**

Pliny was consul under Trajan in AD 100 and delivered a speech of thanks for his appointment which he later expanded and published.[490] This work, now known as the *Panegyricus*, is a key source for the ideals of the Roman elite in the time of Trajan and its agenda and themes overlap extensively with those of the monuments we have discussed.[491] Like the Great Trajanic Frieze and the Arch at Beneventum, Pliny's panegyric was an honorific celebration of imperial power shaped by a positive view of the emperor's role, and the shared panegyrical style of the text and the monuments has often been highlighted.[492] The speech describes Trajan's imperial

[488] Victory appears (in narrative), for example, on: the Gemma Augustea; the Boscoreale cups; the Arch of Titus; both Cancelleria Reliefs; the Column of Trajan; the Great Trajanic Frieze; the extispicium relief; the Column of Marcus Aurelius; the panel reliefs of Marcus Aurelius; the 'Parthian Monument'; and the historical frieze from the Arch of Constantine (twice); as well as on many coins, fragments, and Republican monuments: Hölscher 1967. Victory is absent, however, from the extant parts of the Anaglypha Traiani, for example, which are roughly contemporary with the Arch at Beneventum and also civic in theme. Virtus is also found on most of the monuments listed. Victory is depicted on the Arch at Beneventum in the spandrels, the small triumphal frieze, the border-reliefs between the large panels, and in the soffit relief of the passageway: Fittschen 1972, 783-784.
[489] Simon 1981, 3. Also questioned: Gauer 1974, 316-317; Speidel 2006, 204-205 (suggesting that the whole Arch celebrated the Dacian wars).
[490] Radice 1968, 166-172; Levene 1997, 78-83; Rees 2001, 149-153; Manolaraki 2008, 374-392; Roche 2011, 1-28; Roche 2011b, 45-66.
[491] Rees 2001, 149-166.
[492] Frieze and Pliny: Hamberg 1945, 56-63; Gauer 1973, 319-320, 321-325; Touati 1987, 27, 29-31; Kuhoff 1993, 297-298; Faust 2012b, 27-29; Strobel 2017b, 323-329. Arch and Pliny: Domaszewski 1909, 173-192; Fittschen 1972, 745, 786-788; Lorenz 1973, 22-24, 28-29, 36; Gauer 1974, 323-324; Currie 1996, 167, 170-171; Torelli 1997, 163-171; Speidel 2006, 203; Smith 2013, 312.

character and achievements at length, and in doing so provides a lucid body of contemporary formulations that can perhaps help to refine our assessment of the monuments and situate us in the ancient mental space in which they were conceived.

We may note first that the subject matter and style of the *Panegyricus* share similarities with the monuments. The programme of the Arch at Beneventum and the topics of Pliny's speech are even arranged in a similar order. The Arch and text, for example, both 'open' with prayers to the gods — the Arch with an image of sacrifice in the passageway, the panegyric with an invocation to the gods in its first chapter.[493] The early parts of the speech then mix praise of the emperor's military achievements with description of his virtuous qualities and return to Rome.[494] The lower reliefs of the Arch likewise describe Trajan's actions on the frontier and his arrival in the capital. The emperor's public duties and reforms take up the bulk of the middle of Pliny's speech — an aspect paralleled by the middle reliefs on both facades of the Arch, which show Trajan functioning as a magistrate in a variety of areas.[495] The speech then culminates with prayers to the gods and a description of Trajan as Jupiter's regent on earth.[496] The Arch also 'concludes', in the attic reliefs, with a focus on the emperor's special relationship with the gods and with Jupiter.[497] The actions of courageous battle and imperial arrival shown on the Great Trajanic Frieze are also key parts of Pliny's speech. Trajan's qualities as a warrior and his grand return to Rome are described across multiple chapters.[498] These overlapping themes are presented in a shared panegyrical style that reaches beyond factual reality: for Pliny, Trajan is "god-like" (*dis simillimus*) and "incomparable" (*optimum*);[499] in the Great Trajanic Frieze, the emperor fights heroically on the front lines; and on the Arch, the princeps collaborates personally with Olympian deities.[500] These things did not happen in real life, in historiography, or in the 'documentary' narrative of Trajan's Column. They were part of a

[493] Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 1.1-6.
[494] Military achievement: Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 5-6, 12-20. Qualities and return: Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 4, 7-8, 9-11, 21-24.
[495] Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 25, 29, 33, 36, 37-41, 43, 47-49, 51-52.
[496] Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 80.5 (Trajan was given to men by Jupiter that he might function in the god's place on behalf of humanity: "*erga omne hominum genus vice sua fungereris*"), 94 (final invocation to the gods).
[497] The main area of divergence between the speech and the Arch is found in the text's focus on the emperor's management of the consular elections, a theme that was of course relevant for the occasion and senatorial audience of the speech: Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 54-55, 56-66, 67-71, 75-79.
[498] Courageous battle: Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 13, 14-18. Grand arrival: Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 20-24.
[499] God-like: Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 1.3-4 (*dis simillimus*), 4.4, 5.2. Incomparable: Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 2.7-8, 88. Further: Rees 2001, 162-164 (on the *divinitas* and *humanitas* attributed to Trajan by Pliny).
[500] On the elevated 'heroic' aspects of the Great Trajanic Frieze: Phillip 1991, 22-23, 27; Faust 2012b, 27-28.

panegyrical language that used elevated imagery to convey a strongly felt conceptual understanding of the emperor's unique leadership position.

The active power of the gods was an embedded component of this panegyrical conception of imperial action. The opening lines of Pliny's speech, for example, announce that "nothing prudent can be begun by men without the aid and council of the immortal gods" (*nihil providenter homines sine deorum immortalium ope consilio honore auspicarentur*).[501] This theme is reasserted throughout the text, and in the penultimate chapter the "gods" (*divos*) are again given a comprehensive enabling role, as "imperial protectors and guardians" (*praesides custodesque imperi*).[502] The overarching agency of the gods was clearly a central part of Roman thinking in this context, and the participation of deities in the visual narratives of the period can be understood as an attempt to bring this imagined supportive divine framework to life.

In Pliny's panegyric, the gods are not just benign guardians, but actors who exercise a determining influence on the emperor's rule. Early in the speech, for example, Trajan is characterised as a "gift of the gods" (*munus deorum*), and is said to have been sustained by heaven's favour since the beginning of his reign.[503] In panegyrical terms, the emperor was chosen to rule "by Jupiter himself" (*ab Iove ipso*), and it is the "gods" (*di*) who "placed supreme authority in (Trajan's) hands".[504] Jupiter is recognised not only as the deity who set the emperor's rule in motion, but also as the true author of his subsequent acts. As Pliny says to Trajan: "your benefactions are the gift of Jupiter who gave you to us".[505] The emperor of the *Panegyricus* consistently works with deities and relies on their protection. Pliny declares, for example, that the emperor has a "pact with the gods" (*pacisceris cum dis*), and that he rules according to "divine consensus" (*consensu deorum*).[506] Trajan's resulting achievements are presented as grand occasions that are witnessed by "assemblies of both men and gods" (*contione hominum deorumque*).[507]

[501] Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 1.1.
[502] Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 94.1 ("*praesides custodesque imperi divos*").
[503] Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 1.3-4 (*munus deorum*), 5.3-5 (heaven's favour).
[504] Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 1.5 ("*ab Iove ipso*"), 56.3 (Gods give Trajan authority: "*ad te imperi summam…di transtulerunt*"). See also: Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 5.2, 8.2, 10.4 ("*providentia deorum*"), 52.2, 67.7.
[505] Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 52.6-7 (Trajan's benefactions as a gift from Jupiter). Jupiter's protection of Trajan was also depicted on coins: Alföldi 1999, 42-44.
[506] Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 67.7 (pact with the gods), 68.1 (divine consensus).
[507] Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 8.3.

As on the monuments, a full range of deities are active in Pliny's world: Trajan was "presented" or "created" (*dedissent*) by the "divine powers that inhabit the land" (*terris numina*); and the "spirits of the earth" (*terris divinitas*) and the "divinities of the sea" (*dis maris*) are said to combine with the emperor's leadership to produce the bounty that the empire enjoys.[508] This textual divine-imperial collaboration intersects with the monuments, which likewise set the emperor among authorising divine partners, sanctioning superhuman audiences, and a diverse cast of supportive Olympian and terrestrial divinities.

A key theme in the panegyric is the idea that the legitimate Roman ruler is one who is subordinate to and powered by the gods. For example, Pliny says that Trajan is to be understood "not as a god…but as a citizen" (*nusquam ut deo…sed de cive*), and it is the "gods" (*di*) who set Trajan "highest among men" (*summum inter homines*) because he "does not covet their divine power" (*cum deorum ipse non adpetas*).[509] The emperor even initially "refuses" (*recusabas*) to take up imperial office, and it is the gods who must manoeuvre the reluctant hero into position to save the empire: "the gods raised you to the supreme position, whereas your desire was to remain in second place and even to grow old there" (*Iam te providentia deorum primum in locum provexerat; tu adhuc in secondo resistere atque senescere optabas*).[510] Trajan's sovereignty is said to flow from the "command of the gods" (*di…imperium*), and any mortal involved is to be regarded as a "mere servant" (*tantum minister*) of the divine forces that shape the empire.[511] Contemporary reliefs, which depict the emperor surrounded by gods, can be seen as vivid sculptural manifestations of related ideas.[512]

[508] Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 5.2 (*terris numina*), 32.3 (*terris divinitas*), 35.2 (*dis maris*).
[509] Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 2.3 (not a god, but a citizen), 52.2-3 (gods sanction Trajan because he does not covet their power). Trajan's personal divine aspects are a theme in Pliny's speech: Levene 1997, 78-83; Rees 2001, 162-164. But the idea of the god-like divine emperor seems not to have been expressed (in narrative) on public monuments.
[510] Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 5.6 (*recusabas*), 10.4 (reluctant emperor maneuvered by the gods).
[511] Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 8.2 ("*Sibi enim gloriam illam di vindicaverunt: horum opus, horum illud imperium. Nerva tantum minister fuit*").
[512] It may be noted that battle is the only sphere in which the gods do not directly act: neither the battle scene on the Great Trajanic Frieze nor the discussion of Trajan's campaigns in Pliny's speech features deities. The idea of gods in battle belonged to an 'epic', as opposed to a 'panegyrical', conception of the world, and the direct intervention of gods in battle is avoided by all but the most elevated texts and monuments (such as high-toned poetry and court cameos).

The gods, then, were a vital part of Roman thinking about Trajanic power. From the panegyrical perspective that informed both Pliny's speech and the monuments, deities were not allegories that reflected Trajan's virtues, but independent forces that legitimised and inspired his actions. Part of the justification of the emperor's complex public role as an imperial hero involved a narration of his activity, in words and images, in which the monarchic ruler became a preordained instrument of the gods that was utilised for the advancement of the empire. The *Panegyricus* provides the best way into the consciousness of the period, but its generalised vocabulary (*divos*, *dis*, *deorum*) and focus on Trajan's personal character mean that it does not fully illuminate the reliefs alongside which it was produced. Although the themes and purposes of the text and the monuments were similar, the gods on the Frieze and Arch are more varied and forceful than they are in Pliny's speech. That is, there are more nameable gods doing more specific things. The visual medium of the monuments necessitated that any *contio hominum deorumque* be manifested in the form of specific characters, and the multi-figure scenes on the Frieze and Arch provided space for the realisation of a more complete situational environment of divinely controlled imperial achievement.

## Conclusion

This chapter has suggested that the gods helped to define Trajanic narrative in two main genre-based ways. On Trajan's Column (and later also on the Column of Marcus Aurelius) a distinctive 'documentary' manner of divine action was deployed, similar to that found in historical texts. Within this narrative conception, the gods were pitched 'realistically' as unseen natural forces in order to enhance the authenticity of the Columns' towering campaign friezes. On the Great Trajanic Frieze and the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum, on the other hand, the gods operated under a different set of norms. The Frieze and Arch portray the gods as active companions of the emperor in a way that is perhaps best interpreted through the contemporary formulations preserved in Pliny's panegyric. The vocabulary of this key text helps to lock in the meaning of the gods as authorising actors, but the full description of divine identities and roles was a special competence of the monuments and their visual narrative medium. The Column, Frieze, and Arch use some fifty figures of gods to present the emperor as a divinely powered ruler and to construct a varied imperial drama that explains the diverse achievements of the Trajanic empire. The next chapter explores the continued representation of gods on the monuments of the Antonine period, and extends the discussion from Rome into the provinces.

# Chapter 5: Imperial Narrative in the Antonine World-Empire

The gods were an integral component of Antonine visual narrative, but existing studies have mainly looked at the monuments of this period in isolation, and there is perhaps more to say about the complexity of the phenomenon. This chapter aims to define the divine-imperial relationships represented in Antonine art with greater precision and to substantiate a clearly differentiated set of divine narrative roles. The discussion looks at three key Antonine monuments — the panel reliefs of Marcus Aurelius, the column base of Antoninus Pius, and the so-called 'Parthian Monument' from Ephesus — and investigates the way the gods worked in these varied visual contexts. Imperial rule manifests itself across these images as a series of divinely charged dramas, but in each case the narrative conceptions and historical-cultural backgrounds were different. The panel reliefs of Marcus Aurelius display a Rome-oriented 'panegyrical' sequence of military and triumphal rituals; the Antonine column base has a similar metropolitan outlook, and carries one of the earliest extant monumental images of imperial apotheosis; and the 'Parthian Monument' presents a different and striking image of the emperor and the empire seen from the perspective of the Greek East. The monuments are discussed in that order — panel reliefs, base, 'Parthian Monument' — before a concluding section outlines the overall significance of the gods in the narratives of the period. We will see that deities functioned as actors that helped to legitimise the achievements of the Antonine emperors in a range of culturally and contextually contingent ways.

## The panel reliefs of Marcus Aurelius

A monument of Marcus Aurelius, most probably an arch, survives in eleven panel reliefs (Figure 25).[513] Eight were re-used on the Arch of Constantine and three were found built into a church of Santa Martina and are now in the Conservatori Museum in Rome.[514] The fragment of a possible twelfth is in Copenhagen.[515] The reliefs distil the emperor's war actions on the Danube and the civic rituals generated by his victories into a series of carefully focused

[513] Key studies: Petersen 1889, 314-339; Wegner 1938, 155-195; Kähler 1939, 252-269; Hamberg 1945, 78-99; Ryberg 1967; Blanck 1969, 485-488; Angelicoussis 1984, 141-205; Koeppel 1986, 47-75; La Rocca 1986, 38-52; Boschung 2012, 308-312; Thill 2018, 299-303; Demandt 2019, 253-259; Hölscher 2019, 287-293. The themes, format, and number of the reliefs suggest that they originally decorated an arch.
[514] Ryberg 1967, 1-8; Blanck 1969, 485.
[515] Fragment: Koeppel 1986, 75-76 (it is a head of Marcus Aurelius from a relief and in the same style as the panels, allegedly found near the Castel Sant'Angelo). Sceptical as to its belonging: Hölscher 2019, 293 n.46.

ceremonial scenes. Images of purely human campaigning activity alternate with depictions of grand, divinely governed imperial events. We look first at the reliefs as a whole.

The single origin of the two groups of reliefs, the eight on the Arch of Constantine and the three in the Conservatori museum, was previously doubted, and two separate original monuments were sometimes proposed.[516] More recent studies have confirmed that all the panels derive from a single structure.[517] The eleven reliefs taken together form a cohesive narrative whole. The subjects of the reliefs are widely agreed, and the images of barbarian submission, triumph, and Capitoline sacrifice represented on the Conservatori panels fit neatly into the narrative framework of the eight from the Arch of Constantine.[518] The subjects of the eight are: (1) departure for war, (2) sacrifice on campaign, (3) speech to the army, (4) barbarian prisoners, (5) barbarian supplication, (6) presentation of a barbarian king, (7) imperial arrival in Rome, and (8) distribution of largesse.[519] The 'gaps' in this sequence are convincingly filled by the Conservatori panels: the barbarian submission relief provides the decisive moment of victory following the preparations for war (1-3) and logically preceding the depiction of prisoners, supplicants, and the barbarian king (4-6); and the triumph and sacrifice panels supply the key culminating actions following the emperor's return to Rome (7) and alongside the distribution of largesse (8).[520] The eleven panels can thus be placed in a single narrative sequence set between the beginning of Marcus Aurelius' campaigns in AD 169 and the emperor's triumph of 176.[521]

[516] Two separate monuments: Frothingham 1915, 2-6; Wegner 1938, 188-195; Kähler 1939, 269; Ryberg 1967, 2-7, 77-83, 84-89; Becatti 1972, 66; Kleiner 1992, 294; Rose 2021, 29 (undecided).
[517] Single structure, usually proposed to be an arch: Blanck 1969, 487-488; Angelicoussis 1984, 159-174 (full discussion of the issue); Koeppel 1986, 10; Boschung 2012, 308; Hölscher 2019, 287-293.
[518] Discussion and description: Wegner 1938, 160-191; Kähler 1939, 265-269; Hamberg 1945, 78-99; Ryberg 1967, 9-76; Angelicoussis 1984, 145-159; Koeppel 1986, 47-75; Thill 2018, 299-303.
[519] This ordering of the panels is based on the narrative logic of their subjects. Other sequences are possible, for instance: Demandt 2019, 253-259. The departure probably refers to the historical profectio of AD 169: Angelicoussis 1984, 145. The adventus probably depicts Marcus' return in AD 176: Angelicoussis 1984, 151 (there are earlier coins with the same subject, from AD 173, but these are probably anticipatory). The largesse may refer to the large distribution of AD 177: Dio Cassius, 72.17, 72.32; Hannestad 1977, 79; Demandt 2019, 258. Elizabeth Angelicoussis reconstructs a treaty scene from the Copenhagen fragment: Angelicoussis 1984, 150-151. Alexander Demandt suggests for the same fragment a depiction of the 'rain miracle' known from the Column of Marcus Aurelius: Demandt 2019, 259.
[520] Angelicoussis 1984, 145-159.
[521] The largesse relief may refer to an event in AD 177 (see note 519), but was probably connected with the triumphal conclusion of the war. Marcus' campaigns: Dio Cassius, 72; Birley 1993, 217-251, 323-327; Demandt 2019, 183-253.

Seven of the reliefs depict no gods. These are the sacrifice on campaign, the speech to the army, the barbarian submission, the prisoners, the barbarian supplication, the presentation of the barbarian king, and the distribution of largesse.[522] These seven include all the representations of campaign activity and one of the civic rituals (the largesse), actions that were evidently thought appropriate for rendering in purely human terms. They represent the relatively more prosaic subject matter of the emperor's interactions with the army, the barbarian enemy, and the largesse mechanisms of the urban populace. The emperor in these scenes receives only human assistance: a companion-advisor, sometimes identified as Pompeianus by modern scholars, appears behind or close-by in all seven images.[523] The remaining four reliefs, the profectio, adventus, triumph, and Capitoline sacrifice, captured the auspicious beginning of the narrative and its victorious conclusion. These were some of the more ideologically significant ceremonial moments, and all involved the gods.

The profectio relief (Figure 26) incorporates three deities. Standing behind the emperor is a togate figure with a full beard and divine hairstyle. He is the Genius of the Senate, observing and sanctioning the emperor's departure for war.[524] His now-lost right arm was raised in a gesture of farewell.[525] With the Senatus are two citizen-senators. The three have accompanied the emperor to the edge of the city. These urban figures stand on the left of the relief, before a building identifiable as an arch of Domitian that was located at the beginning of the Via Flaminia and near the senate house.[526] The emperor looks past the arch, 'out of the city', towards a reclining goddess, an armoured military Genius, three soldiers, and two horses. One of the horses rears, ready for departure, and the goddess extends her hand towards the emperor,

[522] Description: Ryberg 1967, 9-15 (submission), 37-43 (campaign sacrifice), 43-50 (barbarian king), 50-56 (speech), 56-61 (prisoners), 61-66 (supplicants), 71-76 (largesse).
[523] Pompeianus(?) appears in these seven scenes and twice more, in the profectio and the Capitoline sacrifice: Ryberg 1967, 11 n.8, 78-79. The identification is suggested by Pompeianus' historical prominence and relationship with Marcus (he was an important commander and the emperor's son-in-law): *Historia Augusta*, *Life of Marcus*, 20.6. The heads in question are portrait-like and close to one another in appearance, but no certain portraits of Pompeianus exist to test the suggestion.
[524] Hamberg 1945, 82-83; Ryberg 1967, 34. Behind the Senate is a figure with an unusual appearance (a straggly beard), who is sometimes identified as a 'faunal' deity: Hamberg 1945, 82-83. This is unwarranted. The figure is surely a generic citizen-senator: Ryberg 1967, 34. Alternatively, for the same figure: Boschung 2012, 309 (Genius of the Roman People); Hölscher 2019, 289 (Genius of the Equestrians). The Genius of the People is very unlikely (the figure in question is bearded), and the Genius of the Equestrians is also doubtful: the figure's hair and physiognomy do not suggest divinity.
[525] Compare the Genius of the Senate in the profectio scene on the Cancelleria Reliefs (Frieze A: Figure 11).
[526] Discussion: Ryberg 1967, 28-33 (identifying the arch as a monument of Domitian at the south end of the Via Flaminia). Identifying the arch as the Porta Triumphalis: Hölscher 2019, 292.

inviting his approach.[527] The goddess' reclining posture and attribute (a wheel) show her to be the protective divinity of a road, probably the Via Flaminia, by which the city was exited from the arch in the background of the relief.[528] The Via Flaminia was also the route to the northern provinces, the setting of the following panels. The military Genius — who is recognisable as such because of his long, divine hairstyle — likewise turns towards the emperor.[529] His now-lost extended left hand perhaps made a gesture of encouragement.[530] As with the crossing of the Danube on the Column of Marcus Aurelius, in which the river god himself is present, the opening of the panel narratives is centred on the emperor's induction by the gods into a divinely sanctioned world that guarantees his success.[531] The emperor's departure is framed and enabled by the divine forces of the Senate and of the involved elements of the empire (the military Genius and the road).[532]

Before coming to the adventus relief, which is perhaps the most discussed panel, we should first consider the two other reliefs with gods: the triumph and the Capitoline sacrifice. The triumph relief (Figure 27) is built around the traditional motif of the victorious emperor processing through the city in a chariot with attendants, here a single lictor and a musician.[533] A mass of roughly worked stone next to Marcus indicates that a second figure has been removed from the chariot. This can only be Commodus, the disgraced emperor and co-triumphator with Marcus in AD 176.[534] Flying behind the chariot is the scene's only god, Victory, who plays her familiar role as validator of military success.[535] The aerial movement of the goddess behind the chariot is an adaptation of her usual placement on the chariot platform, which here is filled by the two emperors.[536] In scenes of triumph Victory usually crowned the leading general.[537] Here, the dual protagonists necessitated that Victory exalt the

[527] Tonio Hölscher understands the goddess to be venerating the emperor: Hölscher 2019, 289 ("*die Personifikation…hebt die Hand zur Verehrung*"). Veneration of the emperor is perhaps a less credible idea for this narrative than divine encouragement. Compare, for example, the extended, encouraging hand of the Danube in the profectio scene on the Column of Marcus Aurelius: Figure 17.
[528] Kähler 1939, 267; Hamberg 1945, 82-83; Ryberg 1967, 32-33; Boschung 2012, 308.
[529] Inez Scott Ryberg, and others, consider this figure mortal: Ryberg 1967, 35.
[530] Alternatively, it may have held the reins of the adjacent horse. For an encouragement gesture, compare the figure of Mars on the Cancelleria Reliefs (Frieze A: Figure 11).
[531] Column scene: Coarelli 2008, 114; Faust 2012b, 100; Kovács 2017, 47-50; Figure 17.
[532] On the significance of imperial roadways and the divine forces associated with them: Statius, *Silvae*, 4.3.
[533] Background architecture: Ryberg 1967, 19-20; Demandt 2019, 258 (suggesting the same background as the profectio and adventus reliefs, on the Campus Martius).
[534] Commodus' removal from the relief: Wegner 1938, 161-164; Angelicoussis 1984, 152-154.
[535] Victory in representations of triumph: Hölscher 1967, 68-97.
[536] Usual placement: Pfanner 1983, 67 (Arch of Titus: Figure 10).
[537] Examples: RIC I, 140 (Augustan coin); Hölscher 1967, 86-87 (Flavian coins); Figure 10 (Arch of Titus).

occasion more generally. She held a now-lost garland between her outstretched hands.[538] Victory holds the same object in the adventus relief, providing her character with continuity across the two scenes.

The Capitoline sacrifice (Figure 28) is a standard treatment of an established theme. Triumphal processions concluded with sacrifices to Jupiter on the Capitol.[539] This setting is specified in the relief by the depiction of Jupiter's temple in the background, which alludes to the 'presence' of the god at the ritual.[540] The explicit divine element of the scene is represented by the Genius of the Senate, who stands next to the emperor.[541] The emperor is back in the capital following his campaigns, and conducts ritual with the support of a key civic divinity. As with the appearance of the Senatus in the profectio relief, the god's inclusion here helps to convert the scene into a more elevated state event. In the stripped-down cast of the panel reliefs, the god perhaps also stands 'diplomatically' for many senators.

The adventus panel (Figure 29) features five gods and constitutes a high point of the relief cycle. The scene is represented taking place in front of a temple and arch. The temple's pediment decoration — a goddess flanked by a globe, wheel, and two cornucopias — permits its identification as a temple of Fortuna, perhaps of Fortuna Redux, in agreement with the panel's narrative of return.[542] The arch too can be identified, as the same building seen in the profectio panel, here conceived as viewed from the other side.[543] A garland hanging from the rear facade of the arch in the profectio relief is here seen face on. The departure was on the outer side, with the goddess of the road, the adventus is on the inner side, moving towards the city.[544] In the foreground are five gods and the emperor. The composition is evenly balanced, and presents imperial action as a divinely charged phenomenon.

[538] Ryberg 1967, 17.
[539] Suetonius, *Caesar*, 37; Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 17; Suetonius, *Domitian*, 6. Images: Ryberg 1955, 141-162.
[540] A portico is also depicted as part of the background architecture: Ryberg 1967, 24-25; Demandt 2019, 258 (suggesting that the portico, which is topped by men and lions, is an allusion to triumphal games).
[541] Ryberg 1967, 22.
[542] Ryberg 1967, 29; Demandt 2019, 258 (temple of Fortuna Redux, on the Campus Martius).
[543] A poem of Martial fixes the close relationship between this (Domitianic) arch and the temple of Fortuna Redux: Martial, *Epigrams*, 8.65. Further: above, note 526.
[544] Ryberg 1967, 28-29.

The emperor stands at the centre of the relief and wears travelling dress. He has just returned from the front. Flanking the emperor are two military gods who have accompanied him home, and in the background stand a pair of female deities, who act as welcoming divine companions. A Victory with a garland flies above, showing that the emperor's actions on the frontier have been successfully completed. The wings of Victory are parallel to the ground, but the rest of her body and legs flare dramatically to the side, as if the figure were in swift, headlong flight across the relief. The goddess thus infuses the scene with dynamism while allowing the emperor to remain still and dignified. A similar complementary pairing of human and divine roles, of imperial poise and divine vigour, can be seen on monuments such as the Cancelleria Reliefs (Frieze A), where the static emperor is urged forward by surrounding gods, and also on the chariot reliefs from the 'Parthian Monument', one of which depicts a stately emperor being helped into a chariot by assisting deities (associated reliefs from the same monument with *divine* charioteers depict their protagonists in energetic striding motion).[545] The Aurelian panel also presents the emperor as an impassive, reactive, and god-guided figure.[546] The surrounding gods set the emperor in a legitimising framework of divine control.

Victory aside, the identities of the remaining four gods are only partially agreed. Two are easily recognised and two have ambiguous iconography. The deity in the foreground on the left is a bearded male with a spear and shield and is clearly Mars, a protective war-companion of the emperor.[547] We can compare the same god's appearance on the Cancelleria Reliefs (Frieze A).[548] The deity in the background on the right is also safely identified: her caduceus and cornucopia are the distinctive attributes of Felicitas. The figure matches named versions of this deity represented in adventus scenes on contemporary coins.[549] Felicitas' associations of prosperity make her a fitting actor in this narrative.[550] As on the coins, the goddess should be understood as a receiving partner of the homecoming emperor.

[545] Cancelleria reliefs: Langer and Pfanner 2018, 75; Figure 11. 'Parthian Monument' reliefs: Meyer 2006, 134-135; Figure 35.
[546] The 'reactive' nature of the emperor was also a key aspect of his role in other contexts: Millar 1977, 208-212.
[547] Inez Scot Ryberg suggests a trophy instead of a spear (the attribute is damaged): Ryberg 1967, 69. For the figure type of Mars (identified on Antonine coins as Mars Ultor): Thomas 2017, 154-174.
[548] Cancelleria Reliefs: Langer and Pfanner 2018, 43; Figure 11.
[549] Coins: BMC IV, 660-663 (these coins refer to the same historical event as the relief: Marcus' return in AD 176).
[550] Further: Fears 1981, 746-748 (on the importance of 'Felicitas' in Roman thought as a divinely bestowed power that enables great achievements).

As mentioned, there are two controversial deities: a veiled goddess without attributes in the background on the left, and an Amazonian-style goddess in the foreground on the right. The veil worn by the goddess on the left was shared by a number of deities, and Aeternitas, Pietas, the divine Faustina, and varying combinations of these three have been suggested, mainly because all appear on coins with veiled heads.[551] Pietas can probably be rejected — her character has little relevance to the victorious arrival narrative. For Faustina, while her image could be partnered with the emperor's,[552] as a female member of the imperial family it would be unusual for her to be represented in a narrative relief such as this, and the figure has none of Faustina's portrait features or hairstyle elements. These could have been easily incorporated to ensure Faustina's legibility, had that been intended.[553] Aeternitas is thus the most logical reading of the figure, and the goddess has appropriate connotations for the narrative. Standing between Mars and Victory, the goddess of eternity guarantees the perpetual supremacy of Rome. This everlasting success is rewarded by the blessings of Felicitas, Aeternitas' partner in the scene.

The Amazonian-style deity on the right of the relief has elicited a predictable controversy: is she Virtus or Roma?[554] The latter has been seen as a good option for the majority of scholars because of the subject of the relief, arrival-return, within which Roma's presence as a representative of the city might logically be expected: the goddess appears on contemporary coins in precisely this role.[555] There is, however, a key difference between the coins and the relief, which shows decisively that the goddess represented on the panel is in fact Virtus.

On the coins, Roma is shown coming from the city and facing the emperor, with her head and body facing the same direction. A Hadrianic relief (Figure 30) shows this interaction in sculptural form: the goddess turns towards the emperor, and hands over a globe.[556] This motif, of Roma and the emperor facing one another, clearly signifies encounter, and thus ensures the

[551] Suggestions: Hamberg 1945, 80-81 (Aeternitas); Ryberg 1967, 67-68 (Aeternitas-Faustina); Hannestad 1986, 232-233 (Aeternitas or Pietas or Faustina); Hölscher 2019, 292 (Aeternitas). Also: Frothingham 1915, 8 (Fortuna).
[552] For example: Dio Cassius, 72.31 (golden and silver statues of Marcus and Faustina).
[553] Compare, for example, the cameo representation of Julia Domna-Victory, which combines the empress' hairstyle with a divine winged female body: Megow 1987, Cat.B52, 270-271, plate 47.2.
[554] Virtus: Frothingham 1915, 8; Hannestad 1986, 232-233; Boschung 2012, 310. Roma: Wegner 1938, 180; Kähler 1939, 266; Hamberg 1945, 80-81; Ryberg 1967, 66-70; Koeppel 1986, 72 (Virtus-Roma); Hölscher 2018, 79; Demandt 2019, 257; Hölscher 2019, 292.
[555] Coins: Kähler 1939, fig.5; BMC IV, 660-663.
[556] Relief: La Rocca 1986, plate 1.

city goddess' legibility. On the Aurelian panel it is conspicuously avoided. The goddess is not waiting, static, to receive the emperor, but guiding him back to the city from campaign. This is confirmed by the deity's look over her shoulder. This motif, of body positioning and implied motion in one direction and head turned in another, was a common posture of Virtus. It conveys the idea that the figure is about to move off with the emperor in attendance, and is used frequently in representations of the goddess. Closely comparable depictions are found, for example, on the Arch of Titus and the Great Trajanic Frieze.[557] These ideas, of suspended or transitionary movement, are alien to Roma, who was characterised in art as a stable avatar of the city.[558] An exactly contemporary depiction of Roma is preserved on the Aurelian reliefs themselves: the decoration of the chariot in the triumph panel includes three gods, Neptune, Minerva, and Roma (Figure 27).[559] There, typically for the city goddess and in contrast to the adventus deity, Roma is shown seated. There are thus a number of iconographical and conceptual points that suggest the figure in question is not Roma and that we should take the Amazonian goddess in the relief firmly as Virtus.[560]

The legs and bodies of Virtus, the emperor, and Mars, while displaying nuanced, carefully studied movement, are all choreographed to face towards the right, suggesting their imminent collective progression into the city. Virtus looks back, as the goddess does on the Arch of Titus and the Great Trajanic Frieze, in order to interface with the emperor as she leads the way. Imperial arrival is thus shown to be conducted by divine forces, and the emperor appears almost as an adjunct of the more numerous, controlling divinities. This god-centred interpretation aligns with an important aspect of the Roman imperial system, in which the emperor was (in strict ideological or constitutional terms) a protagonist whose function was to fulfil a set of pre-existing institutionalised roles.[561] The shaping agency of the gods was an important part of this framework. The legitimate emperor existed in a space cleared for him by divine power.

[557] Arch of Titus: Pfanner 1983, 67-71; Figure 10. Great Trajanic Frieze: Faust 2012b, 16-17; Figure 19.
[558] See: Vermeule 1959, plates 1-4 (seated Roma on coins), 10 (seated Roma in sculpture).
[559] Ryberg 1967, 16. The meaning of this constellation is uncertain: Schürmann 1985, 6.
[560] Virtus was an established god with multiple temples in Rome: (1) temple of Virtus added to a shrine of Honos by M. Marcellus, at the Porta Capena, c.205 BC; (2) temple of Virtus and Honos, c.133 BC; (3) temple of Virtus and Honos on the Capitoline built by Marius, c.103 BC; (4) shrines to Virtus and Honos, dedicated by Pompey near his theatre complex, c.55 BC. Sources: LTUR II, 30-35 (all temples); Cicero, *On the Laws*, 2.58 (shrine at the Porta Capena); Cicero, *Nature of the Gods*, 2.61 (Marcellus' temple of Virtus); Vitruvius, 3.2 (Marius' temple). Further: Augustus, *Res Gestae*, 11 (linking the cult of Virtus and Honos with triumphal return). Virtus may have had a temple on the triumphal route: Lange 2017b.
[561] For this aspect of imperial action and art: Hölscher 2019, 327-334.

**The panel reliefs of Marcus Aurelius: discussion**

The panel reliefs of Marcus Aurelius have been seen by scholars as alternating historical and allegorical images that convey clear imperial virtues.[562] Inez Scott Ryberg, for example, characterised the adventus as "one of the purest allegories in all of Roman relief".[563] And Tonio Hölscher saw the same image populated by symbolic, "allegorical" deities: "Mars represents the army...Roma stands for the representatives of Rome".[564] Other scholars, such as Niels Hannestad, have also stressed the allegorical character of the gods in the reliefs.[565] There is no doubt some truth in these views, but the reliefs can perhaps be better approached from a different direction. For one, the common idea of alternating historical and allegorical images perhaps presents a false dichotomy. It is unlikely that Romans would have seen the panels ranging between 'real' and 'metaphorical' depictions. Rather, all the reliefs, with gods and without, would probably have been understood as equally valid. On an ideological level, the level at which the images were designed and received, the emperor's interaction with the gods was no less actual than his speeches to the army. Indeed, viewing the monument as an honour for and justification of Marcus' power, his close and unique relationship with the gods as presented in the reliefs was as true and important as any other aspect of his rule.

The widespread idea of virtue-related messages perhaps also needs rethinking. The reliefs certainly have their roots in (or rather have the same roots as) the virtue-based descriptions of imperial action that we read about in literature and on coins. That is, both profectio images on coins labelled "VIRTUS" and the relief scene of departure stem from the same ideas about the emperor's proper behaviour. Narrative images and panegyrical texts, also, were different expressions of shared basic ideas, and there is no doubt that literary vocabulary can help to anchor artistic interpretation. Images and monuments, however, often go further in their articulation of imperial rule than virtue-based readings would suggest.[566] Written descriptions of the emperor's behaviour can sometimes be cruder and less immediately impactful than

[562] For example: Hamberg 1945, 100; Ryberg 1967, 90-94; Hannestad 1986, 226; Hölscher 2019b, 20-25.
[563] Ryberg 1967, 71 ("the event is told in allegorical terms, resulting in one of the purest examples of allegorical paraphrase in all of Roman relief").
[564] Hölscher 1980, 321; Hölscher 2018, 79 ("translation of a real ceremony into an allegorical form: Mars represents the army...Roma stands for the representatives of Rome").
[565] Hannestad 1986, 226.
[566] For similar arguments: Griebel 2013, 14-15 (on the Column of Marcus Aurelius).

images. If three-metre-tall panel reliefs of the emperor and the gods performing sacrifice, processing in triumph, and returning victorious to Rome were devised to project only *pietas*, *victoria*, and *virtus*, then much of the design and crafting effort that went into them seems to have been wasted. A more differentiated view of imperial visual culture might see the reliefs instead reworking the ideas found in literature into powerful marble pageants, with a bold and nuanced visual effect that was qualitatively different from coin legends, inscriptions, and Latin prose. For the gods, this is to say that they should not be reduced to mere symbols. The images go beyond virtue-based literary sources and present the Genius of the Senate, Virtus, and the other deities as living gods with a real presence in imperial action.[567] The gods actively help to determine the nature of the emperor's rule, by initiating, guiding, and validating his behaviour.

Comparison with a Greek series of narrative reliefs can perhaps shed further light on this issue. Like the Aurelian panel reliefs, the metopes of the temple of Zeus at Olympia illustrated twelve sculptural scenes, each of which was concerned with a key action carried out by a repeatedly represented mortal protagonist (Hercules).[568] The metopes also combined a majority of images without deities with five scenes in which the gods (Athena and Hermes) participated. There can be little question here of Athena and Hermes as virtue symbols, as fragments of Hercules' persona, or as stand-ins for other, 'more real' entities. The participation of gods instead illustrates divine command over the narrative, the privileged status and superhuman guardianship enjoyed by the protagonist, and the tangible, close interaction with the gods that ensures the success of the represented events. Gods in imperial reliefs might be viewed in similar terms, as divine protectors with their own independent roles. These roles complemented those of the emperor and helped to produce a particular narrative effect. Through the representation of gods, the panel reliefs of Marcus Aurelius illustrate the divinely willed labours of a victorious imperial hero. The equivalent literary representation of this 'imperial heroism' is found in panegyrical writing, where as in the reliefs the emperor is "chosen" (*electus*) by the gods, rules with divine aid and council, and has the privilege of "interceding and acting with the gods" (*apud deos adesse consuesti*) on behalf of the people and empire.[569]

[567] The less well-established gods depicted in the reliefs, such as the Genii, are perhaps better understood as relevant 'imperial gods', who were brought to life to support the emperor, rather than as allegorical symbols.
[568] Metopes: Ashmole 1972, 60-89; Boardman 1985, 37-40; Kyrieleis 2013, 84-94.
[569] Chosen: Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 1.5, 5.2. Aid and council: Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 8.2, 56.3 Interceding: Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 78.5 ("*Adnuas, Caesar, optantibus, quibusque apud deos adesse consuesti, quorum potes ipse votorum, compotes facias*"). Although Pliny's panegyric was delivered to Trajan, not Marcus, it is the only surviving Latin (prose) panegyric from the early-middle empire. Latin panegyric: Levene 1997, 66-103.

The reliefs creatively re-imagine these ideas in a striking and particularly visual form. They replace the fixed transmission sequence of a speech or text with a simultaneous pictorial presentation in which a broader cast of gods and their formal and narrative relationships with the emperor could be more effectively expressed. The reliefs thus situate imperial action in a divinely populated environment that uses the gods to drive and legitimise the emperor's deeds.

**The column base of Antoninus Pius: visual *consecratio***

The column base of Antoninus Pius (Figure 31) allows us to deepen our understanding of the diverse roles exhibited by gods in Antonine art. The base represents one of our earliest monumental images of imperial *consecratio* and belongs to a small group of monuments that depict this ritual event. Apotheosis scenes constitute a distinctive strand of imperial narrative, and it will be helpful in the following discussion of the Antonine base to touch on other depictions of apotheosis where they are relevant. To help set the contours of our interpretation, the discussion begins with an outline of the apotheosis ritual as known from literary sources and earlier monuments, and then moves on to consider the gods on the Antonine base. As on the panel reliefs of Marcus Aurelius, the gods are used to direct the emperor's actions and to help produce a conceptualised and legitimate vision of imperial action.

The emperor's apotheosis — his elevation to heaven and divine status, and its official recognition (*consecratio*) — had great political importance, but it is infrequently depicted on surviving monuments.[570] The idea that great men on their deaths might become divine was inherited from the Greek world and is present, for example, in Cicero.[571] And Romans in the Republic were sometimes made into gods in foreign (Greek) contexts.[572] Julius Caesar was the first historical Roman to be officially deified at Rome and a representation of his apotheosis is perhaps preserved on the Belvedere altar.[573] In the imperial period, deification became more

Contemporary imperial praise can be found in sources such as the letters of Marcus Cornelius Fronto, but these texts have a context and set of concerns quite different to those of imperial monuments. Contemporary Greek panegyric is cited below, in relation to the 'Parthian Monument'.

[570] Discussions of Roman apotheosis images: Deubner 1912, 1-20; Strong 1915, 60-83; Hinks 1939, 89-91; Vogel 1973, 44-55; Brendel 1980, 49-63; Beard and Henderson 1998, 200-219; Alföldi 1999, 74-82; Zanker 2004, 57-65; Hallett 2005, 224-230.

[571] Cicero, *On the Republic*, 6.16 ("love justice and duty...such a life is the road to the skies"); Price 1987, 72-73. Greek apotheosis: Habicht 1970, 236-242.

[572] Habicht 1970, 242.

[573] The protagonist in the scene on the Belvedere Altar is unidentified and could instead be Romulus or Augustus: Buxton 2014, 100-104; Fless 2018, 115-121.

frequent, for emperors and other select family members, including Augustus, Drusilla, Livia, Claudius, Vespasian, Titus, Nerva, Trajan, and Hadrian.[574] Apotheosis images from the early empire are found only on a handful of imperial cameos, such as the Great Cameo of France, and in the archivolt relief from the Arch of Titus.[575] The narrative of deification, that is, the carrying of the deceased to heaven, is present on coins for the first time under Hadrian (in honour of Sabina), and then again on Antonine coins and two key reliefs — the Hadrianic 'Arco di Portogallo' panel (Figure 32) and the column base of Antoninus Pius — which are the first surviving monumental depictions of the event. The acceptance of a recently deceased emperor as a new divinity (a *divus*) played a key role in the period of transition between rulers, and confirmation of apotheosis was by the second century AD the culmination of an imperial funeral.[576] The event helped to legitimise the emperor's successor and represented a pre-eminent form of power projection in the capital.[577]

We have three main literary sources from which we can reconstruct the ceremony: (1) Dio Cassius' account of Augustus' funeral,[578] supplemented by Suetonius;[579] (2) Dio Cassius' account of the funeral of Pertinax, in which the author participated;[580] and (3) Herodian's description of the funeral of Septimius Severus.[581] These authors tell us that the ceremony had three main stages. First, the body was taken in procession from the imperial palace to the forum, where laudatory speeches were read out. The procession then continued to the Campus Martius, where ritualised military manoeuvres were performed. Finally, the body was burned on a large stepped pyre, the lighting of which was accompanied by the release of an eagle, which carried the emperor's soul to heaven and signified his promotion to divine status.[582] The validity of this last, climactic stage rested on senatorial approval.[583] The sources emphasise that the release of the eagle was the decisive, transformative moment, and that its ascension was the core action

[574] Key studies: Price 1984; Beard and Henderson, 197-200; Koortbojian 2013; McIntyre 2019, 1-88.
[575] Cameos: Megow 1987, Cat.A80, 199-200, plate 27.1 (Claudius), Cat.A85, 202-207, plate 33 (Great Cameo), Cat.A99, 214-215, plate 35.3 (Nero). Some of these cameos may have been intended as general celebrations of imperial majesty, rather than as true apotheosis representations. Further on the Great Cameo: Zwierlein-Diehl 2007, 160-166; Giuliani 2010; Smith 2021. Arch of Titus relief: Pfanner 1983, plates 68-69.
[576] Political transition: Zanker 2004, 9, 68-71. Funerals: Price 1987, 91-95.
[577] Price 1987, 56.
[578] Dio Cassius, 56.34-42.
[579] Suetonius, *Augustus*, 100.
[580] Dio Cassius, 75.4-5.
[581] Herodian, *Roman History*, 4.2.
[582] Ceremony: Price 1987, 59-61; Zanker 2004, 16-20 (palace-forum), 20-34 (forum), 35-55 (Campus Martius); McIntyre 2019, 30-36.
[583] Price 1987, 82, 91; McIntyre 2019, 30.

by which apotheosis was made legible to spectators: "As if from a battlement", says Herodian, "an eagle flies forth, soaring with the flames into the sky. The Romans believe that this eagle carries the soul of the emperor from the earth up to heaven. Thereafter the emperor is worshiped with the rest of the gods".[584] It is this moment of ascension that the monuments sought to represent, and in doing so to immortalise the emperor's receipt of the state's highest political-religious honour.

**The base**

The column base of Antoninus Pius constitutes one part of a monument erected in AD 161, the year of the emperor's death.[585] The column itself survives only in fragments, and the base forms the main expressive part of the extant structure. It is decorated on one side with an inscription, which confirms the date and occasion of the dedication, and on the other three sides with narrative reliefs.[586] Two of these sides illustrate the above-mentioned funerary military manoeuvres and deploy a bold, 'documentary' relief style. The final relief-decorated side continues the theme of funerary ritual and displays a majestic scene of the apotheosis of Antoninus Pius and his wife Faustina the elder.[587] The imperial couple fly through the centre of the scene on the back of a winged male deity and are accompanied by a pair of eagles. Below them, at the lower left, a reclining male divinity with an obelisk incarnates the Genius of the Campus Martius, and, on the right, Roma appears as a seated, armed goddess.[588] The emperor and his wife thus ascend to heaven under divine protection from the city of Rome and the Campus Martius, the location of the apotheosis ritual.[589] Their divine transition is confirmed by the double eagles. The monument was dedicated by Pius' adopted sons and successors, Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, and the anachronistic presence of Faustina, who had died years before Pius in AD 140, provides the scene with apposite dynastic connotations.

[584] Sources: Dio Cassius, 56.42 ("an eagle...flew aloft, appearing to bear Augustus' spirit to heaven"), 75.5 ("The consuls applied fire to the structure...an eagle flew aloft from it. Thus was Pertinax made immortal"); Herodian, 4.2.11. Note: Price 1987, 95 (suggesting that Dio's Augustan eagle may be anachronistic).
[585] Base: Vogel 1973; Koeppel 1989, 27-28, 62; Kleiner 1992, 285-288; Zanker 2004, 57-65; Ridley 2018, 235-269 (focusing on its post-antique history).
[586] Inscription: Vogel 1973, 17-18, fig.18.
[587] Description: Vogel 1973, 32-44.
[588] The Genius of the Campus Martius holds the Augustan sundial: Vogel 1973, 32-33.
[589] On the Campus Martius as an 'apotheosis landscape': Zanker 2004, 65-71. The base was also originally displayed there.

The gods, then, had two main roles in the narrative: one largely static and topographical, the other active. Roma and the Genius of the Campus Martius fulfil the former role and mark and protect the location of the scene. Roma's raised hand signals her 'witnessing' acclamation of the departing couple. The same parts are played by the Genius of the Campus Martius and an emperor (probably Hadrian) on the apotheosis relief from the 'Arco di Portogallo' (Figure 32), and by members of the imperial family on the Great Cameo of France. As with Roma on the Antonine base, an observing figure in each of these scenes raises their hand to 'witness' the deification.[590] The second role — the carrying of the emperor to heaven — is performed by a range of deities in apotheosis images. We may review some of them to bring out their variation. On the Belvedere altar, for example, the deceased ascends in a chariot pulled by winged horses, and on some coins and in the archivolt relief from the Arch of Titus the deceased is carried by Jupiter's eagle. On the Great Cameo of France, the carrying figure wears a long-sleeved outfit with trousers and a hat.[591] He is perhaps a Trojan-Julian divinity dressed in eastern costume, but a firm name remains obscure.[592] The god on the 'Arco di Portogallo' relief is female, winged, and holds a torch: she is usually and probably correctly labelled 'Aeternitas', in accordance with similar named figures on coins.[593] The flying deity on the Antonine base has not been convincingly identified.[594] He is winged and holds a snake and a globe decorated with a zodiac band.[595] A possible option is the Genius of the golden age (*saeculum aureum*), who on coins shares the globe, wings, and male gender of the god on the base.[596] If so, the relief would show on one level the imperial couple being taken to heaven on the basis of the divinely supported golden age they have instituted on earth. The unusual deity must at present, however, remain without a secure name.

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[590] Validation of the actual ritual was performed by the senate: Price 1987, 82, 91.

[591] Giuliani 2010, 13, 26-27. The Great Cameo presents a 'triple-apotheosis', of Augustus, Germanicus, and Drusus the Younger. These last two figures ride a winged horse and a shield, respectively. Augustus is the main central figure, and rides the trousered deity. (Germanicus and Drusus were never officially deified.)

[592] Suggestions: Hinks 1939, 88 (Alexander the Great); Brendel 1980, 60-63 (Polus Borealis); Smith 1982, 199 (Polus); Giuliani 2010, 26-27 (oriental Julian figure); Hölscher 2019, 271 (Julus-Ascanius).

[593] Aeternitas: Deubner 1912, 12; Koeppel 1986, 7-8, 39-42; La Rocca, 1986, 25; Kleiner 1992, 253-254; Torelli 1992, 123-125; Söldner 2010, 246-247. Alternatively: Brendel 1980, 56 (Consecratio). Aeternitas coins: Vogel 1973, figs.93-94.

[594] Suggestions: Deubner 1912, 15-20 (Aion); Vogel 1973, 33-38 (Genius of the World, Aion, and Ascensus dismissed; *saeulum aureum* proposed); Brendel 1980, 58 (Ascensus); Koeppel 1989, 27-28 (open discussion).

[595] The zodiac band features a moon, stars, a bull, a ram, and a snake and may allude to the death-date of Antoninus Pius in March: Vogel 1973, 33-34; Koeppel 1989, 62. Further on the possible cosmological associations of the globe: Deubner 1912, 15-20; Brendel 1980, 58 (the snake refers to the path of the sun through the sky). Alternatively, the globe and zodiac symbols could allude to world rule, an important aspect of deification theology, for which: Bosworth 1999, 2-6.

[596] Vogel 1973, 35-38; Kleiner 1992, 285-288. Coins: Vogel 1973, figs.89-91.

That such a range of deities perform this 'carrying' role shows that the participation of a particular god was not fixed. In typical imperial narratives, such as those relating to war or sacrifice, the action was usually authorised by key political and Olympian gods such as the Genius of the Senate, Victory, and Jupiter. Apotheosis scenes, on the other hand, were directed towards an exceptional, one-time status transition, a main focus of which was a particular emperor or empress. The identity of the carrying deity was thus able to change with the perceived character or connections of the imperial figure(s) in question.[597]

What then, we might ask, did these gods add to the narratives? Previous commentators have characterised deities in apotheosis images as highly metaphorical. Lise Vogel, for example, argued that on the Antonine base "the imperial couple in every way belongs to a distinct ontological system, coexisting with the allegorical world of the other (divine) figures"; and Paul Zanker suggested that, because of the elevating gods in apotheosis scenes, "nothing would be more misleading than to describe such images as 'historical reliefs'".[598] But these assessments perhaps exclude an alternative position that is also worth considering. Apotheosis scenes need not be either strict history or full-blown allegory. The action, the human participants, and the gods can instead all be seen as components of a visual system of alluring imperial mythology. In Roman thinking, divinities belonged to the same system of action as the emperor: both Antoninus Pius and gods such as Roma had real parts to play in the empire. Deities thus enhanced, rather than undermined, the 'reality' of the imagery, and are perhaps better seen as an integral part of the political-historical force of the reliefs, rather than as figures that compromised or allegorised the narratives. As the literary sources demonstrated, it was the dramatic action of the soaring eagle and its divine connotations that constituted the core of the historical ritual.[599] Apotheosis reliefs complemented this action by revealing ideas that could only be imagined in the real ceremony, and used the gods to reshape the death of the emperor — to convert the mundane political selection of a new *divus* into an incontrovertible sacred event. The emperor becomes a dignified figure who, although he would rather remain on earth and continue to serve the empire, is seized by the gods and taken to heaven in accordance with

[597] Alföldi 1999, 76-78 (suggesting that the identities of the various gods were based on their shared connections as agents of Jupiter).
[598] Vogel 1973, 42; Zanker 2004, 60 ("*nichts ist irreführender, als solche Bilder als 'historische Reliefs' zu bezeichnen*").
[599] Sources: above, note 584.

a divine plan.[600] The gods on the base were thus deployed as active protagonists to animate and legitimise a key moment in Antonine political mythology.

**Imperial reliefs from Ephesus: the so-called 'Parthian Monument'**

The 'Parthian Monument' preserves a unique visual definition of the emperor's role and the character of his empire as seen from the perspective of local elites in the Greek East.[601] The monument translates imperial Roman ideology into Hellenistic visual epic. This translation involved the working-in of a large divine component, and in the context of this thesis we want to know what this expressed and how it was different from the visual construction of the emperor-in-action at Rome. It will be argued that there are significant and revealing areas of divergence between these two cultural zones. We assess first what can be certainly known about the monument, before analysing the divine figures of the reliefs individually. The fragmentary nature of the monument and the complexity of its iconography necessitate careful discussion.

The monument survives in a number of near-complete slabs and a much larger number of smaller fragments, which belong, on grounds of style, technique, and find location, to a single great relief cycle from an unknown building.[602] The reliefs were found in multiple secondary contexts in Ephesus beginning in 1895 and were fully published in 2009.[603] There are as yet no related epigraphic or literary sources, and the original arrangement and extent of the reliefs, as well as the function and location of the building to which they were once attached, are uncertain.[604]

[600] Compare, for example: Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 10.5 (the gods actively 'claim' Nerva and take him to heaven: "*di ideo caelo vindicaverunt*").
[601] Previous scholarship: Oberleitner 2009, 39-47 (discussion), 454-457 (list). Key studies: Heberdey 1904, 51-56; Vermeule 1968, 95-123; Eichler 1971, 102-135; Oberleitner 1978, 66-94; Ganschow 1986, 209-221; Liverani 1995, 219-249; Liverani 1997, 153-174; Oberleitner 1999, 619-631; Fuchs 2003, 9-29; Nollé 2003, 459-482; Landskron 2006, 143-183; Seipel 2006; Fittschen 2009, 157-179; Fuchs 2009, 347-377; Winkler-Horaček 2009, 198-215; Faust 2012, 319-352; Faust 2012b, 143-167; Smith 2015, 476-478; Demandt 2019, 169-174.
[602] Oberleitner 2009, 49-136 (slabs and larger pieces), 173-193 (fragments). Three sets of Greek letter-markings have been observed on the reliefs, but they do not significantly assist reconstruction and perhaps derive from the secondary re-use(s) of the slabs: Eichler 1971, 102-108, 128-129; Ganschow 1986, 215-216; Fittschen 2009, 175-176; Oberleitner 2009, 297-301; Faust 2012b, 151-152.
[603] Fully published: Oberleitner 2009. Excavation history and find locations: Oberleitner 1999, 619-621; Jobst 2005, 171-173; Oberleitner 2009, 19-38.
[604] No corner fragments or architectural components certainly from the original structure have been found: Oberleitner 2009, 393. Another relief series featuring bull's heads and garlands was also found in Ephesus and

We can reconstruct five main subjects from the extant material: (1) imperial sacrifice; (2) battle; (3) ethnic-geographical personifications; (4) divine and imperial chariots; and (5) gods.[605] Although there are only four instances in which two slabs can be joined (three of which are in the battle section), this division of the material is probably secure: the series of personifications and the series of gods are marked as distinct by the specific arrangement of the figures on each slab; and the battle and sacrifice friezes and the chariot reliefs are unified by subject matter.[606] The chariots could have been dispersed alongside the four other frieze sections in a number of possible ways.[607] We can imagine for the original context a major building set up by the city,[608] perhaps a monumental altar that stood in one of Ephesus' main civic complexes.[609]

The dating of the monument is controversial. One of the slabs from the sacrifice frieze preserves portraits of four members of the imperial family: Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, the young Marcus Aurelius, and the boy Lucius Verus (Figure 33).[610] No other portraits of emperors survive from the monument. The grouping of the four imperial figures provides a terminus post quem of AD 138, the date of Hadrian's adoption of Antoninus Pius and the simultaneous

has been attributed to the same monument as the figural reliefs: Oberleitner 1978, 90-92; Oberleitner 2009, 325-358. This attribution is uncertain, and others, noting the differences in marble type and technique, propose a separate origin: Thür and Pyszkowski-Wyżykowski 2006, 143-157; Fittschen 2009, 162; Thür and Pyszkowski-Wyżykowski 2009, 369-378.

[605] Oberleitner 2009, 215-265; Fittschen 2009, 157-159; Faust 2012, 319-321.

[606] Reconstruction of sections: Oberleitner 2009, 297-323. For a radically different arrangement: Vermeule 1968, 100-120. Cornelius Vermeule's interpretation was strongly criticised: Eichler 1971, 102-133, 134 ("*unwissenschaftlich und dilettantisch im übelsten Sinn*").

[607] Different suggestions: Meyer 2006, 131-132; Oberleitner 2009, 393-406; Faust 2012b, 160-167.

[608] Lanskron 2006, 143; Faust 2012b, 163-164. That the emperor set up the monument himself has been suggested: Taeuber 2006, 25 ("*Ideen und Botschaften des Herrschers selbst*"); Oberleitner 2009, 294. This is unlikely, because: (1) imperial involvement in the cities of the empire was limited, particularly in the cultural sphere; and (2) because honorific initiative was always local, whether in the realm of monuments, portrait statues, or imperial cult: Price 1984 (imperial cult); Smith 2015, 471-495 (monuments). The cities of the Greek East prized their freedom (for instance from taxation): Millar 1993, 236-237.

[609] A monumental altar is the best locally attested possible building form: Oberleitner 1978, 93-94; Jobst 1985, 79-82; Nollé 2003, 459-482; Jobst 2005, 173-176; Oberleitner 2009, 393-402. Other suggestions: Thür and Pyszkowski-Wyżykowski 2009, 402-406 (frieze on the wall of a temple or on the back wall of a stoa). It is possible the original building was connected with imperial cult: Ganschow 1986, 24; Fuchs 2003, 27-28; Oberleitner 2009, 393-406. The only extant comparable monument — the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias — was certainly connected with imperial cult: Smith 2013, 9-13. And the four main subjects of the reliefs would suit a four-sided altar, although no appropriate architectural fragments have been found. Suggestions for the location of the monument: Bammer 2004, 11-15 (by the Artemision); Jobst 2005, 173-176 (near the library); Taeuber 2006, 25 (by the Olympieion); Oberleitner 2009, 407-423 (near the Atrium square).

[610] First identified: Rumpf 1931, 100; Lorentz 1933, 108 n.17. Discussion: Fittschen 2006, 71-87.

adoption by the latter of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus.[611] But, because the monument featured an extensive battle frieze and Hadrian and Antoninus Pius fought no significant wars, the reliefs were traditionally dated to the period following the death of Lucius Verus (c.AD 170), and the imagery was taken as a biographical depiction of Verus' reign: adoption as a boy in the sacrifice scene, victory against the Parthians in the battle frieze, ascension to heaven in the chariot reliefs, and reception by the Olympians in the series of gods.[612]

This 'late' interpretation is insecure.[613] The dynastic configuration in the sacrifice scene demands instead an earlier date around AD 140-150, soon after the situation it depicts, in the reign of Antoninus Pius.[614] The portraits also suggest an early date. Those of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus do not follow closely any official type.[615] In the case of Lucius Verus this would be striking if the monument was conceived with him as the protagonist and executed after his death, by which time his portrait types would be widely known and available.[616] Stylistic arguments for a late date are also not convincing.[617] The span between the earliest and latest proposed dates is a mere forty years: no time, that is, in which we might recognise significant or diagnostic stylistic change in this period.[618] And neither is the battle frieze necessarily of a Parthian war. The depicted barbarians are diverse, and figures with northern and eastern characteristics are mixed freely.[619] A head identified in the monument's main publication as Lucius Verus and attributed to the series of gods can also probably be dismissed as useful evidence for this issue: its inclusion in that section of the frieze is without foundation, and the head does not represent Verus (or any other emperor).[620] There is thus nothing to

[611] Adoption (February 23 AD 138): *Historia Augusta*, *Hadrian*, 24.1; *Pius*, 4.5; *Marcus*, 5.1; *Verus*, 2.2.
[612] Lucius Verus dating: Eichler 1971, 119; Oberleitner 1978, 60-68, 92-93; Stähler 1987, 108; Kleiner 1992, 309-312; Oberleitner 1999, 621-630; Fuchs 2003, 9-29; Nollé 2003, 478; Hölscher 2004, 16, 43; Jobst 2005, 171; Oberleitner 2006, 13-14; Fuchs 2009, 347-377; Oberleitner 2009, 269-295, 296 ("*eine Früdatierung nicht möglich ist*"); Winkler-Horaček 2009, 212 (late or early); Demandt 2019, 169-174 (late or early); Rose 2021, 24.
[613] Earlier dating (c.AD 140-150): Lorentz 1933, 108 n.17; Vermeule 1968, 96-97; Liverani 1995, 234-236; Liverani 1997, 153-155; Liverani 1999, 639-641; Chausson 2006, 33-67; Landskron 2006, 172-175, 178; Landskron 2006b, 124; Taeuber 2006, 25-31; Christof 2009, 696-698; Faust 2012, 321-322; Faust 2012b, 160-164; Smith 2015, 476-477.
[614] Already recognised: Lorentz 1933, 108 n.17 ("*Die Reliefs sind somit ganz außergewöhnlich gut datiert*").
[615] Compare: Fittschen and Zanker 1985, Cat.72, 78-79, plate 83 (image of the boy Lucius Verus in the emperor's first portrait type: the hair and physiognomy differ clearly from the Ephesian representation).
[616] Fittschen 2006, 71-87. Against: Fuchs 2009, 347-350 (arguing that conformity to portrait typology is crucial for either date).
[617] Stylistic arguments: Eichler 1971, 131-134; Oberleitner 2009, 267-286.
[618] Fittschen 2009, 168-175; Faust 2012, 330-331.
[619] Landskron 2006, 144-154; Faust 2012b, 143-167. Against: Fuchs 2009, 357-375; Oberleitner 2009, 223-226 (both arguing that the barbarians are mostly eastern).
[620] Identified as imperial: Oberleitner 1978, 60-77; Kleiner 1992, 309; Oberleitner 2009, 262-265. Dismissed: Landskron 2006, 170; Fittschen 2006, 81-83.

support a late dating of the monument. The early date is secured independently by the dynastic conception presented in the sacrifice frieze, to which we now turn.

**Sacrifice**

The sacrifice frieze survives in several fragments and three near-complete slabs.[621] The slabs show: (1) a sacrificial bull, musicians, and attendants; (2) draped women observing the ritual;[622] and (3) four members of the imperial family, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, and Lucius Verus, on the important slab mentioned above. Hadrian and Pius wear togas, have their heads veiled, and stand either side of a sceptre.[623] They are co-leaders of the ceremony and equal holders of imperial power. Further fragments confirm the presence of other members of the imperial family: Faustina the Elder and (possibly belonging) Sabina, both securely identified by their portraits.[624] The narrative clearly represents a sacrifice celebrating the succession plans brought about by the double adoption of AD 138.[625] Whether an *adoptio* or *adrogatio* is depicted has been debated,[626] but the idea that the frieze was concerned with the subtleties of Roman religion is questionable — the iconography of the sacrificial attendants, for example, is not correct for a Roman ritual (they wear the Greek *exomis*)[627] — and the narrative may be understood in its local context as a 'loose' visualisation of the dynastic situation at Rome following the adoption.[628]

Three participants have been identified as divine: Sabina, Faustina, and a male figure behind Hadrian. Sabina wears a stephane, and it has been debated whether the empress appears as a *diva* or not, with some arguing that a stephane is not an automatic sign of divine status.[629]

[621] Description: Oberleitner 2009, 49-68; Faust 2012, 323-328.
[622] Discussion: Christof 2009, 696-708.
[623] Togas and veiled heads were important markers of Roman identity in the Greek East: Smith 2013, 158, 207 ('forced' inclusion of togas and veiled heads to emphasise Roman identity in the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias).
[624] Fragments: Oberleitner 2009, 301-307. Portraits: Fittschen 2006, 75-78. Paulo Liverani attributed Sabina and Faustina to the series of gods: Liverani 1995, 233-243. Faustina, on grounds of composition and iconography, belongs certainly to the sacrifice: Oberleitner 2006, 17-18.
[625] Suggested events: Liverani 1995, 233-243 (*nunc votorum*); Landskron 2006, 162-169 (sacrifice to Jupiter); Oberleitner 2006, 17-23 (adoption focused on Lucius Verus)
[626] *Adoptio*: Oberleitner 2009, 218-222. *Adrogatio*: Liverani 1997, 156-162.
[627] Landskron 2006, 162-169. Also: Christof 2009, 706-708 (noting a similar 'Hellenisation' of the female participants).
[628] Fittschen 2009, 163-164.
[629] *Diva*: Liverani 1997, 156-162; Laubenberger 1999, 648; Oberleitner 2009, 215-222. Against: Fittschen 2006, 75-78 (living or dead); Landskron 2006, 162-169 (living or dead); Töpfer 2012, 56.

Regardless of the significance of the stephane, Sabina should be understood as divine due to the fact that she was already dead (and deified) before the dramatic date of the frieze (she died in AD 136, a year or so before the adoption in 138). We know from the column base of Antoninus Pius that members of the imperial family could be represented taking part in events which occurred after their deaths, and the divine Sabina would be a welcome addition to the dynastic narrative.[630] The empress' head, however, does not certainly belong to the frieze. It does not join any slab or fragment, and the body with which the head is combined in the monument's main publication produces a figure with an unnaturally long neck.[631] Sabina's participation should thus remain only an attractive hypothesis.

Faustina's divine status is less certain. The issue is whether her iconography (veiled head, cornucopia) constitutes a basis for interpreting her as a *diva* and thus for dating the monument after AD 140 (the year of Faustina's death).[632] Cornucopias, however, were not firm markers of divinity. A relief from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias, for example, depicts Agrippina the Younger, who was never deified, holding a cornucopia in a scene conceived as taking place within her lifetime.[633] Like the Agrippina from the Sebasteion, Faustina appears with a cornucopia here to give the empress (in Greek thinking) the visual elevation appropriate for a member of the imperial family. The veiled head could perhaps be taken as an indication of divine status, and is seen as such often on coins.[634] But like the cornucopia it does not constitute hard evidence for divinity.[635] The frieze also refers to an occasion before the empress' death. Faustina was thus possibly but not certainly intended as divine. That said, the precise divine status of members of the imperial family was probably not a major concern from the perspective of the Greek East, where emperors, empresses, and princes, living or dead, could all be easily visualised as gods or god-like.[636] Representing Faustina with a cornucopia, whether she was technically a *diva* at Rome yet or not, probably carried in its local context a

[630] The column base depicts the apotheosis of Antoninus Pius (AD 161) but includes the emperor's wife, Faustina, who died years before, in AD 140: Zanker 2004, 58-60; Figure 31.
[631] So: Fittschen 2006, 75-78. Main publication: Oberleitner 2009, fig.96. The character of the head (that is, the fact it is a portrait) suggests it belongs, with all the other identified portraits from the monument, to the sacrifice.
[632] Seeing Faustina as dead and divine: Liverani 1997, 156-162; Liverani 1999, 639-641; Fittschen 2006, 75-78; Taeuber 2006, 25; Oberleitner 2009, 218. Against: Fuchs 2003, 17-18.
[633] Smith 2013, 74-78.
[634] For example: RIC III, Faustina I 345, 348-349a, 350-351, 353.
[635] Certainly-mortal females could appear with veiled heads in images of sacrifice. For example: Zanker 1988, figs.100-101 (Ara Pacis and Lares altar).
[636] As in, for example, the imperial reliefs from the Aphrodisian Sebasteion: Smith 1987, 88-138.

more straightforward message of the empress' god-like status, dynastic importance, and fertility.

The third possible god has been seen in the male figure standing behind Hadrian. Only the figure's head is visible, but his proximity to the emperor and (longish) hairstyle have led to his identification with a number of gods and imperial figures. Honos, the Genius of the Roman People, Pedanius Fuscus, Aelius Verus, Antinoos, and Faustina the Younger have been suggested.[637] All can probably be discounted. The hair is not long enough for a deity,[638] the physiognomy is not good for any known portrait,[639] and the apparent significance of the figure's proximity to Hadrian is an illusion. The figure is overlapped almost completely by the emperor (and clearly of insignificant status) and looks towards the now-lost adjacent slab, which probably included generic participants to whose number this figure surely belongs.[640] Narrative reliefs were often designed to show the emperor as an accessible magistrate taking part in real-looking activity. This was achieved in part through the juxtaposition of imperial protagonists with generic figures such as rank-and-file soldiers and sacrificial attendants. This is a feature of many relief cycles, and we need not suppose anything more significant to be the case here.

The sacrifice frieze, then, did not as far as we know have a divine component. The narrative was concerned primarily with the emperors (Hadrian and Pius) and their significance as members of a dynastic group. Divinised members of the imperial family (Sabina) were perhaps included, as well as allusions to imperial fertility (Faustina and her cornucopia), but as we have it, and in the context of this thesis, the scene contains no gods. This was an official, ceremonial narrative, and more elevated aspects of imperial rule were celebrated in the other frieze sections.

[637] Honos or Genius: Fittschen 2006, 78; Fittschen 2009, 163-164; Oberleitner 2009, 215-218. Pedanius: Fuchs 2006, 89-99. Aelius: Eichler 1971, 115. Antinoos: Landskron 2006, 165-166. Faustina: Vermeule 1968, 110.
[638] The figure's ears are visible, like the certain mortals on the same slab and unlike, for example, the four male gods on the chariot reliefs from the 'Parthian Monument'. Chariot relief gods: Oberleitner 2009, figs.196, 204-209, 212, 215.
[639] Fittschen 2006, 78.
[640] Faust 2012b, 161.

**Battle**

The battle frieze uses unusual and varied iconography to present an unmatched, heightened vision of imperial warfare. It is preserved in six near-complete slabs, a large fragment of a seventh, and many smaller pieces.[641] As far as we know, the frieze was filled by a single overall scene of combat. Joins between the seven better preserved slabs allow the surviving material to be divided into four main sections: (1) a single slab with a defeated barbarian rider, two more barbarians, and two Roman soldiers; (2) a two-slab section showing dying barbarians, fighting barbarians and Romans, and the horses and foreparts of a chariot, which surely belonged to an emperor;[642] (3) a one-and-a-half-slab section with Roman riders and dying barbarians; and (4) a two-slab segment depicting more Roman cavalry, fighting warriors, and barbarians.[643] The composition throughout is densely packed and extremely violent: barbarians fight desperately with stones, commit suicide, and are depicted completely naked; the emperor (probably) appeared in a heroic chariot; and the multi-ethnic barbarians suggest a struggle of world-embracing importance. In compositional intensity and iconographical elaboration, the frieze can be compared broadly with the gigantomachy of the Great Altar at Pergamon.[644]

The heterogeneous appearance of the barbarians speaks against the traditional identification of the narrative with a Parthian war.[645] As discussed, the monument is independently dated by the adoption scene to the reign of Antoninus Pius, who like his predecessor Hadrian fought no significant campaigns. Though monuments at Rome could display elevated narrative representations, they typically referred back to some initiating historical event. The Ephesian

[641] Slabs: Oberleitner 2009, 68-89. Fragments: Oberleitner 2009, 137-193.
[642] The chariot is very prominent — it stretched over at least three slabs — and moves from left to right like the vast majority of Roman figures in the frieze. It thus seems very probable that an emperor was the passenger: Hölscher 2004, 43; Landskron 2006, 148; Fuchs 2009, 370; Oberleitner 2009, 223-224; Winkler-Horaček 2009, 200; Faust 2012b, 149-151. Some prefer to see an enemy king: Eichler 1971, 110 (undecided); Fittschen 2006, 83-85; Fittschen 2009, 165. Statue groups of figures in chariots seem to have been reserved for the emperor throughout the empire: Zimmer 1989, fig.14 and fig.22 (reconstructions of imperial chariot monuments at Timgad and Djemila, in North Africa); Smith 1998, 64 (imperial chariot monuments in the Greek East).
[643] Discussions: Eichler 1971, 129-131; Oberleitner 2009, 223-276; Winkler-Horaček 2009, 198-215; Faust 2012b, 145-149.
[644] Great Altar gigantomachy: Kähler 1948, 103-116; Robertson 1975, 538-541; Smith 1991, 158-164.
[645] Parthian interpretation: Eichler 1971, 109-111, 131 (symbolic depiction of Lucius Verus' campaigns); Oberleitner 1978, 60-68; Stähler 1987, 108-116; Kleiner 1992, 309-312; Oberleitner 1999, 621-630; Fuchs 2003, 19-21; Hölscher 2004, 43; Fittschen 2006, 83-85 (Trajan's Parthian war); Fuchs 2009, 357-375; Oberleitner 2009, 223-226. Against: Liverani 1995, 236; Landskron 2006, 144-154; Taeuber 2006, 27; Winkler-Horaček 2009, 203-204; Faust 2012, 328-330; Faust 2012b, 143-167; Smith 2015, 476-477.

frieze ignores these norms and presents instead a vision of the emperor's eternal role as conqueror and defender of the empire's borders, irrespective of actual military activity.[646]

Three of the frieze's participants have been identified as gods.[647] Their divinity is contested and none has a secure name.[648] Each is depicted as a prominent warrior wearing fur boots and an *exomis*. Two are victorious over, and about to kill, their opponents: they are therefore either Romans or on the Roman side. The third stands sure-footed before the chariot. No opponent for this figure is preserved, but since all known barbarians in the frieze are overcome or dead, he too can be taken as 'Roman'. In addition to the *exomis* and boots, the figure before the chariot is equipped with a sword, shield, and cloak, but his head is not preserved. Another of the figures likewise has no head and has no extant weapons — he grabs the hair of a barbarian and raises his now-lost right arm to strike a blow. The third figure is armed with a shield and sword and does have a head. He wears a pseudo-attic helmet and a heroic-divine hairstyle (Figure 34).[649]

This last figure's hair is key to the interpretation of the frieze. The hair is long around the neck, covers most of the ears, and projects from under the front of the helmet. All other Roman figures in the frieze have shorter hair which exposes the ears and, except for one soldier in the background, does not escape over the forehead.[650] The figure in question thus has a particular elevating hairstyle, known from scores of imperial reliefs as a marker of divinity. We can compare, for instance, the hairstyles of the male gods on the 'Parthian Monument's' chariot reliefs.[651] Considering also the figure's ideal physiognomy and compositional prominence, we may take him as a hero or god with confidence.

[646] Smith 2015, 476-477. For a comparable disregard for historical truth and official Roman ideas in the Greek East: Smith 2013, 171-173 (Aphrodisian relief showing the 'weak' emperor Claudius as a god-like ruler of land and sea).
[647] In addition, Stephan Faust attributes a fragmentary head and wing of Nike to the frieze, which previously had been assigned to the series of gods, and suggests the goddess assisted the emperor in the chariot: Faust 2012b, 149-151. Previous suggestions of Nike's participation: Landskron 2006, 148; Fittschen 2009, 165. The idea is attractive but uncertain.
[648] For suggestions: note 653.
[649] Oberleitner 2009, 79-80 (description), figs.127-128.
[650] This background figure has clearly mortal physiognomy, shorter hair, and exposed ears: Oberleitner 2009, fig.119.
[651] Oberleitner 2009, figs.196, 204-209, 212, 215.

The other two potential deities share the same iconography as the divine warrior, but crucially are lacking heads. It would be tempting to take the fur boots-and-*exomis* costume of the three figures as an indication of shared heroic-divine nature (as has been done), if not for a fourth Roman figure behind the horses of the chariot, whose physiognomy shows that he is certainly not a god but who is wearing the same costume (fur boots, *exomis*): this figure leaves open the possibility that the two unidentified headless warriors were also simply mortal soldiers.[652] Our interpretation should thus stay close to the single more securely identified divine warrior.

The divine warrior has often been taken as such, and a Greek hero, a heroised Roman soldier, and the god Honos or a Greek equivalent have been suggested.[653] A Greek hero or a Greek version of a deity such as Honos would be iconographically and conceptually appropriate, but in the light of the open-ended iconography of the figure it is probably not possible to press a precise identification. The figure's presence, however, is important for our understanding of the narrative: he shows that the battle involved the gods. The integration of fighting deities raises the battle to an extraordinary 'epic' level and can be compared with the elevated images found on imperial cameos, such as the Gemma Augustea, which depicts divinities subduing defeated barbarians in its lower register (one of the gods on the cameo is also an *exomis*-wearing divine warrior). Other imperial cameos, such as the Great Cameo of France, match the amplified dramatic tone of the 'Parthian Monument's' frieze in their representation of multi-ethnic barbarians.[654] In addition, the participation of gods in battle is well known from historical and mythological epic. Texts such as the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid* and images such as the Athenian stoa painting of Marathon gave the gods active military roles.[655] In metropolitan Roman battle narratives such as those found on Trajan's Column and the Great Trajanic Frieze, victory is won against particular barbarians by the Roman army, and any gods that do appear do not take part in the actual fighting. Imperial cameos and monuments in the Greek East, on the other hand, were able to conceive gods in a direct 'epic' manner as physically participating

[652] Figure: Oberleitner 2009, figs.116, 118. Fur boots often signified divinity or high status in Roman art: Goette 1988, 401-423.
[653] The figure before the chariot has been read as Mars: Oberleitner 1978, 82; Jobst 2005, 178; Oberleitner 2009, 223-224. Further suggestions for the heroic figure(s): Stähler 1987, 114 (a Greek equivalent of Honos); Landskron 2006, 154 (three heroic warriors that guarantee victory); Fuchs 2009, 371-373 (Honos); Faust 2012b, 157-158 (three soldiers with iconographic borrowings that compare them with gods). Against, seeing no gods: Kleiner 1992, 311; Winkler-Horaček 2009, 206. On Greek 'translations' of Roman deities in art: Smith 1993, 29-32.
[654] Great Cameo barbarians: Giuliani 2010, 12-13.
[655] Literature: Homer, *Iliad*, 20.1-74 (battle of the gods); Virgil, *Aeneid*, 2.612-617 (gods fight at Troy). Images: Pausanias, 1.15.3 (Athenian battle painting: gods observe and heroes fight at Marathon).

warriors. In the battle frieze from the 'Parthian Monument', then, gods become comrades of the emperor, and his deeds are raised to the level of the divinely assisted heroes of Troy and Marathon. Scholars such as Michaela Fuchs have argued that the deity in the frieze should be understood as an "embodiment" (*Verkörperung*) of the emperor's military virtue.[656] Such a reading understates the role of the divinity, and consequently misses the mythologising effect described here.

**Personifications**

The ethnic and geographical personifications of the 'Parthian Monument' form a group of divine beings with a different nature to the majority of those discussed in this thesis. They do not work with the emperor, and are not engaged in the divine interventions and divine-mortal interactions that form the core subject under discussion. Their character is assessed to help support the overall analysis of the monument.

Fragments and large pieces of about seven slabs can be identified as belonging to the series because of the particular arrangement of the figures they represent: two standing females and a male half-figure emerging from the ground between them.[657] The varied appearance and dress of the females, and the iconography and positioning of the males, suggests their interpretation as a series of female ethnic-geographical personifications, accompanied by male water or river gods.[658] One of the slabs deviates from this pattern in that one of the standing figures is a cuirassed male, and therefore Roman.[659] Depicted on the background next to this figure are Romulus, Remus, and the she-wolf, confirming the connection of the slab with Rome.[660]

Apart from the Roman slab, the identities of the figures are debated: none has an agreed name.[661] Such uncertainty is typical for personification series which lack identifying labels.

[656] Fuchs 2009, 371-373.
[657] Description: Oberleitner 2009, 90-109, 310-315.
[658] Matthai 2007, 183; Landskron 2009, 226-252.
[659] The cuirass was a key Roman costume in the second century in the Greek East: Smith 2015, 475. Interpretations of the cuirassed figure: Liverani 1995, 237-243 (Mars); Landskron 2006b, 109-110, 121 (an emperor); 2009, 238-240 (an emperor); Faust 2012, 337-340 (Mars).
[660] Oberleitner 1978, 85; Landskron 2009, 238-240; Faust 2012, 337-340.
[661] Discussions: Eichler 1971, 111, 119-123; Oberleitner 1978, 66-94; Laubenberger 1999, 650-653; Liverani 1995, 219-249; Fuchs 2003, 21-23; Landskron 2006, 154-157; Landskron 2006b, 103-127; Matthai 2007, 181-

This is the case, for instance, with the contemporary personifications from the Hadrianeum in Rome, all twenty-three of which are without secure names.[662] There are two reasons for this uncertainty. (1) Rome's vast empire provided scope for the visualisation of hundreds of peoples and places in human form, many of which did not have a sufficiently distinctive iconography for us to be able to differentiate them more precisely than by broad region — such as 'northern' or 'eastern'. (2) Coins show us that even figures with distinctive iconography could be given a range of names. A figure with Egyptian attributes, for example, might represent an entire region (Africa) or a single city (Alexandria), and without labels it is often difficult to decide which was intended.[663] Providing the personifications of the 'Parthian Monument' with precise names is thus not practical, though it is clear that they were originally carefully characterised.[664] With this in mind, we should concentrate on the overall character of the series and the ideas it might have expressed. At a basic level, the series represents the incorporated peoples and places of the Roman world — a flesh-and-blood inventory of the flourishing Antonine world-empire.[665]

By the Augustan period, personification series had become an established means of enumerating conquests and representing the empire.[666] A number of monuments survive with groups of personifications,[667] and we know from literary sources that more extensive series were created at Rome.[668] A series of *ethne* from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias are probably a reflection of one of these series.[669] For the Antonine period, key series survive on coins and in

189; Fittschen 2009, 166; Landskron 2009, 226-252; Faust 2012, 337-340; Smith 2013, 120; Landskron 2019, 8-14.

[662] Toynbee 1934, 1-6; Sapelli 1999; Smith 2013, 119-120; Fless 2018b, 165-166.

[663] Compare the following Egyptian-style representations: RIC Hadrian, 838-839 (*Aegyptos*), 843-844 (Alexandria); RIC Antoninus Pius, 577 (Alexandria); Kuttner 1995, 72 (Africa: Boscoreale cups). Further: Taeuber 2006, 27.

[664] There are Egyptian-African and Oriental figures, and a range of females in Greek dress. Discussions: Eichler 1971, 119-123; Landskron 2006b, 103-113; Matthai 2007, 181-189; Landskron 2009, 226-250.

[665] Interpretations: Liverani 1999, 641-645 (eternal empire); Fuchs 2003, 21-23 (revived regions of east); Taeuber 2006, 27 (loyalty of the *Reich*); Oberleitner 2009, 250-253 (places defended by Lucius Verus' Parthian war); Smith 2015, 476-477 (cared-for cities of the empire).

[666] Key discussions of phenomenon: Gardner 1888, 69-73; Toynbee 1934, 7-23; Hölscher 1988, 525-528; Smith 1988, 70-77; Kuttner 1995, 69-93; Liverani 1995, 220-249; Landskron 2006b, 113-119; Smith 2013, 113-120.

[667] Pre-Antonine examples, cited in chronological order: Kähler 1959 (Prima Porta cuirass); Kähler 1954, 89-100 (Ara Pacis altar); Kuttner 1995, 69-93 (Boscoreale cups); Gardner 1888, 69-71 (Puteoli base); Laubscher 1976, 5-37 (Arcus Novus reliefs); Wiegartz 1996, 171-179 (Forum Transitorum).

[668] Pliny, *Natural History*, 36.41 (sculptures of "*quattuordecim nationes*" in Pompey's theatre), 36.39 (an Augustan "*porticus ad nationes*", containing "*simulacra omnium gentium*": Servius, *On Aeneas*, 8.721); Velleius Paterculus, 2.39.2 (mention of a series in Augustus' forum); Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.8 ("*victarum ab eo gentium vocabula*" in Augustus' funeral procession); Dio Cassius, 56.34 (also on the images in Augustus' funeral). Discussion: Smith 2013, 114-118. The hypothetical personification series in the Forum Transitorum may have included forty-two figures: Wiegartz 1996, 171-172.

[669] Smith 2013, 114 (the highly specific inscribed names and their awkward 'translation' into Greek suggest a Roman-Latin model).

the sculptural figures from the Hadrianeum mentioned above, of which there were perhaps originally around 100.[670] Unlike figures and images paraded in triumphs, these series were not primarily connected with particular events, but instead symbolised the overall power-realm of the emperor.[671] They celebrated the ethnic and geographical range of the peoples and places controlled by Rome, and incorporated notions of barbarian defeat, Roman victory, and imperialist integration.[672]

Most previous interpretations of the 'Parthian Monument' series focus on these Roman antecedents, but alongside this Roman tradition stood conceptually different Greek models which might also have informed the series. The 'Parthian Monument's' combination of female personifications and water gods has similarities, for example, with Hellenistic images of city Tyches, such as the Tyche of Antioch, which was shown in its defining image seated above the 'swimming' Orontes.[673] Unlike the Roman personifications, these Tyches were not conquered places, but protective city gods with cults.[674] A Greek series of city *personifications* is known from the great procession of Ptolemy II.[675] Like the Tyches, these cities were not defeated barbarians but cared-for partners in empire. They wore gold crowns and were celebrated as having been rescued from Persian rule.[676] The 'Parthian Monument' series can be compared with these Ptolemaic figures: both were composed of (mostly Greek) participating entities, and neither displayed any Roman-style iconography of defeat. The Sebasteion and Hadrianeum figures, by contrast, are more subdued (some have crossed arms) and range clearly over the whole empire, taking in the uncivilised north and west as well as the cultured Greek East.[677]

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[670] Coins: Strack 1933, 139-166; Toynbee 1934, 24-130 (Hadrianic), 144-153 (Antonine); RIC Hadrian, 838-871 (province series), 872-907 (adventus series), 908-937 (army series), 938-966 (restitution series); RIC Antoninus Pius, 574-596. Hadrianeum: Toynbee 1934, 152-159, plates 34-36; Liverani 1995, 229-233; Sapelli 1999; Smith 2013, 119-120; Fless 2018b, 165-166.
[671] Hölscher 1988, 525-528.
[672] Strack 1933, 152-161; Smith 1988, 76-77.
[673] Tyches/Antioch: Gardner 1888, 73-79; Dohrn 1960, 13-29, 38 (connection with river), plates 1-33; Smith 1991, 76-77; Meyer 2006b. Also: Gardner 1888, 71 (Puteoli base: Amazon-Ephesus figure rests foot on river god); Dickins 1920, fig.25 (statue: Aphrodite above water deity); Toynbee 1953, 17 ('Dacia' above rivers on Trajan's Arch), plate 9.15 (Antonine coin: Tyche of Samosata above river god). Hellenistic landscape personifications: Hesberg 1988, 349-352 (rivers), 352-361.
[674] Greek guardian deities as city representations: Gardner 1888, 49-53.
[675] Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters*, 5.201d-e. Other Greek city representations: Gardner 1888, 58-64.
[676] Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters*, 5.201d-e.
[677] Crossed arms: Toynbee 1953, plates 34.3, 36.1 (Hadrianeum); Smith 1988, plate 2 (Sebasteion). The figures in the Hadrianeum were also interspersed with relief representations of captured weapons. Empire-wide range: Strack 1933, 144 (thirty-three of the forty-four provinces of the Hadrianic empire were represented by the emperor's coin series).

The influence of Greek city goddesses and a focus on willing participation gives the 'Parthian Monument' series a different colouring to many of the Roman antecedents mentioned above, which were closely aligned with the ideology of triumph and victory.[678] Similar 'participatory' ideas were expressed in Antonine literature. The Greek orator Aelius Aristides, for instance, spoke of the empire as a walled world-state that ruled justly over its civilised constituents and ignored or destroyed external barbarian tribes: "like the enclosure of a courtyard, cleansed of every disturbance, a circle encompasses your empire. So the whole inhabited world speaks in greater harmony than a chorus".[679] The civilised world (the empire) is conceived as a refuge and assembly place for its peoples.[680] Pausanias, another Greek writing around the time of the 'Parthian Monument', also saw Rome as ruling the worthwhile parts of the world and ignoring the unproductive.[681] And Appian, writing in the same period, praised the Romans in the preface of his *History* for creating a virtuous world-empire, unified "like a single stronghold".[682] These (elite, Greek) concerns were likely shared by the creators of the 'Parthian Monument', and the personifications can be seen as a visual expression of these ideas. The series is a loyalist representation of the regions of the Greek East as imperial partners, placed side-by-side with and on the same visual plane as the city of Rome.

## Chariots

The 'Parthian Monument' displayed four reliefs that represent chariots, two with gods as protagonists, one probably with an emperor, and the fourth and least-well-preserved with either a third god or a second imperial figure.[683] The reliefs share a common iconographic scheme and were clearly conceived as pendants. Two pairs, one divine and the other imperial, is an attractive reconstruction. This visual comparison of the emperor with the gods has suggested to many scholars the idea of apotheosis, but we will see that other readings are perhaps

[678] Some personifications in the Hadrianic coin series, for example, were seated dejectedly with their heads in their hands: RIC Hadrian, 845-846 (Britannia).
[679] Aristides, *Regarding Rome*, 28-30 (civilised empire of equal subjects), 60-61 (world city), 80-84 (walled world state).
[680] Aristides, *Regarding Rome*, 28-30, 61 (peoples assemble as if on an acropolis), 99-100 (cities shine and flourish).
[681] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 1.9.5, 8.43.3 (praise of Antoninus Pius).
[682] Appian, *Roman History*, preface.
[683] Description: Oberleitner 2009, 109-124.

preferable. The reliefs preserve traces of twelve gods, and it will be useful to first outline their identities.

One of the reliefs depicts a deer-drawn chariot which has as its passenger a goddess with a quiver and a knee-length dress, who is clearly Artemis, the patron deity of Ephesus.[684] The chariot is driven by a divine youth. Before the chariot is a female god with a billowing veil, and reclining on the floor beneath the deer is another goddess. This goddess holds a rudder and is accompanied by an aquatic feline creature, attributes which suggest a connection with the sea. She is probably best identified as Thassala, an ocean deity.[685] Artemis is thus 'rising from the ocean' as Artemis-Selene, an idea confirmed by the inclusion of a crescent moon emblem on the goddess' shoulder.[686] The identities of Artemis' companions follow clearly from this. The goddess before the chariot is surely Nyx, leading the way, and the driver of the chariot is perhaps Hesperos, the evening star, or another celestial god.[687]

Alongside Artemis-Selene, another of the chariot reliefs depicts Apollo-Helios. Only half of the relief is preserved, but it can be shown to have followed the same scheme as the depiction of Artemis. The god is identified as Helios by his long hairstyle, charioteer's garment, and by his attributes, a solar disk and a solar-ray crown.[688] The god's hand-held attributes are lost, but he perhaps held a torch.[689] Of the chariot only parts of the wheel and car and the hind legs of the animal team are extant. The animals have feline legs and should be restored as griffins, the usual animal associates of Apollo.[690] The griffins supply the Apolline component of the relief (Helios' chariot was pulled by horses).[691] The chariot is driven by a divine youth, who is perhaps a wind god such as Euros or Zephyros, as suggested by the figure's convex 'blowing'

[684] Meyer 2006, 135-136; Oberleitner 2009, 254-256; Faust 2012, 331-333. Artemis and deer: Linant de Bellefonds 2009, 39-43. Ephesian Artemis: Muss 2008.
[685] Meyer 2006, 129-131; Oberleitner 2009, 254-256; Faust 2012, 331-332. Compare: *LIMC* Thassala, 2, 6-8, 11, 14. The figure's torso, face, and hair compare well with other female ocean divinities: Andreae 2001, fig.89 (marble version of the Skylla from Sperlonga).
[686] Meyer 2006, 131; Oberleitner 2009, 254-253; Faust 2012, 331-332. Artemis-Selene: *LIMC* Artemis, 900-911.
[687] Meyer 2006, 131; Oberleitner 2009, 254-253; Faust 2012, 331-332. The goddess' veil suggests Nyx, compare: *LIMC* Nyx, 1-6; Linant de Bellefonds 2009, 15-21, plates 1-2 (relief with Selene and Nyx at Aphrodisias).
[688] Oberleitner 1995, 49-59 (seeing a kitharode's dress); Meyer 2006, 129. Apollo-Helios: Bergmann 1998, 3.
[689] Oberleitner 1995, 54-55 (kithara); Landskron 2006, 157-161 (torch); Meyer 2006, 129 (torch?).
[690] Compare: Figure 6 (Apollo and griffin on Prima Porta cuirass); Aurigemma 1969, plate 25-26 (Apollo with griffin chariot on quadrifrons arch at Tripoli); Linant de Bellefonts 2009, plate 16 (relief with Apollo's griffins in a gigantomachy at Aphrodisias).
[691] Helios' horses: Kähler 1948, plate 9 (Pergamene gigantomachy); *LIMC* Helios/Sol, 124-155; Smith 1991, fig.201 (Ilion metope).

cheeks.[692] Near the legs of the griffins is the foot of another figure who was reclining beneath the chariot.[693] This figure is unidentified (Ge and Okeanos are both possible),[694] and the character of a possible fourth figure in the place of Artemis' Nyx must also remain hypothetical.[695]

The third chariot (Figure 35) probably belonged to an emperor. In place of Artemis and Apollo in the chariot is a now-headless cuirassed figure. The cuirass was the key identifying costume of the emperor in the Greek East, and characterised the wearer as Roman, imperial, and as a military commander — the three defining aspects of the emperor from a provincial perspective.[696] The chariot is pulled by horses, driven by Victory, and guided by two further deities: a male with a solar crown, perhaps Phosphorus,[697] and an Amazonian-style goddess, surely Virtus.[698] The earth goddess Tellus reclines beneath the chariot and holds a cornucopia and a child.[699] Tellus, Victory, Virtus, and the cuirass costume of the protagonist are distinctive Roman components that give the relief a strong imperial inflection.

Two details differentiate the emperor's action from that of Artemis and Apollo. First, the emperor steps, rather than strides, into his chariot. He is dignified as appropriate for an imperial figure. Second, the emperor is assisted more directly by the accompanying deities than the two Olympians are: his chariot driver, Victory, physically leads him into the chariot by the wrist, as Artemis' and Apollo's drivers do not; and there are two gods in front of his chariot, in contrast to Artemis' one.[700] In addition, Virtus probably guided the emperor's horses (by the reins), unlike her opposite number in Artemis' scene, Nyx, who is passive. The emperor was thus carefully distinguished from the Olympians. The shared design of the reliefs placed the

[692] Oberleitner 1995, 56 (Zephyros); Faust 2012, 331-332 (Euros). Compare: *LIMC* Venti, 12 (Athenian tower of the winds), 14 (Tazza Farnese), 15-16, 22b (wind god with 'blowing' cheeks driving Helios' chariot in a gigantomachy on a theatre relief from Perge).
[693] Oberleitner 2009, figs.210-211.
[694] Oberleitner 1995, (Gaia, Oikoumené, Okeanos?); Fuchs 2003, 14 (Gaia); Meyer 2006, 129-131 (Ge); Faust 2012, 331-332 (Ge or Okeanos?).
[695] This fourth figure could perhaps have been Hemere or Eos: Meyer 2006, 131; Faust 2012, 331-332.
[696] Smith 2015, 475.
[697] Oberleitner 2009, 253-254; Faust 2012, 332-333. Johannes Nollé sees Mars: Nollé 2003, 476.
[698] Oberleitner 2009, 223 (seeing Virtus as a personification of the emperor's virtue), 253-254; Faust 2012, 332-333.
[699] The goddess leans, unusually, on a cow's head: Meyer 2006, 133. Tellus' key images and lying-under-chariot scheme: *LIMC* Tellus, 61-96.
[700] See: Landskron 2006, 156-161 (on Victory's action).

emperor and the deities on the same divine level, but the emperor was conceived as a different, less commanding kind of god.[701]

Although only a fragment of the fourth chariot is preserved, it can be confidently restored on the same pattern as the other three. Still visible are the hind legs of a feline animal team, the knee of a figure reclining under the chariot, and part of the leg of a figure driving or standing in the car.[702] The identities of these figures and the protagonist are speculative, but we are surely dealing with another god or imperial figure. Kybele, Zeus, Sabina, Faustina, Drusilla, Marcus Aurelius, and other deified emperors have been suggested.[703] Marion Meyer argued that because the chariot is pulled by feline animals (lions, panthers, or griffins) it could not belong to an empress, who as a figure of lower status than the emperor would not be represented outranking him in this way (the emperor's chariot is 'merely' drawn by horses).[704] The fourth chariot, on this view, must belong to either a god or a senior deified emperor. Against this, however, it may be observed that the triumphal associations of horses would be appropriate for a representation of a commander-emperor, no matter the identity of his partner; and also, that, given her lack of official roles, an empress, if depicted, would probably borrow from divine iconography. An empress with panthers next to an emperor with horses is entirely possible.[705] The elevating connotations of the feline animal team, then, do not help to decide whether their master was imperial or divine. Other factors show that an imperial female figure is more likely.

The chariots of Apollo and Artemis and of the emperor and the unknown figure were clearly complementary. Apollo and Artemis go together as a divine pair, and the emperor matches Apollo as a male figure, leaving the unknown fourth charioteer as both a companion of the emperor and a pendant to Artemis. To balance this equation, the unidentified protagonist was surely both imperial and female, and thus an empress. Any doubts that an empress would be represented so prominently — as an equal to the emperor and the gods — are driven by a

[701] Compare: Aristides, *Regarding the emperor*, 1-4 (the emperor is divine, and giving honours to him is like sacrificing to the gods), 8 (the emperor is cared for by the gods so that he can take over affairs).
[702] Oberleitner 2009, fig.347.
[703] Kybele: Oberleitner 2009, 258-259. Zeus: Meyer 2006, 136 (or deified emperor). Sabina: Liverani 1995, 233-243; Taeuber 2006, 26-27. Faustina: Faust 2012b, 164-167. Drusilla: Oberleitner 1995, 49-59 (or a god). Marcus Aurelius: Fuchs 2003, 27-28 (Marcus/Hercules). Deified emperor: Landskron 2006, 157-161.
[704] Meyer 2006, 136.
[705] Compare the representation of imperial men and women on the Gemma Claudia, in which Germanicus wears the 'real' *corona civica*, while his wife Agrippina the Elder wears the 'divine' helmet of Virtus: Megow 1987, Cat.A81, 200-201, plate 31.

concern with central Roman ideology, within which the empress was on one level simply the wife of a leading statesman. In the Greek East, on the other hand, the imperial house was understood more bluntly as a divine royal family, the continuity of which resided in its female members. There is thus no need to interpret the fourth figure in 'Rome-friendly' terms as an emperor or a god. The reliefs recast the imperial house as a new and modern divine dynasty. The emperor and his wife become successor-companions of the established Olympian family of Apollo and Artemis.

As mentioned, the action of the reliefs is controversial — in particular, it has been debated whether the emperor's chariot should be understood as a depiction of his apotheosis. Apotheosis is the traditional and most widely held interpretation of the relief, but it has been questioned in more recent years on a number of grounds.[706] The first area of doubt relates to the iconography of the scene. In Roman contexts, emperors undergoing deification were always depicted wearing the toga, and were usually carried to heaven on the back of a deity or eagle.[707] Here, the emperor is armoured, mounting a chariot, and no eagles or deification-related divinities are present. As a picture of apotheosis, the relief would be unusual, and the emperor's cuirass and chariot suggest instead a martial action. This idea is strengthened by the character of the deities who are depicted, Victory and Virtus, both of whom had military characters and were commonly paired with the emperor in images of triumph and departure.

The image is clearly not one of triumph, but the idea of a mythologised profectio has much to recommend it. Although the formal departure of the emperor from the city of Rome (the true profectio) would be inappropriate for the elevated iconography of the relief, a narrative of departure is probably the only action that makes sense when the four chariot reliefs are taken together. As stated, the images were conceived as pendants: the shared design indicates a shared meaning. Apollo-Helios and Artemis-Selene were in art and literature frequently represented setting-off on their daily journey across the sky, and are surely doing so in the

[706] Apotheosis view: Eichler 1971, 112-113; Kleiner 1992, 311; Oberleitner 1995, 49-59; Zanker 2004, 60; Oberleitner 2006, 14-17; Oberleitner 2009, 253-254; Smith 2015, 477; Demandt 2019, 169-174. Questioned: Engemann 1999, 633-637; Fuchs 2003, 27-28; Nollé 2003, 476 (departure for war); Landskron 2006, 157-161 ('profectio'); Meyer 2006, 134-135 (loose profectio); Faust 2012, 334-337 (profectio?).
[707] Always toga: Hallett 2005, 224-230. Roman chariot apotheosis, but with *winged* horses and reflecting an earlier pre-imperial iconographic tradition: Fless 2018, 115-121 (Belvedere altar).

reliefs here.[708] In this way the gods could provide a grand framing for important events,[709] or signify more generally the divinely ordained passage of time.[710] The chariot reliefs can be understood in a similar way as images of eternal imperial and divine departure.[711] The emperor is imagined like Apollo-Helios as perpetually initiating new events (victories) and journeying unbounded across space. The emperor's 'real' activity as a tireless campaigner formed the basis for this analogy.[712] Comparable descriptions of the emperor as a 'new Helios' are found in contemporary Greek inscriptions.[713]

The emperor's victorious campaigning and wide-ranging movement across the globe are also more appropriate ideas for the relief than apotheosis given the cultural context of the monument. The emperor's deification was primarily a metropolitan concern — a fascinating senate-sanctioned transition across a critical conceptual line, man to god. For the emperor in the Greek East, this line was not really there to be crossed. Apotheosis would thus perhaps be a less likely subject for celebration in this context. With the themes and the date of the monument in mind, the relief surely depicted Antoninus Pius, the new divinely assisted emperor embarking on his imperial mission.

**Gods**

The series of gods is both the worst preserved section of the monument and the most straightforward to interpret.[714] The frieze depicted an assembly of Olympians. The best-preserved slab shows a single, standing goddess holding a torch: surely Demeter. She probably stood at one of the ends of the series. Alongside this goddess can be placed the remains of three slabs, each of which displays a central seated Olympian flanked by companions or associated

[708] Literature: Virgil, *Aeneid*, 7.26, 11.182-183. Art: Kähler 1959 (Sol: Prima Porta cuirass); Boardman 1985, fig.78 (Helios and Selene flanking the birth of Athena: Parthenon); Fless 2018, 115-121 (Sol: Belvedere altar). Further: *LIMC* Helios/Sol, 124-155, Selene/Luna, 39-66. Discussions: Ehrhardt 2004, 32-38; Hurwit 2017, 527-556.
[709] For instance: Linant de Bellefonds 2009, 19-20 (gigantomachies).
[710] For example: Kleiner 1992, figs.408, 411 (cosmic deities on the Arch of Constantine).
[711] Marion Meyer notes that, unusually for images of Helios and Selene, their chariots here are moving in different directions, perhaps suggesting they were positioned emblematically back-to-back rather than framing a section of the frieze: Meyer 2006, 131-132.
[712] 'Real' activity as campaigner and administrator: Millar 1977, 28-40.
[713] Meyer 2006, 135-136 (emperor as Neos Helios). This kind of rhetoric went back to the Hellenistic and Julio-Claudian periods: Bergmann 1998, 127 (Greek inscriptions and coins describing Caligula as a new Helios, with further examples and earlier sources and literature).
[714] Description: Oberleitner 2009, 125-136.

gods. One of these slabs depicts a reclining water deity with an upturned vessel, above which is seated a goddess with an elaborate hairstyle known from images of Aphrodite, who is surely the subject here.[715] Another of the slabs represents a male god, who is flanked by divinities and seated on a large scaly animal. The animal is easily taken as a sea creature and the god above it as Poseidon.[716] The third partially preserved slab depicts the foot and tail of a large cat and the foot of a male god, probably of Dionysus seated on his panther.[717] Fragments of a figure of Nike and a helmeted head of Athena may also belong to the series.[718]

We should probably imagine all the major Olympians seated in three- or four-figure groups with associated deities. To Demeter, Aphrodite, Poseidon, Dionysus, and Athena we can add the obvious Zeus, Hera, Apollo, and Artemis. Beyond that the participants are uncertain (Hermes, Ares, Isis, and local gods are all possible), but the general character and purpose of the series is clear.[719] Imperial rule is given a grand divine justification: the deeds of the emperor and the regions of the empire represented in the other series are watched over by the gods. The extensive divine assembly matches the high tone of the rest of the monument's imagery: the entire Antonine dynasty was gathered for the sacrifice, multi-ethnic barbarians were defeated in the battle, the whole Greek world was represented in the personification series, and here all the gods participate in the life of the empire. The same idea is caught more prosaically in contemporary literature. A speech by Aelius Aristides, for example, culminates with an invocation to all the gods to ensure Rome's supremacy.[720] The series of Olympians provides the monument with a traditional and (as far as we know) purely Greek component, and at the same time underlines the soaring conception of the Antonine-led empire represented in the other frieze sections.

[715] Eichler 1971, 120. Hairstyle, compare: *LIMC* Venus, 88-95, 113.
[716] Compare: *LIMC* Poseidon, 194 (vase: for posture and costume); Neptunus, 63, 76, 94, 134 (all of the god with or seated on a sea creature).
[717] Dionysus on panther: *LIMC* Dionysus, 430-434, 521, Bacchus 117.
[718] Athena: Oberleitner 2009, figs.229-231. Nike: Oberleitner 2009, fig.233 (this fragment has been attributed by others to the battle frieze). Also tentatively attributed: Oberleitner 2009, figs.257-259 (helmeted head: Ares?), fig.263 ('heroic' head: Herakles?). Wolfgang Oberleitner reconstructs with the Nike fragment and an uncertainly identified male head a scene of the deified Lucius Verus crowned and received by the gods: Oberleitner 2009, 263-264. This is unsubstantiated.
[719] Compare the reliefs from the agora at Smyrna: Naumann and Kantar 1950, 91-101, plates 29-34 (assembly including Poseidon, Artemis, Demeter, and Herakles).
[720] Aristides, *Regarding Rome*, 109.

## Conclusion: gods and emperors in Rome and the empire

The 'Parthian Monument' consistently made different choices to monuments produced at Rome, both in terms of the subjects that were represented and in terms of the way that its themes were expressed. The gods were central to this Greek reworking of imperial rule. An epic-style warrior hero was brought into the battle frieze, a range of deities assist and accompany the emperor on the chariot reliefs, and the gods are given their own significant group definition in the series of Olympians. These ideas of direct divine military intervention, mythologised chariot imagery, and grand Olympian assembly are not found on metropolitan monuments. They were part of a Greek conception of the emperor's nature, and were heavily influenced by a need to put imperial rule into a meaningful relationship with prior Hellenic paradigms — in particular the need to define the connection between the new god-emperors and the old mythological network of heroes and Olympians.[721]

These elevated aspects of the monument's imagery are well known.[722] What is less commented on is the perhaps surprising way in which the monument does not upgrade aspects of metropolitan representation. Centrally produced images such as the panel reliefs of Marcus Aurelius actually feature more gods in their imperial narratives than the 'Parthian Monument' does. The Ephesian battle and sacrifice friezes, for example, depict between them a single deity (the warrior hero), whereas the comparable military and ritual scenes of Marcus Aurelius' panel reliefs contain ten gods, all of whom work closely with the emperor. In the Greek East it was not the gods' narrative involvement which was increased, but the emperor's own divine-royal aspects: the whole Antonine dynasty is assembled for the sacrifice scene, where they are equipped with elevating cornucopias and a commanding sceptre; while in the battle the emperor storms through the action in an aggrandising chariot. The 'Parthian Monument' did not need to represent the carefully distinguished, side-by-side human and divine roles found in metropolitan reliefs, and ignored the official Roman fiction of the emperor as a reactive divine servant. The emperor was instead free to manifest his own superhuman, dynastic, or royal qualities. A similar vaulting reformulation of the emperor's nature is found on imperial cameos.

[721] Similar concerns shaped the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias: Smith 2013.
[722] For example: Smith 1987, 137; Landskron 2006, 143; Fuchs 2009, 374-376; Faust 2012b, 163-164.

These observations undermine the prevailing view of divine-mortal interaction in imperial narrative as a virtue-related glorification of the emperor's behaviour. In images where the ideal character and virtues of the emperor were a primary focus, such as those on court cameos and on imperial reliefs from the Greek East, the superstructure of supportive divinities found on public metropolitan reliefs melted away.[723] This suggests that the gods represented on metropolitan monuments were not attributes glorifying the power of the emperor, but instead protective authorising gods whose assistance was relied upon by the princeps of the capital.

Across Antonine narratives, then, the varied roles of the gods helped to structure the emperor's relationship with the religious authorities of society, and to define and make sense of his activity and power — whether as an elevated god-like emperor alongside the Olympians on the 'Parthian Monument', or as the constitutional imperial hero and protected divine servant of the panel reliefs and Antonine column base. To achieve these expressive aims, the gods functioned as narrative actors with their own identities, rather than as virtue-related allegories or symbols.

[723] This is true for both the 'Parthian Monument' and the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias: Smith 2013 (on the Sebasteion).

# Chapter 6: Late Imperial Monuments: The Arches of Septimius Severus and Constantine

The Arches of Septimius Severus and Constantine are among the last major extant monuments to employ the system of imperial narrative under investigation. The Arches express many of the key themes we have discussed while being shaped by aspects of the new cultural-historical circumstances that surrounded their creation. They allow us to draw together the main threads of the preceding chapters and to show how the phenomenon we have been exploring continued to have a point and force in the later imperial periods of the third and early fourth centuries. The following discussion first argues that the main reliefs on the Arch of Septimius Severus in Rome, which represent detailed campaigning narratives and do not feature any participating gods, were informed by the same 'documentary' narrative conception that we saw on the Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. The discussion then considers the side-by-side representation of metropolitan and local gods on the contemporary Arch of Septimius Severus in Leptis Magna, which serves as an example of the provincial recasting of imperial rule that we observed in a different context on the reliefs of the 'Parthian Monument' in the last chapter. Finally, the Arch of Constantine takes the discussion into the early fourth century and is analysed as a final major expression of imperial visual drama. It is argued that the gods continued to play a defining role in the representation of the emperor's actions and that the gods on the Arch of Constantine can be understood most effectively within the ideological horizons of contemporary panegyric.

## The Arch of Septimius Severus in Rome

The Arch of Septimius Severus in Rome was dedicated in AD 203 to commemorate the emperor's Parthian campaigns.[724] The most important elements of the surviving decoration are the four large panel reliefs on the principal facades of the Arch, which show scenes (speeches, sieges, battles, submissions) from Severus' eastern wars.[725] The imagery of these reliefs is characterised by the same 'documentary' style that marked the Columns of Trajan and Marcus

[724] Dedication, date, inscription: Brilliant 1967, 29-32, 91-95; Faust 2012b, 121. The monument was set up in the Forum, opposite the senate house: Lusnia 2006, 275-276.
[725] Arch, decoration, panels: Brilliant 1967, 171-182 (context), 183-217 (description), 219-250 (style); Toynbee 1968, 230-231; Koeppel 1990, 9-32; Kleiner 1992, 329-332; Landskron 2005, 130-134; Lusnia 2006, 272-296; Newby 2007, 202-206; Ditzler 2011, 229-234; Lichtenberger 2011, 74-75; Faust 2012b, 121-141.

Aurelius.[726] The scenes are depicted with 'real-world' landscape features such as buildings and rivers, constructed as if seen from an expansive, 'bird's eye' perspective, and designed to be read from the bottom up — all aspects that the reliefs share with the spiral friezes of the Columns.

It was argued in Chapter Four that this narrative conception involved a re-working of the role of the gods, who on the Columns are not, as was typical in imperial narratives, personal guardians of the emperor and 'full' participants in the action, but instead partially concealed natural forces. This style of divine representation, we saw, helped the Columns to provide authentic 'documentary' accounts of imperial campaigns. If a connection between this narrative conception and this 'distanced' manner of representing the gods holds true, we might expect the column-style Severan panels to adopt a similar attitude towards the divine, which they in fact do. Indeed, the Arch of Septimius Severus moves so far in this down-to-earth 'documentary' direction that the gods are eliminated entirely: not a single divinity appears in any of the four large reliefs.[727] This is a rare instance of the emperor's actions being described in purely human terms, and was probably driven by the 'documentary' priorities of the Arch's pragmatic campaigning representations. The purely mortal cast of the narratives proclaims the authentic and well-earned reality of the emperor's victories.[728]

The gods were not, however, absent from the Arch as a whole. Reliefs on the keystones and spandrels depict Mars, Hercules, Victories, Seasons, and river gods, and a four-times-repeated small frieze below the large panels shows barbarian prisoners and a personification of Parthia submitting to an orb-holding, enthroned Roma.[729] These short frieze strips are executed in a stylised visual language often used for subsidiary friezes that privileges clarity and legibility over naturalistic detail and scale relations. The depictions of gods complement the courageous mortal conquest dramatised in the main panels and announce that Severus' victorious rule is

[726] On the similarities between the Columns and the reliefs on the Arch: Brilliant 1967, 219-250; Lusnia 2006, 283; Faust 2012b, 136-138.
[727] The absence of the gods has been recognised by some scholars: Faust 2012b, 140 ("*Hier fehlt die göttliche Sphäre ja ganz und gar*"). Further: Brilliant 1967, 220-221 (arguing that the reliefs are an experimental attempt to provide column-style 'proof' of the victories that led to the dedication of the monument).
[728] Discussion of these aspects of the reliefs (without reference to the gods): Lusnia 2006, 293-296.
[729] Brilliant 1967, 101-165 (keystones, spandrels), 137-147 (small friezes, Roma); Lichtenberger 2011, 74-75; Faust 2012b, 121-122, 136, 140.

coterminous with divine favour and prosperity.[730] Finally, we may note that the main reliefs demonstrate that the emperor's own actions could be displayed without deploying the gods at all. The corollary to this is the need to explain the widespread representation of gods in other imperial narratives in a way that goes beyond a description of the emperor's virtues and personal qualities. The presence of gods added something different, peculiar to and derived from the deities' own identities.

**The Arch of Septimius Severus in Leptis Magna**

Septimius Severus was honoured by his home town in North Africa, Leptis Magna, with an impressive four-sided arch, which was erected in the city centre probably at some point between AD 203 and 209.[731] The monument does not have an inscription, but the campaigning and triumphal themes present in its imagery suggest a celebration of victory, and the Arch was perhaps connected with either Severus' wars against the Parthians or with his battles against African tribes.[732] Originally, the Arch displayed twelve narrative reliefs: four long (7.3m) friezes on the attic; and eight panels in a vertical format on the walls of the piers on either side of the four passageways. Parts of ten or eleven of the twelve reliefs survive, but all are fragmentary. Typically, about half of each relief remains. The monument has not been comprehensively published, but following the long preliminary report by Renato Bartoccini in 1931, a range of interpretations of the reliefs have been proposed.[733] There are some areas of basic certainty, and others where interpretation remains open or controversial. The following discussion assesses the reliefs and the deities that are represented in turn, before proposing an overall interpretation of the gods in the context of what is perhaps the most distinctive feature of the monument — its combination of metropolitan and local ideas.[734] The gods, we will see, served as a key instrument for the monument's cultural and religious processing of political

[730] Brilliant 1967, 135; Faust 2012b, 140. Divine imagery and Roman arches: Fähndrich 2005, 251-252.
[731] Date: Ward-Perkins 1948, 72 n.54 (AD 203); Ryberg 1955, 160 (207); Strocka 1972, 169-170 (206-209); Newby 2007, 206-211 (203 or 205-209); Lichtenberger 2011, 75-78 (c.207); Faust 2013, 494 (205 or later).
[732] Townsend 1938, 522-523 (local, African); Ryberg 1955, 160 (African tribes); Landskron 2005, 134-136 (Parthian); Newby 2007, 207-209 (symbolic, Parthian); Faust 2012b, 168-175 (Parthian); Rowan 2012, 84-99 (Parthian). Inscription fragments: Rowan 2012, 85; Faust 2013, 494 n.3 (the words "DIVO" and "DIVAE" are preserved).
[733] Bartoccini 1931, 32-152. Main discussions: Townsend 1938, 512-524; Ward-Perkins 1948, 75-79; Ward-Perkins 1951, 226-232; Ryberg 1955, 134-135, 160-161; Strocka 1972, 147-172; La Rocca 1985, 2-11; Alföldi 1999, 137-141; Landskron 2005, 134-136; Newby 2007, 206-211; Faust 2011b, 111-145; Lichtenberger 2011, 75-78; Faust 2012b, 168-175; Rowan 2012, 84-99; Faust 2013, 493-514.
[734] Lichtenberger 2011, 75-78.

themes. More than thirty figures of deities are used to place Severus' power and dynasty in a locally appropriate framework of divine support.

**Pier reliefs**

Parts of six or seven of the eight pier reliefs survive.[735] Apart from one, their original relative positions on the Arch are unknown and various distributions between the four archways are possible.[736] The reliefs are split into three horizontal frieze zones, with separate but related subjects in each of the registers. All but one of the panels certainly feature participating gods or prominent representations of divine statues. The outlier is a fragmentary relief that depicts a siege, which may be briefly discussed first.[737] Stephan Faust has tentatively identified a damaged figure in the relief as the goddess Virtus, but this is not certain.[738] The panel is too poorly preserved to reach certainty on the issue. The sleeveless dress and long hair of the figure show that she is probably female, but the figure could be another kind of female participant, such as a barbarian captive, rather than a goddess. The presence of Virtus must therefore remain hypothetical, and given that the relief depicts a column-style image of campaigning, the involvement of the goddess would perhaps be unlikely. We know that comparable campaigning narratives on Severus' Roman Arch and on the Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius avoided the manner of representation in which Virtus' interaction with the emperor was likely to appear. Local adaptation of the 'documentary' style is possible (Virtus and other gods appear elsewhere on the Arch at Leptis in places that might be considered unusual in metropolitan imagery), but there is no secure basis for building such an interpretation here.

Two of the pier panels, and a large fragment that may have belonged to one of them or to a third panel, are concerned with acts of cult. The fragment shows an 'Egyptian facade', that is, a representation of architectural elements alongside a sun disc, snakes, and other Egyptian-style iconography.[739] A range of subjects are possible, but the relief perhaps depicted the emperor's interaction with the cult of the Egyptian god Serapis, promoting with many of the

[735] Faust 2011b, 112-113.
[736] Faust 2011b, 112-113, n.13 (the upper third of the siege relief was found attached to the south-east side of the western pylon of the Arch; the other pier reliefs were either found out of context or their find locations were insufficiently documented to determine their original positions).
[737] Lusnia 2006, 287-288; Faust 2011b, 114.
[738] Faust 2011b, 114; Faust 2012b, 170; Faust 2013, 496. Also: Ward-Perkins 1951, 229 (seeing Hercules).
[739] Faust 2011b, 122.

other reliefs the idea of divine support for the ruling dynasty.[740] The themes of cult and the imperial family are explicitly represented on the two better preserved 'cult' panels. The first shows a scene of sacrifice without gods in its lower section and a scene of the imperial family and gods before a temple in its middle zone.[741] The upper third of the panel is not preserved. In the middle zone (Figure 36), Severus and Caracalla stand in front of the columnar facade of a temple, opposite two figures (perhaps Julia Domna and Geta) who are only partially preserved.[742] A lionskin-wearing Hercules stands behind the emperor, and an Amazonian-style goddess stands on the far left of the scene.[743] The goddess wears a helmet, carries a spear, and is probably Virtus.[744] The iconographically possible Roma would be better placed as a majestic central or enthroned figure, as she appears in the small friezes on Severus' Arch in Rome. Since the narrative has no clear military aspect, Virtus may be understood as a characteristically imperial god, who from a local perspective was a welcome companion of the emperor in any context.[745] The goddess appears in this way in a non-military scene on one of the attic friezes.[746] The second cult-related panel perhaps shows Julia Domna in a local sanctuary with divine statues (Figure 37).[747] One of the statues holds a cornucopia and is identifiable as Tyche, a city goddess who marks the location of the sanctuary as local. It is possible that the full city triad of Leptis — Hercules, Liber, and Tyche — was present: a statue of Hercules is visible on the right of the scene, and a nude male figure on the left perhaps represented Liber.[748] Both 'cult' reliefs, therefore, describe the mutually supportive relationship that was felt to exist between the imperial family and the gods.

The three remaining pier reliefs can be grouped by their shared subject matter and format. Each shows a paratactic series of gods juxtaposed with members of the imperial family (Figures 38-39). The first picks up the themes of the 'cult' panels and expresses them in a more elevated

[740] Faust 2011b, 122.
[741] Lower sacrifice scene: Faust 2011b, 118-119.
[742] Bartoccini 1931, 74; Faust 2011b, 115-117; Rowan 2012, 95-97.
[743] The relief is damaged, and it is possible that more gods were also depicted in the missing sections. Suggesting the addition of Liber and Tyche, who alongside Hercules would form the city triad of Leptis: Bartoccini 1931, 83-84; Faust 2011b, 117; Lichtenberger 2011, 78. The significance of the triad is discussed below. Suggesting the presence of Silvanus (recognised in the bearded male statue on the right of the scene): Rowan 2012, 97.
[744] Faust 2011b, 117-118.
[745] Alternatively, Virtus' involvement may suggest activity following the victories celebrated in the siege relief (the sacrifice scene in the section of the relief below Virtus includes soldiers): Faust 2011b, 118-119.
[746] Virtus attends a 'civic' imperial ceremony on the south-west attic frieze: discussed below.
[747] Faust 2011b, 120-121; Rowan 2012, 97.
[748] Whether these figures are statues or 'living' gods is not certain: Faust 2011b, 120-121; Rowan 2012, 97. The relief is battered, but Hercules is identifiable by his lion skin.

register. In the upper section, Severus and Julia Domna (identifiable by their portrait hairstyles) appear with the attributes of Jupiter and Juno.[749] They are flanked on the left by Tyche, who is identified by her cornucopia, and on the right by Minerva, with shield and owl.[750] The relief thus combines the Capitoline triad with the city goddess of Leptis and presents the divine imperial couple as the link between the two.[751] Only two figures, Mars and Venus, are preserved from the fragmentary lower registers of the relief, but they may be understood by analogy with the better-preserved reliefs from this group (Figure 39) as part of a series of deities, gathered in support of the city and emperor.[752] In comparison with images from Rome, the relief makes a bold statement about the emperor's divine status. It inverts the carefully managed hierarchy between gods and emperors that was maintained in the imperial centre. The emperor and his wife are imagined here as embodiments of the Capitoline triad in a way that would be unthinkable at Rome. In metropolitan images, such as those on the attic reliefs of the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum, the relationship of the emperor to the gods was that of an elected partner to an authorising higher authority. For the Arch at Leptis, the emperor himself is primary and divine.

The two final reliefs from the pier-cycle can be convincingly reconstructed as pendants (Figure 39).[753] They share similar iconography and are comparable to the Severus-Jupiter relief just discussed, but have as protagonists the princes Caracalla and Geta. The identity of the protagonists is not absolutely certain — their heads are damaged and some have thought them emperors — but a reading as princes makes the most sense within the logic of the Arch's programme.[754] Severus and Julia were already featured alongside gods in the panel just discussed, and the pendant reliefs require a pair of protagonists of equal status. The head of one of the figures is also recognisable as a (young, clean-shaven) prince, rather than an emperor. Caracalla and Geta are therefore the best fit and are assumed in what follows.

[749] Faust 2011b, 123-125; Rowan 2012, 94-95. The unusual drapery of Severus' Jovian costume may reflect local influence: Faust 2013, 501. Compare a figure of Hercules on the south-west attic frieze, who is also unusually draped: Lichtenberger 2011, 31-32; Figure 41.
[750] Bartoccini 1931, 83-84.
[751] La Rocca 1985, 9; Newby 2007, 211; Faust 2011b, 123-125.
[752] As a distinctively Roman pair, Mars and Venus perhaps suggest that the series of gods had imperial connotations that helped to define the ruling couple depicted above. Stephan Faust suggests a connection between Severus and Julia, Jupiter and Juno, and Mars and Venus as significant paternal couples and 'parents' of Rome: Faust 2011b, 123-125.
[753] Faust 2011b, 126-129.
[754] Princes: La Rocca 1985, 2-9; Faust 2011b, 126-127. Emperors or princes: Bartoccini 1931, 83-91.

The first of the two reliefs shows in its upper section a togate youth being crowned by Victory and greeted by Jupiter, who extends his now-broken hand towards the prince.[755] The fragmentary lower registers of the relief depict gods. Apollo, Silvanus, Ceres, Diana, Kybele, and Attis can be identified from their attributes.[756] Kybele and Attis stand by an altar, while the other gods are arranged in unspecified relief space. The second prince-and-gods panel follows the same pattern. The upper register represents a prince in military dress being crowned by Victory and accompanied by the patron gods of Leptis, Liber and Hercules, while Mercury and Virtus (both firmly identified) and an uncertainly identified god and goddess stand in the fragmentary lower registers of the relief.[757] The uncertainly identified god wears a hip-mantle and, in the light of the presence of Virtus and the warrior costume of the protagonist, may be taken as the military god Honos.[758]

Together, the pendant reliefs present the princes as the divinely sanctioned inheritors of their father's executive position — the one a togate civic leader with Olympian and country gods, the other a military commander with the warlike Virtus and Honos and the conquering, Leptis-oriented Liber and Hercules.[759] The connection between the gods of Leptis and Rome represented on the Severus-Jupiter relief is here willed to continue under the rule of the princes.[760] The depictions of Virtus and Honos are rare examples of these gods being given their own, independent definitions in relief. Virtus and Honos were usually depicted as close companions of the emperor, and this has at times encouraged the view that they had no real identity of their own. The Leptis relief suggests that Virtus and Honos were regarded here as fully independent divinities, on a par with and no more allegorical than Mercury, Diana, Apollo, or Jupiter.

[755] The gods are easily recognised: Faust 2011b, 126-127 (restoring Juno to the missing section).
[756] Bartoccini 1931, 83-91; Faust 2011b, 126-127.
[757] Virtus is secure because the military costume of the protagonist and the presence of the Leptis gods Liber and Hercules show that the setting of the relief is outside Rome, which would not suit the metropolitan goddess Roma: Bartoccini 1931, 83-91; Faust 2011b, 127-128 (fragments depicting Sol and other unspecified draped goddesses may also belong to the lower registers of the relief).
[758] Faust 2011b, 127.
[759] Faust 2011b, 128-129.
[760] La Rocca 1985, 9.

**Attic reliefs**

Significant sections of all four attic friezes survive (Figures 40-41). Unlike the pier reliefs, the attic friezes were able to be restored to their probable original positions on the Arch during excavations in the 1920s, and their relationships to one another are known.[761] The friezes translate the themes of Severan victory and dynasty that were displayed on the pier reliefs into a more extended narrative format, and their basic subjects are agreed. The friezes on the opposing north-west and south-east facades show scenes of victorious procession, and the friezes on the opposing south-west and north-east facades show scenes of imperial ceremony.[762] Each of the pairs of friezes is comprised of one Roman scene, set in the capital, and one provincial scene, set in Leptis Magna. We see complementary narratives of metropolitan and local triumph and ritual that are defined by the participation of Roman and local gods.

The frieze on the north-west facade depicts Septimius Severus processing in a chariot with his sons Caracalla and Geta, as if in triumph. The chariot is followed by a group of horsemen and preceded by barbarian captives, soldiers, and attendants.[763] The multi-storey lighthouse of Leptis Magna is depicted in the background of the scene and shows that the procession is local and in the city.[764] The decoration of the emperor's chariot, which includes the Leptis triad of Hercules, Liber, and Tyche, further confirms the provincial setting of the image.[765] The narrative cannot, therefore, be a triumph in the strict sense of the term — the *triumphus* proper was peculiar to Rome — and if a real event is needed the scene is perhaps best taken as a victorious arrival into Leptis.[766] Like many of the other reliefs, then, the frieze amalgamates local and central ideas: one of the highest rituals of the capital is recreated here in a local setting. A small young long-haired male wearing a tunic and a medallion decorated with a bust image stands before the chariot and leads the horses.[767] He has been interpreted by some as a Genius

[761] Batoccini 1931, 92-100; Faust 2011b, 112.
[762] Bartoccini 1931, 92-136; Townsend 1938, 512-524; Ward-Perkins 1948, 75-79; Strocka 1972, 147-172; Kleiner 1992, 340-343; Newby 2007, 206-211; Lichtenberger 2011, 75-78.
[763] Description: Strocka 1972, 149-154; Rowan 2012, 86-91 (Parthian captives).
[764] Lighthouse: Townsend 1948, 514; Ryberg 1955, 161; Strocka 1972, 151-152; Rowan 2012, 84 (the lighthouse was probably built by Severus). Some scholars remain open to the idea that the frieze is set in Rome: Newby 2007, 207-209.
[765] Chariot decoration: Ryberg 1955, 161; Strocka 1972, 150-151; Lichtenberger 2011, 77-78.
[766] Strocka 1972, 166.
[767] Renato Bartoccini suggested that another figure preceding the chariot might be the god Honos: Bartoccini 1931, 110. This has been rightly dismissed: Townsend 1938, 514-515; Strocka 1972, 152. For an interpretation of the young figure's medallion: Alföldi 1999, 140-141, n.81 (suggesting that the figure may be a Genius

connected with the army or the imperial family, and by others as a mortal attendant.[768] Although the figure has long hair which might suit a god, his diminutive size suggests a mortal identity: certainly mortal small attendants with similar hairstyles are known from numerous other reliefs, such as the Capitoline sacrifice panel of Marcus Aurelius (Figure 28). The figure's iconography, then, shows that he is mortal, and as we have it the frieze contains no secure gods.[769]

The frieze on the south-east facade is badly damaged and the emperor is not preserved, but the presence of trophies, barbarian captives, and the wheel and horses of a chariot show that the subject was a second victorious procession.[770] There is nothing in the extant imagery that can securely determine the location of the scene, but the idea that the frieze depicted a triumph in Rome to balance the local procession on the north-west facade is attractive.[771] Three gods and an unusual imperial-divine female figure have leading roles in the narrative. Victory carries a trophy and stands at the head of the procession, on the far right, and a male deity and a warlike goddess stride in front of the chariot and lead the horses, respectively.[772] The animal-skin attribute of the male deity suggests that he is Hercules, and the guiding action of the goddess shows that she is Virtus.[773] As on the Arch of Titus (Figure 10), we see protective warrior gods leading the triumphing emperor into the city. Honos, who was frequently partnered with Virtus in scenes of triumph and arrival in Rome, has been replaced here by the locally relevant Hercules. Also near the chariot is the above-mentioned unusual female figure, who has the hairstyle of Julia Domna and the wings and palm branch of Victory.[774] This empress-goddess represents a striking departure from the norms of official metropolitan imagery, in which members of the imperial family always appeared as real-looking mortal civilians, priests, or generals.[775] Metropolitan images of Julia Domna-Victory come exclusively from the semi-

associated with a legion founded in the Augustan period, the *legio III Augusta*, that is known to have played a role in Severus' campaigns, and that the bust image on the figure's medallion may reflect the emblem of this legion, which was, it is suggested, a bust of Augustus).

[768] Genius of Legions: Bartoccini 1931, 100-101; Alföldi 1999, 140-141. Military Lar: Ryberg 1955, 160. Imperial Genius: Townsend 1938, 514-515. Mortal attendant: Strocka 1972, 151.

[769] Some scholars have suggested that Victory may have been depicted in the missing section at the head of the procession, as the goddess is on the opposing south-east frieze: Rowan 2012, 86.

[770] Description: Strocka 1972, 154-157.

[771] Strocka 1972, 154; Rowan 2012, 94.

[772] Victory: Strocka 1972, 156-157.

[773] Strocka 1972, 155; Alexandridis 2000, 24; Newby 2007, 209 (Roma or Virtus); Lichtenberger 2011, 77-78.

[774] Strocka 1972, 155 (Julia Domna *and* Victory); Alexandridis 2000, 24 (Julia Domna-Victory); Newby 2007, 209 (Julia Domna); Lichtenberger 2011, 77-78 (Julia Domna-Victory).

[775] Alexandridis 2000, 24.

private realm of court cameos.[776] The empress' public role has been upgraded on the Leptis frieze to reflect her exceptional, god-like identity in the eyes of a provincial, emperor-loving audience.

The two remaining attic friezes represent ceremonial scenes (Figure 41). The frieze on the south-west facade celebrates the concord of the imperial house under the protection of the gods of Leptis.[777] The scene centres on Severus and Caracalla, who shake hands in the presence of togate magistrates and soldiers.[778] Also present are other members of the imperial family. Geta, the junior prince, stands between his father and brother, and Julia Domna looks on from the left.[779] This imperial group is framed by six gods. The local triad of Hercules, Liber, and Tyche stands behind Severus and the princes and fixes the location of the narrative in Leptis.[780] A goddess with a spear, shield, and aegis stands beside Hercules and is clearly Minerva.[781] These four gods are represented in static postures and at a reduced scale, suggesting that they were perhaps conceived as statues, rather than living participants.[782] Either way, the presence of the gods was clearly important — they have been brought in to ground and sanction the narrative. Two final deities flank the imperial group. On the left stands an Amazonian-style goddess with a triple-crested helmet, sword, and military standard. Since the image is set in Leptis, this warrior goddess can only be Virtus: the iconographically possible Roma would not be shown outside her home city.[783] On the other, right-hand side of the imperial group stands a headless cuirassed figure wearing fur boots and holding a sword. This figure has been identified as Honos and as a mortal soldier, but is perhaps better interpreted as Mars.[784] Honos appeared in

[776] Julia Domna-Victory cameo: Megow 1987, Cat.B52, 270-271, plate 47; Alexandridis 2004: 205-206; Zwierlein-Diehl 2007, 202, 454.
[777] Description: Strocka 1972, 157-160; Rowan 2012, 91-93.
[778] The emperor holds a *lituus*. The togas worn by the imperial figures speak against a martial narrative: Fähndrich 2005, 37-38 (suggesting the *lituus* relates to the inauguration of a building or civic project); Rowan 2012, 91-93; Faust 2013, 499.
[779] Bartoccini 1931, 125-127 (Julia Domna-*mater castrorum*); Townsend 1938, 518-51 (Julia Domna-Concordia); Strocka 1972, 157-160.
[780] Lichtenberger 2011, 77-78; Rowan 2012, 91. Hercules was usually depicted nude and the garment worn by the god here may reflect local influence: Lichtenberger 2011, 31-32.
[781] Strocka 1972, 158; Rowan 2012, 91.
[782] It is difficult to determine whether the feet of the gods reach the baseline of the frieze: Ryberg 1955, 161 (suggesting that the gods were conceived as statues).
[783] Strocka 1972, 158; Rowan 2012, 91. The standard is also more easily taken as an attribute of the warlike 'campaigning' Virtus, rather than of the civic goddess Roma. Compare: Koeppel 1983, 119-123 (Virtus with a standard on the Arcus Novus reliefs).
[784] Honos: Bartoccini 1931, 125-127; Townsend 1938, 518. Soldier: Strocka 1972, 158. Mars appears in a cuirass elsewhere on the monument: (1) on one of the 'ruler-and-gods' pier reliefs (Figure 38); and (2) on the frieze on the north-east facade.

a cuirass only rarely, and a non-imperial mortal would be out of place in this central group of gods and rulers.[785] Mars, therefore, is the best fit for the iconography of the figure. He is with Minerva and Virtus an appropriate military guardian of the unified and locally sanctioned Severan dynasty.

The fourth and final attic frieze, on the north-east facade, depicts a sacrifice, which is indicated by the presence of bull victims at either end of the scene.[786] The key central section is fragmentary, but the scene appears to have mirrored the concord frieze just discussed, with imperial figures in the centre (only Julia Domna is extant) and gods standing beside and behind them.[787] Fragments of a head of Jupiter and the body of an enthroned goddess suggest that the scene included the Capitoline triad, which would serve as the Roman equivalent of the three Leptis gods on the frieze just discussed.[788] Further metropolitan divinities flank the missing central section of the frieze. An armed figure on the left is perhaps Mars, and an orb-holding Amazonian-style goddess on the right is surely Roma. Roma is paired with the bearded and togate Genius of the Senate, who stands beside her in the scene.[789] These distinctively Roman gods anchor the narrative in a metropolitan context. This idea is underlined by the fact that this is the only attic frieze to feature none of the city gods of Leptis.[790] Together, the two ceremonial friezes articulate the local-metropolitan divine framework that supported the Severan dynasty at home and abroad.

**Roman rulers, local gods, provincial context**

The Arch of Septimius Severus in Leptis Magna immerses the Severan dynasty in a locally oriented and divinely sanctioned narrative world. More than thirty (extant) figures of gods are depicted on the reliefs, and it may be helpful for the following discussion to list the deities that are securely identified. The following gods are represented two or more times: Virtus, Minerva,

[785] The figure's fur boots also suggest elevated, non-mortal status: Goette 1988, 401-423.
[786] The ritual was perhaps connected with the wellbeing of the imperial family: Townsend 1938, 521; Ryberg 1955, 161. But, given the provincial context of the monument, a precise 'religiously correct' occasion was perhaps not necessary.
[787] Description: Strocka 1972, 160-165; Rowan 2012, 93-94.
[788] Strocka 1972, 163.
[789] Strocka 1972, 164. Clare Rowan interprets the figure of the Genius of the Senate as a depiction of Septimius Severus holding a thunderbolt: Rowan 2012, 94. This idea is difficult to accept. The attribute of the figure is probably the Genius' characteristic staff. Compare the depiction of the god on the Cancelleria Reliefs (Frieze A: Figure 11).
[790] Lichtenberger 2011, 77-78.

Mars, Jupiter, Victory, and the city triad of Tyche, Hercules, and Liber. Other securely identified divinities include Roma and the Genius of the Senate, and the Olympians Venus, Apollo, Ceres, Diana, and Mercury. The Arch thus deploys a range of well-known imperial and Olympian gods (Virtus, Mars, Jupiter, Victory, Roma) and adds its own 'personal' protective deities, Tyche, Hercules, and Liber, who appear on seven of the ten reliefs we have discussed.[791] This was the Severan empire viewed from one particular city in North Africa — an empire in which metropolitan gods and rulers were seamlessly combined with local deities and institutions, and one in which local patron gods became imperial guardians who were as important to the functioning of the empire as the deities of the capital. The reliefs consistently juxtapose the authorising roles of gods such as Jupiter, Roma, and Mars with equivalent local representations of Tyche, Hercules, and Liber. The Arch thus uses the gods to give the special role of the emperor in Leptis and of Leptis in the empire a powerful divine justification.[792]

The central place of Hercules and Liber on the Arch reflects the new significance of these gods in Severan ideology, and a brief sketch of this wider phenomenon will provide useful context for our interpretation of the monument.[793] Hercules and Liber were unknown as a pair in Roman art and cult before the Severan period, but under Severus they received a new definition as personal, dynastic protection gods.[794] The identity of the pair was derived from the city gods of the emperor's home town, Leptis Magna, where their equivalents had been worshipped under the names Shadrapa (for Liber) and Melquart (for Hercules) since the Punic period.[795] Roman translations of this pair were created for coins issued in AD 194 (following Severus' establishment of power) and again in 204 (in connection with the Secular Games celebrated in that year).[796] These coins depicted Hercules and Liber as a pair, and on the latter issue the gods were associated with a unique legend describing them as "Gods of the Fatherland" (*DI*

[791] The only extant reliefs to not feature any members of the city triad (in their current state of preservation) are the siege pier panel, one of the prince-and-gods pier reliefs, and the attic frieze on the north-east facade, all of which had a Roman-metropolitan focus or, in the case of the siege relief, were set in a foreign location. The north-west attic frieze depicts the triad as part of the decoration of the emperor's chariot, and the other six reliefs include at least one and often two or three of the city gods.
[792] The emperor's relationship to provincial communities was also described elsewhere through the side-by-side representation of imperial deities or protagonists and local gods. For example, contemporary reliefs from the theatres of Sabratha (in north Africa) and Hierapolis (in Asia Minor) depict respectively the city Tyche and Roma shaking hands, and the emperor and local divinities participating in a city festival: Boehringer 1929, figs.3-4; Ryberg 1955, 136-137; Newby 2007, 215.
[793] This topic has recently received comprehensive treatments by Achim Lichtenberger and Clare Rowan: Lichtenberger 2011, 1-175, 381; Rowan 2012, 32-109.
[794] Lichtenberger 2011, 90.
[795] Local origins, character, names: Lichtenberger 2011, 27-35.
[796] Coins: Lichtenberger 2011, 1-2, 37-74; Rowan 2012, 41-50 (first coins), 50-65 (Secular Games coins).

*PATRII*), highlighting their connection with Severus and his non-Italian origins.[797] In addition, Dio Cassius tells us that Severus built "a huge temple to Liber and Hercules".[798] The location of this temple has not been securely identified, but Dio's statement captures the special connection between the emperor and these gods that was felt to exist.[799] The role of Liber and Hercules in Severan thinking grew out of an existing tradition of promoting favoured patron gods. Notable examples of this practice include Augustus' veneration of Apollo and Domitian's partnership with Minerva. These relationships were different from those which existed between the emperor and, say, Jupiter, where the bond was between the god and the current holder of imperial office: Liber and Hercules were personal guardians that granted privileges to Severus alone.[800] Association with these gods thus presented the emperor as the favourite of and successor to these divine benefactors of mankind.[801] The Arch at Leptis preserves the only certain sculptural representations of these gods as a pair and is a key point within these strands of Severan thinking, but one in which the association of Hercules and Liber with their city was as important as their partnership with the emperor.

Alongside the incorporation of local deities, the Arch does several things differently from monuments produced at Rome. Severus and Julia Domna, for example, are represented on the Arch both as real-looking mortals and, on the panel in which they are equipped with the attributes of Jupiter and Juno, as god-like rulers. Explicit divine elevation of this kind never occurred on public narrative reliefs at Rome. The Arch also places significant emphasis on the dynastic character of the emperor's family: Julia Domna, Caracalla, and Geta are given central roles in most of the narratives. The dynastic nature of the imperial family and the exceptional qualities of the emperor were of course recognised and celebrated at Rome, but these themes were usually carefully negotiated in the capital in a way that was not a priority for provincial monuments.[802] The Arch, however, does not engage in the comprehensive re-configuration of imperial rule found on monuments such as the Julio-Claudian Sebasteion at Aphrodisias or the Antonine 'Parthian Monument' at Ephesus, which conceived emperors as Hellenistic-style

[797] For collected evidence and discussion: Lichtenberger 2011, 1-2, 37-74; Rowan 2012, 75-84 (suggesting the coins may have been connected with a possible journey made by the emperor to Africa in AD 207).
[798] Dio Cassius, 77.16.3.
[799] Rowan 2012, 67-72 (suggesting that the temple may have been located on the Quirinal hill and constructed around AD 206).
[800] For these ideas: Lichtenberger 2011, 90, 175, 381.
[801] Cordovana 2012, 72-73.
[802] Alexandridis 2000, 9-25.

rulers and successors to traditional Greek mythological heroes.[803] The Arch at Leptis — particularly in its images of siege, triumph, ceremony, and sacrifice — draws more heavily on imperial models than these Greek monuments did.[804] This contrast is in large part to do with the cultural differences that existed between the Greek East and the Latin West. The Arch at Leptis, for example, depicts Severan victory with 'Roman' images of siege, triumph, and procession, whereas a contemporary battle frieze from the Greek city of Cyrene translates imperial victory into Greek heroic terms, with elevating nude warriors and classical-looking duels.[805] The designers of the Arch, then, used cultural and aesthetic tools that adjusted central conceptions of imperial power without wholly restructuring them.[806] The reliefs reproduce the established themes of metropolitan monuments in an intensified local form.

The Arch's local interpretation of Roman themes has been well discussed by scholars, but there are several points relating to the gods that should perhaps be reconsidered.[807] The first is the notion of symbolic virtue-related messages. The most extensive discussions of this subject are those by Elena La Rocca and Stephan Faust, both of whom convincingly reconstruct the key concepts that were associated with the reliefs, such as *pietas*, *virtus*, and *concordia*.[808] These interpretations are influenced by the classic treatment of the attic friezes by Volker Michael Strocka, who saw the reliefs and the deities they represent partly in allegorical terms, and argued that: "one should not consider Roman state reliefs as historical images…they should rather be read as inscriptions: letter for letter".[809] These virtue-related ideas are well known and influential, and are compelling precisely because of their reductive nature, which ensures that any interpretation they generate is sufficiently focused to be well-supported by the relatively narrow evidentiary basis we have for what these images meant. That is, because we know from coins and inscriptions that images of sacrifice were associated with *pietas* and that the gods Virtus and Victory were connected with *virtus* and *victoria*, it is tempting to read narrative

[803] Sebasteion: Smith 2013. 'Parthian Monument': Chapter Five, this thesis.
[804] The emphatically 'Roman' series of ethnic personifications from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias is a notable exception to the otherwise strong 'Greek' flavour of monuments in the Greek East: Smith 1988, 50-77; Smith 2013, 86-121.
[805] Cyrene frieze: Lusnia 2006, 288-290; Faust 2012b, 174-175.
[806] On these points in relation to the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias: Smith 1987, 136-138.
[807] Bartoccini 1931, 76, 136-138; Ward-Perkins 1948, 75; Strocka 1972, 165-172; La Rocca 1985, 9; Marsden 1997, 2-14; Newby 2007, 211; Faust 2011b, 129-131; Lichtenberger 2011, 75-78; Rowan 2012, 98-99; Faust 2013, 503.
[808] La Rocca 1985, 2-9; Faust 2011b, 139-131; Faust 2013, 493-514.
[809] Strocka 1972, 147-172. Quotation: Strocka 1972, 148 ("*Man darf die römischen Staatsreliefs nicht als Historienbilder betrachten…man muss vielmehr wie Inschriften lesen: Buchstabe für Buchstabe*").

reliefs and the gods within them as variations on these securely attested themes. As Tonio Hölscher has put it in a recent discussion of historical reliefs: "As we know from numerous coin types, where imperial themes are explained by inscribed legends, the emperor is presented in these scenes (on historical reliefs) as an active model of the fundamental virtues of Roman warfare and imperial policy".[810] The difficulty for this approach is that gods in ancient thinking were not easily reduced to visual metaphors or allegories. They were real conceptual actors that enhanced and participated in the dramaturgy of imperial narratives. An analysis that conceives deities as representations of imperial qualities thus erases the real identities and complementary narrative functions of these figures as gods.[811] La Rocca, for example, characterised the prince-and-gods reliefs and the procession friezes on the attic as representations of "*virtus*", and Faust interpreted the Victories that crown Caracalla and Geta on the pier reliefs as "qualities of the princes".[812]

The reliefs, however, can perhaps be better understood as narratives in which the gods have their own roles that orchestrate and structure the emperor's deeds, rather than as images of imperial virtues alone. The scenes of cult action on the pier reliefs, for example, were grounded in particular sanctuaries by gods that accompanied and protected the imperial family. The narratives on this view become events in a collaborative divine-imperial drama, in which gods and mortals had their own complementary roles, rather than programmatic images of virtues. The pier reliefs of rulers and gods arranged in static tiers can also be interpreted differently: they create unique Capitoline-local pantheons that shape a provincial conception of divinely authorised imperial rule. The gods give these narratives a complexion and emphasis that diverges from monuments produced at Rome, which looked different despite also being concerned with basic ideas such as *virtus* and *pietas*. In addition, Victory's crowning of the princes is not simply a metaphor for the personal qualities of the protagonists, but an action that shows the legitimising interaction between gods and rulers that formed the basis of Roman sovereignty. The attic friezes too use the gods in this way, to enhance and activate political narratives, rather than to reiterate virtues. The gods function as topographical and protective figures that define and enable the wide-ranging ceremonial actions of the imperial family. The

[810] Hölscher 2018, 195.
[811] For example: Victory's real identity in the Severan period is highlighted by the continuing function of the senate house as a *Templum Victoriae Romanae*, with associated statuary images and acts of cult: Ditzler 2011, 226-229.
[812] La Rocca 1985, 2-9. Faust 2013, 503 ("a quality of the princes").

Arch was not intended as a catalogue of virtues, but as a grand honour for the emperor and as a detailed articulation of the ties that bound the ruler with his home city. The gods helped to convert this political veneration and desired affiliation into a legitimate and compelling visual reality.

## The Arch of Constantine

The Arch of Constantine (Figure 42) is the last monument discussed in this thesis. It stands near the end of four centuries of Roman narrative as a final marble expression of the emperor in action.[813] The Arch re-uses large portions of earlier monuments alongside freshly created Constantinian sculpture, and the purpose of this composite design, the meaning of the old images in their new context, and the value and place of the fourth-century sculpture within the whole have dominated scholarship on the Arch for over a century.[814] The monument is one of the best discussed and most divisive manifestations of Roman art.[815] The re-used relief panels in the central passageway and on the attic have been discussed in their pre-Constantinian contexts in earlier chapters of this thesis.[816] The focus of the present chapter is the fourth-century frieze that runs around the Arch's middle zone.[817] Before discussing the frieze, a little more should be said about the background of the monument and the meaning of the deities on the re-used reliefs in their new Constantinian context.

[813] Other 'late Roman' monuments with narrative reliefs include the so-called Decennalia Base: Kähler 1964; Koeppel 1990, 33-38; Bardill 2012, 91. And the Arch of Galerius in Thessaloniki: Laubscher 1975; Meyer 1980, 374-444.

[814] Key discussions: Wace 1907, 270-276; Frothingham 1913, 487-503; Frothingham 1915, 1-12; L'Orange 1939, 192-229; Toynbee 1941, 189-193; Giuliano 1955; Brilliant 1984, 119-123; Gauer 1995, 131-140; Elsner 2000, 149-178; Giuliani 2000, 269-287; Faust 2011, 379-384; Bardill 2012, 98-99; Zanker 2012, 77-104; Ferris 2013; Stähler 2015, 91-132; Popkin 2016, 42-88; Hölscher 2019, 332-334; Koortbojian 2020, 123-167; Rose 2021, 1-36.

[815] Divisiveness and controversy: Berenson 1954; Spivey 1995, 20-23; Elsner 2000, 149-178.

[816] These reliefs comprise the major parts of the Great Trajanic Frieze (passageway and attic) and the panel reliefs of Marcus Aurelius (attic), discussed in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis respectively.

[817] A fourth-century date and a unity of design and execution with the rest of the monument is assumed: L'Orange 1939, 29-33; von Gerkan 1939, 17-26; Elsner 2000, 165-169; Faust 2011, 384-386; Zanker 2012, 85-99. Against: Wace 1907, 270-276 (the frieze is made of re-carved Diocleatianic material); Frothingham 1913, 487-503 (the frieze is pre-Constantinian); Knudsen 1989, 267-268 (the frieze was re-cut from a Maxentian monument); Rose 2021, 1-36 (the frieze is made of re-carved Diocleatianic material). Those against the (Constantinian) fourth-century date represent a small, renegade school of thought.

Constantine achieved sole rule of the western empire in a war with his rival Maxentius and returned victorious to Rome in AD 312.[818] The senate honoured their new leader with a monumental arch, located on the triumphal route, that celebrated Constantine's liberation of the city and marked out visually the elite's conception of his position and character.[819] The ideological principles and the date of the monument are fixed by three sets of inscriptions. The main dedication on the attic describes the emperor as the divinely inspired conqueror of a tyrant (Maxentius) and as usual records the senatorial agency behind the monument.[820] A pair of inscriptions beneath the relief panels on the walls of the central passageway cast Constantine as the "Liberator of the city" (*LIBERATORI URBIS*) and the "Founder of peace" (*FUNDATORI QUIETIS*).[821] And a final set of inscriptions above the side passageways, which commemorate and anticipate respectively the ten-year and twentieth anniversaries of the emperor's rule, show that the monument was probably completed in AD 315, the year of Constantine's decennalia, as part of the anniversary celebrations.[822]

The Arch thus aimed to create an ideal image of the emperor as the triumphant saviour of Rome and the blessed guarantor of traditional order. In these roles Constantine was supported by an impressive array of gods: Sol, Apollo, Artemis, Silvanus, Hercules, Mars, Victory, Virtus, Honos, Tiber, Felicitas, and others appear across the reliefs — Victory no less than thirty-two times.[823] These deities are the flesh-and-blood agents of the "divine inspiration" (*INSTINCTU DIVINITATIS*) described in the Arch's famous inscription, and we may look briefly at their roles in the recycled images.[824] The re-used reliefs, which are found on the attic, middle zone, and in the central passageway, provided the designers of the monument with ready-made

[818] Background and sources: Latin Panegyrics IV.25-32.3; XII.8-10, 17-21; Kuhoff 1991, 127-162 (historical background), 163-174 (campaigns).
[819] Zanker 2012, 77-105 (seeing the Arch as 'advisory panegyric'). Against: Prusas 2012, 127-153 (seeing Constantine's personal agency behind the monument). Location: Zanker 2012, 80-81; Popkin 2016, 45-54. Structure and architecture: von Gerkan 1939, 4-17; Jones 2000, 50-72.
[820] von Gerkan 1939, 26-28; Grünewald 1990, 78-86; Kuhoff 1991, 165-168; Zanker 2012, 78-79 (senatorial agency); Ferris 2013, 41-43; Popkin 2016, 45-54; Koortbojian 2020, 127-134 (on senatorial versus imperial agency), 136-141 (on the main inscription).
[821] Best discussion: Faust 2011, 383-384. Compare: Dio Cassius, 44.4.5 (statues of Caesar set up on the rostra, one showing him as 'saviour of the citizens', the other as 'deliverer of the city from siege').
[822] L'Orange 1939, 29-33; von Gerkan 1939, 26-28; Jones 2000, 50-72; Engemann 2007, 85; Rose 2021, 27.
[823] Faust 2011, 400-401 (thirty-two Victories).
[824] Divine inspiration: Faust 2011, 400-401. Against: Grünewald 1990, 78-86 (arguing, in the light of the emergence of Christianity around this time, that *INSTINCTU DIVINITATIS* suggests a tolerant or ambiguous religious position).

narrative tableaus that were re-cut for their new function on the Arch.[825] The round reliefs on the middle zone depict Constantine and companions (perhaps including his co-emperor Licinius) hunting and performing sacrifice. Statues of Apollo, Artemis, Silvanus, and Hercules function as the objects of the sacrifices and sanction the scenes.[826] Hunting was the activity of an exemplary collaborative ruler, and was perhaps felt to be particularly appropriate for an emperor involved in the collegiate system that governed the empire in the fourth century.[827] The other re-used reliefs, on the walls of the central passageway and on the attic, show the emperor departing for war, sacrificing, addressing troops, fighting, disciplining barbarians, arriving in Rome, and handing out cash to the people. Virtus, Honos, Victory, Mars, the Genius of the Senate, and other gods participate in the scenes. These reliefs provide an account of Constantine's deeds as an imperial leader in war and as a civic executive in the city.

The re-used reliefs were originally produced for Trajan, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius, but their presentation on the Arch suggests they had been re-interpreted as Constantinian narratives.[828] The gods in the reliefs would thus have been perceived in contemporary terms as protectors of the fourth-century emperor: their authorising divine roles were an established part of the imperial dramaturgy that had been displayed on monuments in Rome for centuries. Whatever Constantine's personal religious beliefs, he is framed on the Arch as a man guided and inspired by a traditional Roman pantheon. The soon-to-be Christian emperor is thrown into the familiar visual role of an exemplary pagan warrior-ruler. This same system of divinely

[825] The portraits of the protagonists were altered to represent Constantine, the Hadrianic reliefs (on the middle zone) appear to have been re-ordered, the Trajanic frieze was split into four relief sections (placed in the central passageway and on the attic), and the Aurelian panels (on the attic) were re-ordered, with those that referred explicitly to triumph (the procession and sacrifice reliefs in the Conservatori Museum) not chosen for re-use, since Constantine did not celebrate a triumph after the victory in AD 312: Hölscher 2019, 332-334; Koortbojian 2020, 165-167.

[826] Hadrianic reliefs: Stähler 2015, 91-132.

[827] Roman hunting imagery: Tuck 2005, 221-245.

[828] The most popular interpretation of the re-use considers the reliefs exemplary models that equated Constantine with the respected emperors from whose monuments the reliefs originally came: L'Orange 1939, 192-229; Elsner 2000, 149-178; Popkin 2016, 75. Stephan Faust, on the other hand, has argued that the re-used character of the reliefs was unrecognisable and that they were wholly re-interpreted as Constantinian narratives: Faust 2011, 379-384. This view was pre-figured by scholars such as Dale Kinney: Kinney 1997, 117-148. And it has been accepted by some recent studies: Hölscher 2019, 332-334. The idea is probably correct, for the following main reasons: (1) the inscriptions beneath the relief panels in the main passageway show explicitly that the scenes were given contemporary meanings related to the war with Maxentius; and (2) the re-used reliefs would probably have been unrecognisable as such, and if their recycled nature was perceived, it is unlikely that viewers would have been able to associate them with monuments of Trajan, Hadrian, and Marcus, rather than with monuments of other emperors, such as the disgraced Domitian and Commodus, who produced images with the same subjects, in the same style, at the same time. The idea that the re-deployment of the reliefs was ideological is therefore unlikely. The re-use was perhaps driven by historical and economic factors. The Arch had to be built quickly for a newly elevated emperor.

charged action was channelled into the Constantinian frieze, which presents the emperor's civil-war victory as a sequence of events in which the gods play a central role.

**The fourth-century frieze**

The frieze extends around the middle zone of the Arch in six main panels (Figures 43-44).[829] There is one panel each on the narrow east and west facades of the Arch, and two panels apiece on the main north and south facades, above the entrances to the side passageways. Six key episodes from Constantine's campaign against Maxentius are depicted, creating a flowing narrative of the emperor's victorious return to Rome.[830] The frieze is executed in a simplified visual language, conditioned partly by contemporary sculptural fashions and partly by the long-standing manner of representation used for subsidiary friezes: the Arches of Titus, Trajan, and Septimius Severus, for example, all feature comparable stylised friezes around their middle zones.[831] The Constantinian frieze, therefore, is not simply a degenerate fourth-century attempt at the lifelike drama found on high imperial panel reliefs, but an enhanced and detailed rendition of the traditional small arch frieze.

The narrative begins on the west side of the Arch with a profectio.[832] This leads round to the country-facing southern facade, which features two images of warfare: a siege and a battle.[833] The frieze then turns again onto the east side of the Arch with a representation of the emperor's arrival into Rome.[834] Two final sections, on the city-facing northern facade, complete the narrative and depict Constantine's subsequent actions in the city: a speech in the Forum and a

[829] There are also four small sections that ensure continuity around the corners of the monument: L'Orange 1939, 38-39. Key discussions of the frieze: Wace 1907, 270-276; Frothingham 1913, 487-503; L'Orange 1939, 34-102; Brilliant 1984, 119-123; Koeppel 1990, 38-64; Elsner 2000, 165-169; Giuliani 2000, 269-287; Faust 2011, 384-386; Zanker 2012, 85-99; Ferris 2013, 71-84; Stähler 2015, 121-123, 127; Popkin 2016, 64-68; Rose 2021, 3-16.
[830] L'Orange 1939, 34-102; Koeppel 1990, 38-64.
[831] For contemporary sculptural fashions, compare the Victories and barbarians on the Arch's pedestal reliefs: L'Orange 1939, 103-136. Earlier arches: Brilliant 1967, 137-147 (Severus); Fittschen 1972, 783-784 (Trajan); Pfanner 1983, 84 (Titus). The style of the campaigning scenes on the Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius are also partly comparable: Chapter Four, this thesis.
[832] L'Orange 1939, 51-60; Koeppel 1990, 38-43; Zanker 2012, 86; Rose 2021, 13-16.
[833] Siege: L'Orange 1939, 60-65; Koeppel 1990, 43-46; Zanker 2012, 86-87; Rose 2021, 3-4. Battle: Frothingham 1913, 492; L'Orange 1939, 65-71; Koeppel 1990, 47-51; Faust 2011, 385-386; Zanker 2012, 88; Ferris 2013, 76; Stähler 2015, 122; Rose 2021, 5-6.
[834] L'Orange 1939, 72-80; Koeppel 1990, 51-56; Giuliani 2000, 274-279; Faust 2011, 385; Zanker 2012, 91-92; Rose 2021, 6-8.

distribution of largesse.[835] The frieze, then, followed a careful structure, with scenes of transition on the short east and west facades that lead into paired images of warfare, on the outer facade, and of civic ceremony, on the inner facade.[836] This sequence can be linked with key events from AD 312: the profectio perhaps represents Constantine's real departure from Mediolanum; the siege perhaps shows the taking of Verona; and the battle surely refers to the historical struggle at the Milvian bridge.[837] Constantine's activities in Rome (the subjects of the final sections of the frieze) are also recorded in sources for the period.[838]

Gods participate in three of the scenes — the siege, the battle, and the arrival — and are depicted not at all on the largesse relief and only as statues in the speech and departure scenes.[839] Two of these scenes without gods — the speech and the largesse — describe Constantine's civic acts, and the purely mortal departure scene does not feature the emperor at all. The gods are thus reserved for the decisive scenes of warfare and for the victorious return to Rome. They appear as the emperor's wartime guardians and as the workers of Constantinian victory. A comparable division between purely human scenes and more elevated god-supported narratives was observed on the panel reliefs of Marcus Aurelius.[840] It will be useful now to look at the gods individually, before assessing their overall effect in connection with contemporary panegyrical texts.

The first scene to include a participating deity is the siege (Figure 43). On the left, Constantine and his army are arrayed before a fortified town, which is defended by opposing forces positioned on the settlement's walls. Although his head is damaged, Constantine can be

[835] Speech: L'Orange 1939, 80-89; Koeppel 1990, 56-60; Giuliani 2000, 269-274; Zanker 2012, 93-95; Rose 2021, 8-9. Largesse: L'Orange 1939, 89-102; Koeppel 1990, 60-63; Giuliani 2000, 286-287; Zanker 2012, 95-99; Rose 2021, 9-13.
[836] Faust 2011, 384-386.
[837] L'Orange 1939, 34-102; Koeppel 1990, 38-64; Zanker 2012, 85-99. Sources and background: Latin Panegyrics IV.25-32.3, XII.8-10, 17-21; Kuhoff 1991, 127-162 (historical background), 163-174 (campaigns).
[838] See the sources cited in the previous note. Also: L'Orange 1939, 89-102.
[839] Statuettes of Victory and Sol are held by soldiers in the profectio: L'Orange 1939, 55, 57-58. In the speech relief Constantine stands before the tetrarchic five-columns monument, closest to the central statue of Jupiter, alluding to his supreme divine favour and position: Zanker 2012, 93-95. Compare: Latin Panegyrics V.8.4 (images of gods brought out for Constantine's arrival).
[840] The subject matter and style of the Constantinian frieze, on the other hand, as well as the emperor's absence from the opening profectio scene, recall the narratives on the Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. (No emperor is involved in the opening profectio of Trajan's Column.) The frieze thus presents aspects of the 'panegyrical' manner of direct divine-mortal interaction alongside 'documentary' column-style representations of campaigning themes.

identified by his portrait profile, size, and commander's costume. He is a static figure, placed 'realistically' away from the most intense fighting: two figures near the emperor with large shields are perhaps his bodyguards.[841] There is one god present, Victory, who holds a trophy and flies in to crown the emperor.[842] The intervention of the goddess at an 'early' stage in the fighting, before the city is actually taken, suggests the inevitability of Constantine's success.[843] The relief proclaims that the emperor and his deeds are supported by the gods and that we are witnessing a legitimate war.

The next divine intervention occurs in the battle scene (Figure 43). The battle takes place by a bridge, river, and bank, and should be taken as a representation of the defeat of Maxentius at the Milvian bridge outside Rome in AD 312. The bridge, part of which can be seen on the left of the scene, appears to be broken, and the structure was in fact destroyed by Maxentius before the battle to slow Constantine's advance.[844] A goddess in Amazonian costume stands on the left-hand portion of the bridge. This warrior deity can only be Virtus or Roma, and scholars are divided over the issue.[845] Two details make Virtus more probable: (1) the scene is set outside Rome, that is, in a context in which Roma is not known to have appeared in any other imperial relief; and (2) the deity in question is striding forwards while her clothing flares out behind her. This was a posture-drapery configuration known to signify the arrival of a swift-moving god, something which the static and often seated Roma emphatically was not. The deity is thus Virtus, a dynamic warrior guardian rushing to the emperor's support. The figure of Constantine is damaged, but the section where he stood shows that the emperor was standing on a boat (used to cross the gap in the bridge) and that he was accompanied by an agile figure of Victory, who can be seen standing on the ship's prow.[846] The goddess has a palm branch in her left hand, holds a crown for the emperor in her right hand, and is moving vigorously towards the fighting.[847] Victory and Virtus are thus shown as energetic military gods who urge the emperor into battle. A third deity is depicted below Constantine. The figure is reclining, bearded,

[841] L'Orange 1939, 61-62.
[842] L'Orange 1939, 61-62; Koeppel 1990, 43-46; Zanker 2012, 86-87.
[843] Zanker 2012, 86-87 (Victory's early intervention shows that the emperor is '*semper victor*'). Other proleptic victories can be found on the Cancelleria Reliefs (Frieze A) and on the 'Parthian Monument': Figures 11 and 34 respectively.
[844] Speidel 1986, 253-259; Koeppel 1990, 47.
[845] Virtus: Frothingham 1913, 492; Koeppel 1990, 48; Faust 2011, 385-386. Roma: L'Orange 1939, 70, n.1; Speidel 1986, 259; Zanker 2012, 88; Ferris 2013, 76; Stähler 2015, 122. Hans L'Orange's argument, that if Virtus was represented she would have to be present in both the siege and the battle, is not convincing.
[846] The precise relationship between Victory and the boat is difficult to determine.
[847] L'Orange 1939, 70; Zanker 2012, 88 (Victory is "*voraus stürmenden*").

situated in the water, and is clearly Tiber, the god of the river.[848] His presence illustrates the significance of the river for the narrative.[849] The unified 'framing' action of the three deities gives the emperor's appearance the character of a divinely facilitated 'imperial epiphany': the gods sweep Constantine into the scene and ensure victory.[850] The rest of the relief is taken up by intense fighting. Constantinian cavalry and archers stand 'above' the swirling river, into which Maxentius' army collapses.[851] The scene concludes on the far right with two musicians who stand on an earth bank and signal Constantine's success.[852]

The final intervention of the gods takes place in the arrival scene (Figure 44). The relief shows a procession of soldiers, followed by a four-horse carriage in which Constantine is seated. The carriage is driven by Victory, who appears for the third time in the frieze. The goddess supported the emperor in the siege, guided him into battle, and now leads him safely home.[853] Victory often accompanied emperors in scenes of arrival, procession, and triumph (for example, she performs the same 'chariot-driving' role for Tiberius on the Gemma Augustea and for an Antonine emperor on a relief from the 'Parthian Monument'), and the goddess here helps to elevate the emperor's return.[854] Some scholars have seen Victory as a metaphorical reflection of the emperor's achievement — as an "embodiment of the emperor's military success".[855] This view is perhaps an underestimation. In ancient thinking, gods were not metaphors that describing mortal-generated phenomena: they were authorial divine forces that created and drove those phenomena.[856] Seeing the gods as symbols of Constantine's success is therefore the wrong way round. The gods stood prior to and enabled the deeds of their mortal favourites. Seen as a real divinity, Victory is not an allegory for the emperor's achievement, but an independent narrative participant with her own complementary function. She shows that Constantine is not simply victorious, but that his victory is a legitimate and divinely

[848] Koeppel 1990, 48.
[849] Faust 2011, 386. More below.
[850] L'Orange 1939, 70.
[851] Description of the geography of the scene: Koeppel 1990, 47
[852] Koeppel 1990, 47.
[853] Further: Fears 1981, 749-752 (victory is the supreme justification of power: the repetition of the goddess underscores this aspect of Constantinian ideology).
[854] Victory as chariot driver and triumphal companion: Hölscher 1967, 68-96. The relief on the Arch of Constantine does not depict a triumph: Giuliani 2000, 274-279. Compare: Latin Panegyrics VI.7.5 (Constantine flown to Britain in a divine chariot), VII.14.3-4 (Constantine's father rides to heaven in Sol's chariot); Fähndrich 2005, 251-252 (discussion of Roman arches as sacral 'frames' for the entrances of rulers).
[855] For example: Faust 2011, 385 ("*Victoria als Verkörperung des militärischen Erfolges*"); Rose 2021, 24 (the gods Victory and Virtus are "personifications"; the frieze illustrates imperial "qualities and virtues").
[856] For example, dedications to Victory were especially important in military contexts at the empire's borders, that is, the goddess was particularly significant for the army that Constantine relied upon: Rüpke 2011, 24-25.

orchestrated one. This conception of the gods as imperial actors is preserved in illuminating parallel form in contemporary literary sources, and those that relate to the subjects of the frieze and Arch should now be integrated into the discussion.

**Gods, Constantine, panegyric**

The best written evidence for Constantine's relationship with the gods comes from the collection of speeches delivered to late Roman emperors known as the Latin Panegyrics, four of which were aimed at Constantine and one of which was delivered to Constantine and Maximian, when the pair were co-rulers.[857] The speeches have the same official character and celebratory function as the Arch: both were honorific cultural products directed at the emperor from the perspective of the elite.[858] The panegyrics thus offer a verbal delineation of the ideological territory in which the reliefs were based, and the texts can be used for our purposes as a detailed and vivid contemporary voice that can help us interpret the frieze and its gods.[859] The speeches draw heavily on the longstanding idea that there was a special connection between sovereignty and divinity, and Constantine's own actions and god-like character (his *maiestas* and *divinitas*) are a focus of the texts.[860] Our priorities lie on the other side of the association, with the gods themselves — their powers, interventions, and effect on the emperor's rule. We may outline their character and main roles as presented in the texts.

For the authors of the panegyrics, Constantine's life was permeated by beneficent divine operation. The gods made the emperor, and his position was from the beginning dependent on divine favour.[861] Constantine is described as "an emperor sent by the gods" (*a dis mittitur imperator*), and the orators wonder about the deities that must have inspired his success: "which god encouraged you?" (*quisnam te deus…hortata*).[862] Constantine's sovereignty is said to have

[857] Latin Panegyrics: Nixon and Rodgers 1994 (VII was delivered to Maximian and Constantine; IV, V, VI, and XII to Constantine alone); Rodgers 2012, 306-315; Ware 2018, 113-136.
[858] Speech V, for example, was delivered in AD 311 to commemorate the emperor's quinquennalia: Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 255. It is thus comparable to the decennalia-related Arch. Further: Giuliani 2000, 279 ("*Die Lobreden haben einen offiziellen Charakter, der unmittelbar mit dem des Frieses am Bogen zu vergleichen ist*"); Rodgers 2012, 289-329; Zanker 2012, 78-79, 99-104; Popkin 2016, 68-76.
[859] These ideas in relation to fourth-century portraits: Smith 1997, 194-201.
[860] For example: IV.16.6 (praise of Constantine's Herculean deeds and strength); V.1.3; VI.1.4-5 (both on Constantine's divinity); VI.2.1-2 (Constantine's divine descent); VI.17.4 (Constantine's god-like appearance). Further: Rodgers 2012, 289, 306-315 (*maiestas* and *divinitas*).
[861] Constantine made emperor by the gods: V.13.1; VI.7.3-5.
[862] Emperor sent by the gods: VI.9.5. Divine encouragement: XII.2.4.

been "given to him by the will of Jupiter" (*illa maiestas quae Iovis sublata nutu*) and, once installed as the gods' viceroy, the emperor remains subject to the "favour of heaven" (*celestam…favorem*) and to "divine aid" (*auxilia divina*).[863] Victory in particular is held to flow from the hands of the gods: Constantine received divine protection at the siege of Verona, for example, and divine powers were at work during the battle of the Milvian bridge — the tyrant Maxentius, one author feels, must have been driven to ruin by the actions of a "hostile god" (*infestior deus*).[864] The emperor of the panegyrics has a close relationship with the gods and may be "personally inspired by their power" (*divino monitus instinctu*) or supported by the gods and their agents: for example, Mars ensures Constantine's invincibility, Apollo and Victory send a guiding vision (*Vidisti enim, credo, Constantine, Apollinem tuum comitante Victoria*), and the triumph of the emperor in his Gallic campaigns is secured by the dazzling intervention of a "heaven-sent army" (*exercitus…qui se divinitas missos*).[865] In the panegyrics, then, Constantine's relationship with the gods rested on two main pillars: the first was the fundamental divine authority that granted and maintained the emperor's position, and the second was the active collaboration between the emperor and the gods that occurred primarily in warfare.[866] These ideas are reflected on the frieze: the gods support and validate the emperor's actions in the siege and arrival, and intervene in the battle as his guiding warrior protectors.

The speeches also shed light on the specific way that Constantine's interaction with the gods was perceived. Deities did not simply reflect Constantine's power — they acted on their own initiative to advance the emperor's career in opposition to the reluctance and modesty of the mortal ruler. The gods, for example, are said to "avenge the emperor against his own will" (*di te vindicant et invitum*), and the battle at the Milvian bridge (a bloody event in a civil war) is justified on the basis that Constantine was "directed by a divine power" (*quid in consilio nisi divinum numen habuisti*).[867] The emperor deserved victory over Maxentius "for the very reason

[863] Jupiter and sovereignty: VI.8.5. Heavenly favour: IV.2.6. Divine aid: IV.19.4. Further: V.13.6 (the bounties of "*Terra mater*" and Jupiter combine with the emperor's own benefactions).
[864] Divine protection at Verona: IV.26.1. Maxentius and hostile god: IV.28.1.
[865] Close relationship: XII.2.1-6 (the divine "reveals itself to you (Constantine) alone"). Personal inspiration: XII.11.4. Mars: IV.7.1-4. Apollo: VI.21.4-7. Divine army: IV.14.1-6 (composed of giant celestial warriors and led by the deified Constantius). On Constantine's Apolline vision: Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 248 n.92.
[866] The emphasis on the military role of the emperor and the gods in the art and literature of the early fourth century perhaps reflects a shift in emphasis from the culture of the earlier imperial periods. The parallel change in imperial portrait styles, from Antonine civil elegance to the hard military presentation of many third- and fourth-century emperors, could be compared: Smith 1997, 179-187.
[867] Gods avenge the emperor: VI.20.3-4. Divine power: XII.4.1-2.

that he did not desire it" (*maxime victoriam meruisti quia non desiderabas*): he was "compelled" (*coactus*) by forces outside his control.[868] Constantine, then, is presented in the panegyrics not only as a favourite of the gods, but as their instrument. This idea — that the emperor was an almost-passive figure wielded by the gods — is dramatised on the frieze, where the static figure of Constantine is compelled to fight in battle and escorted into Rome by active divine protagonists. Like the divine invocations in the panegyrics, the interventions of the gods on the frieze translate the aggressive usurpation of AD 312 into the legitimate administration of divine authority. The emperor becomes a noble mortal ruler — an imperial hero — who has been called to act as the tool of the gods.

Lastly, we may note that even Victory and Tiber (the two deities on the frieze who might suggest themselves most easily to modern observers as allegorical figures) were conceived in ancient terms, the panegyrics show us, as substantial gods. Victory, for example, is said to have accompanied Constantine's father to Britain, and after his death the goddess is tasked with conferring power on Constantine in her capacity as Jupiter's "winged messenger" (*pinnis commissa Victoriae*): her connecting role between the gods in heaven and the emperors on earth is presented as constitutive of imperial sovereignty.[869] Victory again appears as an active god in Constantine's famous 'Apolline vision', in which she is represented as an independent, supportive deity who bestows laurels on the emperor (*Apollinem tuum comitante Victoria coronas tibi laureas offerentem*).[870] As in the frieze, Victory in the panegyrics is an important protagonist on the occasion of Constantine's arrival into Rome in AD 312: "winged Victory" (*pennata Victoria*) is said to have "spread the news of the emperor's success everywhere".[871] For contemporaries, then, Victory was as a real divinity, not a symbolic reflection of Constantine's qualities. The characterisation of Tiber in the speeches likewise suggests that we should understand his role in the frieze as that of an active god. At the battle of the Milvian bridge, Tiber is said to have "swallowed the impious" and to have "snatched up their leader in his whirlpool and devoured him" (*cum impios Tiberis hausisset…correptum gurgite devoravit*).[872] This statement is followed by an account dedicated to the "sacred Tiber" (*sancte Thybri*) in which the god is given his own powerful identity: Tiber was an "adviser" (*monitor*)

[868] IV.13.4.
[869] Victory in Britain: VI.5.4. Messenger of Jupiter: VI.8.5-6.
[870] VI.21.4-7.
[871] IV.32.4.
[872] XII.17.2. Compare: VI.5.4 (Oceanus calms the water for Constantius' crossing to Britain).

to Rome's founding heroes, a "protector" (*conservator*) of the city throughout its history, and a deity who "wished to participate in Constantine's victory" (*Constantini victoriae particeps esse voluisti*).[873] The frieze and Arch gave these panegyrical visions of active gods an artistically realised existence.

**Conclusion**

The Arches of Septimius Severus and Constantine show that the gods continued to be imagined in the third and early fourth centuries as multi-faceted actors in imperial drama. The different priorities of the monuments and the narratives they depict were contextualised and validated by a range of deities with a number of roles. The Arch of Septimius Severus in Rome presented independent representations of gods as bringers of victory and abundance alongside narrative panels that were partly defined by their denial of direct divine involvement in the emperor's campaigning achievements. This narrative conception, we saw, is probably best understood as an adapted re-deployment of the 'documentary' genre of divine representation that was developed on the Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. The contemporary Arch of Septimius Severus in Leptis Magna, on the other hand, created a significant space for metropolitan and local gods in a complex relief programme that emphasised provincial-imperial interaction. The treatment of the emperor's relationship with the gods on the Arch at Leptis differed from that found on monuments produced at Rome. In his home town, the emperor could be publicly assimilated in a narrative relief to figures such as Jupiter, and the local city triad of Hercules, Liber, and Tyche played a striking enhanced role as authorises of the ruling dynasty alongside the gods of the capital. It was argued that these divinely charged adjustments to central conceptions of imperial power need to be understood not as the reproduction of emblematic virtues, but as the region-specific political and religious contextualisation of Severan rule. This view of the gods as culturally meaningful narrative protagonists is appropriate for the complexity of divine and imperial roles and perceptions that existed in a highly differentiated empire.

The Arch of Constantine took the story of divine representation in imperial narrative into its later stages in the early fourth century, and illustrated the continued potency of the now

[873] XII.18.1-2.

entrenched Roman visual strategies for articulating divinely supported imperial power. The Arch's fourth-century frieze, it was argued, illustrated the well-established roles of active gods such as Virtus and Victory, who were deployed alongside a range of other gods on the monument's re-used reliefs to authorise and ground the emperor's civil-war achievement in a legitimate system of divine meaning.

We may note finally that the monuments we have discussed depict many of the same deities, scenes, and actions as those produced around the time of Augustus. The core cast of imperial gods such as Virtus, Victory, Mars, Jupiter, and Roma, alongside distinctive local and personal patron divinities, retained its shaping role over three centuries of visual imperial narrative.[874] Relatively few major monuments with narrative relief decoration survive from the period after Constantine, but Roman concepts of divinely inspired sovereignty continued in different ways to inform the Christian visual-cultural systems of late antiquity and the Middle Ages.[875]

[874] Sol was in some ways a newly important god in later imperial representation, as both a cosmic force of imperial *aeternitas* and as a radiant figure of victory. The god appears a number of times, for example, on the Arch of Constantine (as a statuette in the fourth-century frieze and on the pedestal reliefs, as a charioteer on the east face of the Arch, and as a bust image in one of the reliefs on the walls of the side passageways): L'Orange 1939, 52-59, 103-136, 137-144; Hijmans 1996, 139, 144; Faust 2011, 395-401; Bardill 2012, 98-99; Zanker 2012, 99-104; Ferris 2013, 67-71. Sol also appears in other fourth-century media: Latin Panegyrics XII.22.2 ("the sun itself reposes at night: you alone, Constantine, tirelessly follow one war with another"); Grünewald 1990, 50-56; Kuhoff 1991, 171-173; Hijmans 1996, 144-148; Alföldi 1999, 58-60 (coins); Matern 2002; Bardill 2012, 92-109. The god rarely appears in person in narrative scenes with the emperor, however: Lichtenberger 2011, 384. Sol's 'narrative absence' was perhaps driven by the god's particular celestial zone of divine operation. Constantine and solar imagery: Bergmann 1998, 282-290.

[875] Fittschen 1972, 787-788; Fears 1981, 822-824; Elsner 1998, 221-235, 251-259; Bardill 2012; Flower 2012, 287-305.

# Chapter 7: Conclusion

We have seen that the representation of imperial action was often defined by the active presence of the gods. Deities were built into the mental fabric of the Roman world and were consistently cast in a central role in the visual dramatisation of political events. Monuments produced across the empire deployed a full range of gods to help narrate complex imperial themes in a compelling way, and to immunise the mundane reality of the man-made political order by presenting it as a divinely sanctioned and incontrovertible imperial mythology. Monumental sculptural tableaus translated the Roman world of battles, rituals, places, and events into a divinely charged environment that was populated and animated by an array of supporting gods. The primary aim of this visual system was not to describe the emperor's virtues and achievements in allegorical language, but to present the emperor as a legitimate and divinely powered imperial hero.

In Chapter Two, we saw how the roles of the gods as validators of victory and sacrifice that emerged in the Republic were re-oriented by the needs of the Augustan regime. The inauguration of the Augustan imperial project gave the Roman system of political commemoration a new structure, centred around the emperor, who was now in life and art the leading protagonist of Roman society. The emperor's position needed to be narrated in an effective way, and narrative reliefs came to form one strand of this wider cultural project of imperial representation and description. From the start, the emperor's role had a protean and 'contextually differentiated' nature that was defined by his relationship with the gods. Augustus became a civilian senator-priest among mortals on public monuments such as the Ara Pacis, but in the private narratives of artefacts such as the Gemma Augustea, the emperor was realised as a collaborator and partner of the gods — as a distinctively Roman imperial ruler whose position was divinely created. Monuments produced in the Republican and Augustan periods illustrate the range of victory-bringing, ritual-oriented, and authorising roles that gods were imagined to fulfil in Roman culture, and bring many of the key ideas found in later imperial narrative into play.

The fragmentary nature of the evidence, however, and the perhaps experimental or 'modest' aspects of some monuments produced under Augustus, mean that the full-scale intervention of gods in key imperial scenes seems to have fully developed in the Flavian period. Chapter Three discussed the role of the gods on two key monuments — the Arch of Titus and the Cancelleria Reliefs — which stand at the beginning of our series of major imperial narratives. It was argued on the basis of the details of the reliefs and the parallel evidence provided by contemporary epic and panegyric, that the gods were conceived in these scenes as actors in Flavian drama that provoked and sanctioned the emperor as a constitutional imperial hero, who was presented as the chosen conduit through which the gods channelled their will into the world. This interpretation challenges established ways of thinking about divine representation in imperial narrative. The gods, it was suggested, were not virtue-related symbols or allegories, but real actors with their own roles that shaped and legitimised imperial achievement. The prevailing view of these monuments as virtue representations may thus be replaced by an understanding of the images as manifestations of a collaborative imperial mythology, in which gods and mortals had their own distinct and complementary roles.

The development of this system of imperial mythology across the monuments of the Trajanic and Antonine periods, and of the varied roles of the gods within that trajectory, formed the subject of Chapters Four and Five. Chapter Four looked primarily at Trajanic monuments, and suggested that they present a multi-layered picture of divine action. It was argued that the 'campaign epics' depicted on the Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius were shaped by a distinctive 'documentary' conception of imperial action in which the gods functioned as partially concealed natural forces, as they do in Roman historical writing, in order to sharpen and reinforce the narrative authenticity of the monuments. The Great Trajanic Frieze and the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum, on the other hand, were informed by a different narrative logic, that is best understood as an enhanced visual elaboration of ideas about imperial action that are found in contemporary panegyric. Chapter Five looked at two further monuments that articulated this 'panegyrical' imperial mythology — the war actions and ceremonies on the panel reliefs of Marcus Aurelius, and the striking sculptural portrayal of imperial apotheosis on the column base of Antoninus Pius. Chapter Five also expanded the picture to include the Hellenistic translation of imperial narrative that occurred on the reliefs of the 'Parthian Monument' from Ephesus. In each of these examples the gods helped to drive specific conceptions of imperial power in different ways.

Chapter Six extended the argument into the later imperial periods and assessed the Arches of Septimius Severus and Constantine. The threads of the preceding chapters were pulled together through a discussion of these monuments: the Arch of Septimius Severus in Rome continued the 'documentary' conception of imperial action seen on the Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, in which the gods had a limited, indirect role; the Arch of Septimius Severus in Leptis Magna depicted a range of local and metropolitan gods that were used to form a specific local vision of imperial power; and, finally, the Arch of Constantine showed how the established roles of the gods as authorising actors in battle and ceremony continued to function in the early fourth century.

Throughout the monuments discussed, the gods took on various discrete roles — as authorising Olympians, as patrons and imperial companions, as protective local gods and topographical guardians, as nature-related and elemental deities, as ritual participants and cult instantiations, as static legitimisers of state ceremonies, and as dynamic warrior divinities and active supporters of the emperor in battle. These visual representations intersected with ideas found in contemporary poetry, history, and panegyric in a range of illuminating ways that allow the monuments to be differentiated by narrative genre. The gods were a multi-faceted, sharply defined, and living component of Roman culture and political thinking that gave meaning and direction to the visual representation of imperial power.

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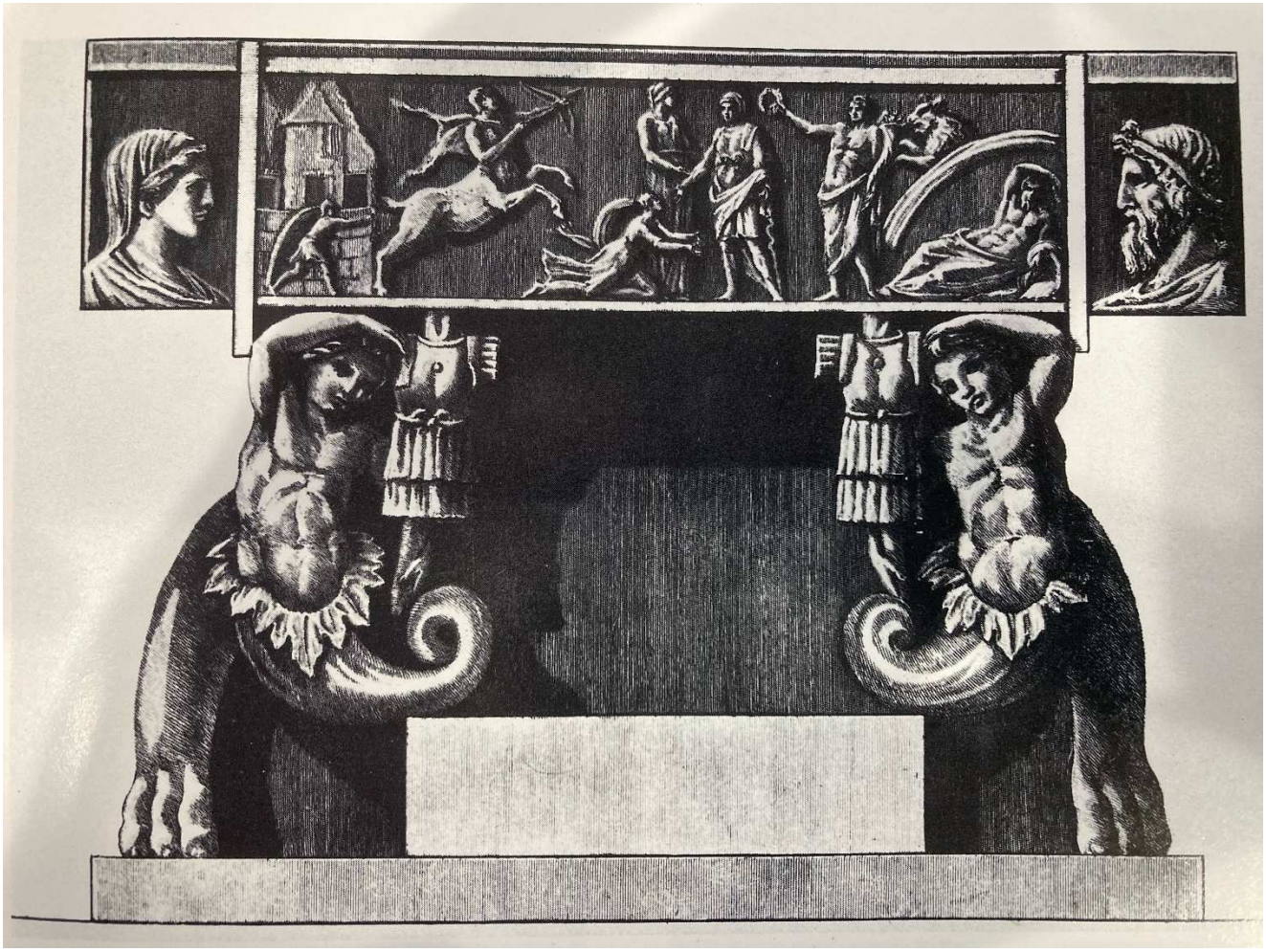


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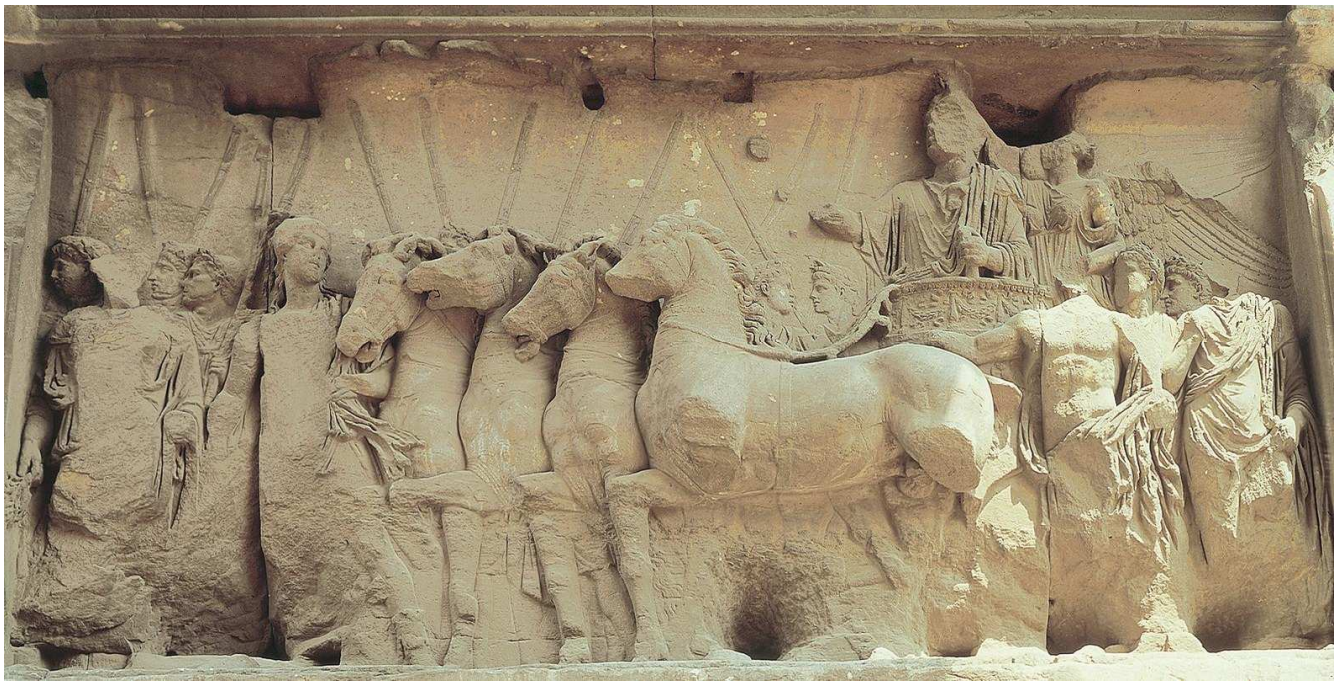


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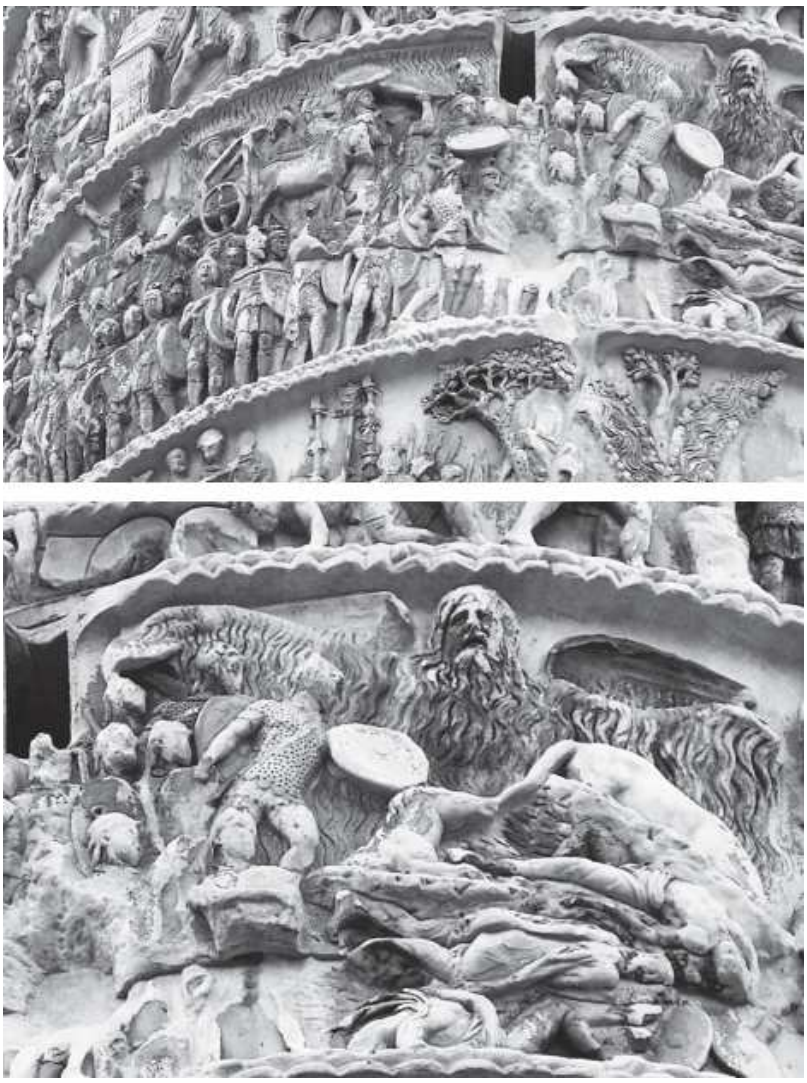


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Figure 19: A section of the Great Trajanic Frieze on the Arch of Constantine in Rome. Marble. Height: c.298 cm. c.AD 113-117. Trajan arrives accompanied by gods.



Figure 20: The passageway reliefs on the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum. Above: southern relief. Below: northern relief. Marble. AD 114. The emperor hands out food (above) and conducts sacrifice (below) in the presence of legitimising gods.



Figure 21: The reliefs on the lower two storeys of the eastern facade of the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum. Marble. AD 114. Assisted by gods, Trajan oversees new recruits (top left), cares for the people of Italy (top right), negotiates with barbarians (bottom left), and secures the empire's borders (bottom right).



Figure 22: The reliefs on the attic storey of the eastern facade of the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum. Marble. AD 114. Trajan meets rural gods (left) and secures Dacia (right).



Figure 23: The reliefs on the lower two storeys of the western facade of the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum. Marble. AD 114. Assisted by gods, Trajan cares for veterans (top left), interacts with merchants (top right), and arrives in Rome (bottom left and right).




Figure 24: The reliefs on the attic storey of the western facade of the Arch of Trajan at Beneventum. Marble. AD 114. The emperor arrives in Rome and is greeted and sanctioned by gods (left and right).



Figure 25: The panel reliefs of Marcus Aurelius. Marble. Height: c.300 cm. From Rome. Now in the Conservatori Museum and on the Arch of Constantine, Rome. c.AD 176-180. Eleven narratives of war and ritual in which the gods guide the emperor in key ceremonial scenes at the beginning and conclusion of his northern campaigns.



Figure 26: The profectio relief from the panel reliefs of Marcus Aurelius. Marble. Height: c.300 cm. From Rome. Now on the Arch of Constantine, Rome. c.AD 176-180. The divinely sanctioned emperor departs for war.



Figure 27: The triumph relief from the panel reliefs of Marcus Aurelius. Marble. Height: c.300 cm. From Rome. Now in the Conservatori Museum, Rome. c.AD 176-180. Supported by Victory, the emperor processes in triumph.



Figure 28: The Capitoline sacrifice relief from the panel reliefs of Marcus Aurelius. Marble. Height: c.300 cm. From Rome. Now in the Conservatori Museum, Rome. c.AD 176-180. The emperor performs a sacrifice accompanied by the Genius of the Senate.



Figure 29: The adventus relief from the panel reliefs of Marcus Aurelius. Marble. Height: c.300 cm. From Rome. Now on the Arch of Constantine, Rome. c.AD 176-180. The divinely protected emperor arrives in Rome.



Figure 30: The ‘Conservatori adventus’ relief. Marble. From the Piazza Sciarra, Rome. Now in the Conservatori Museum, Rome. c.AD 117-138. Roma hands an orb to the arriving emperor.

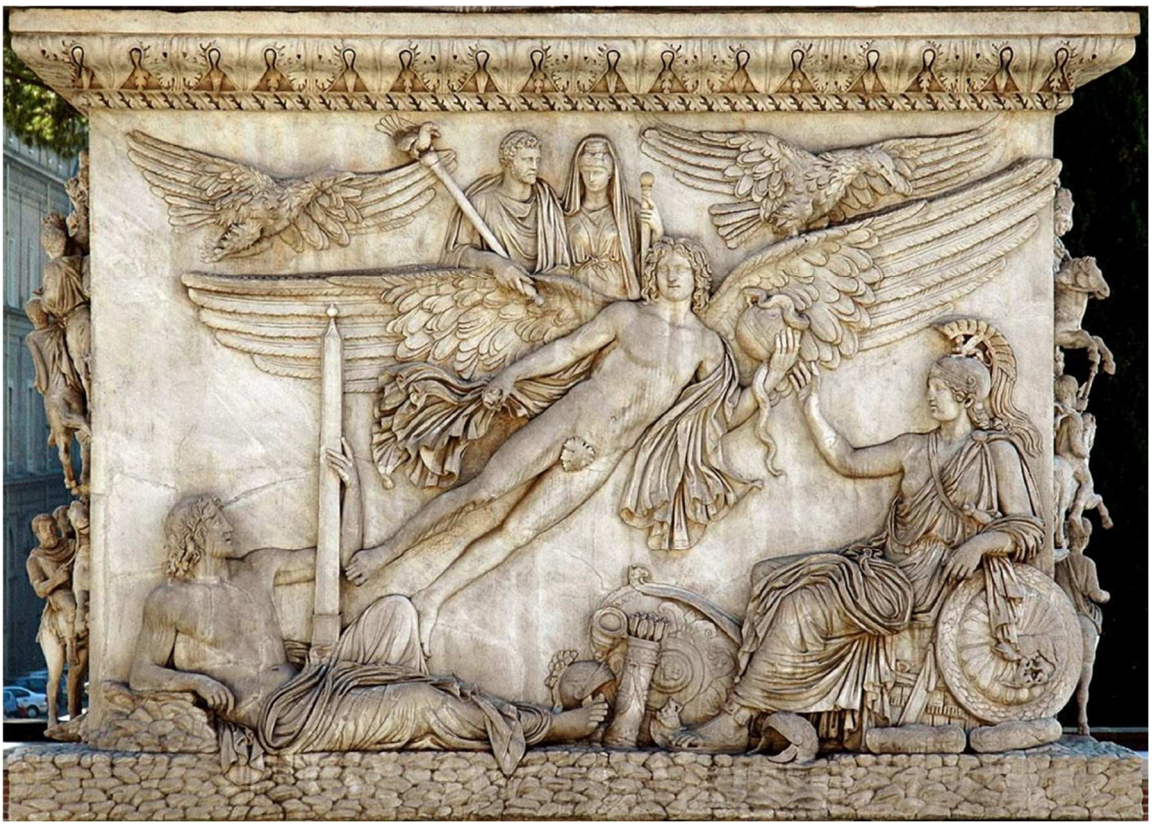


Figure 31: The column base of Antoninus Pius. Marble. Height: 247 cm. From Rome. Now in the Vatican Museums, Rome. c.AD 161. Antoninus Pius and his wife Faustina ascend to heaven on the back of a winged god, witnessed by the Genius of the Campus Martius and Roma.



Figure 32: The apotheosis relief from the ‘Arco di Portogallo’ in Rome. Marble. Height: 276 cm. Now in the Conservatori Museum, Rome. c.AD 136-138. Sabina ascends to heaven on the back of a winged deity.

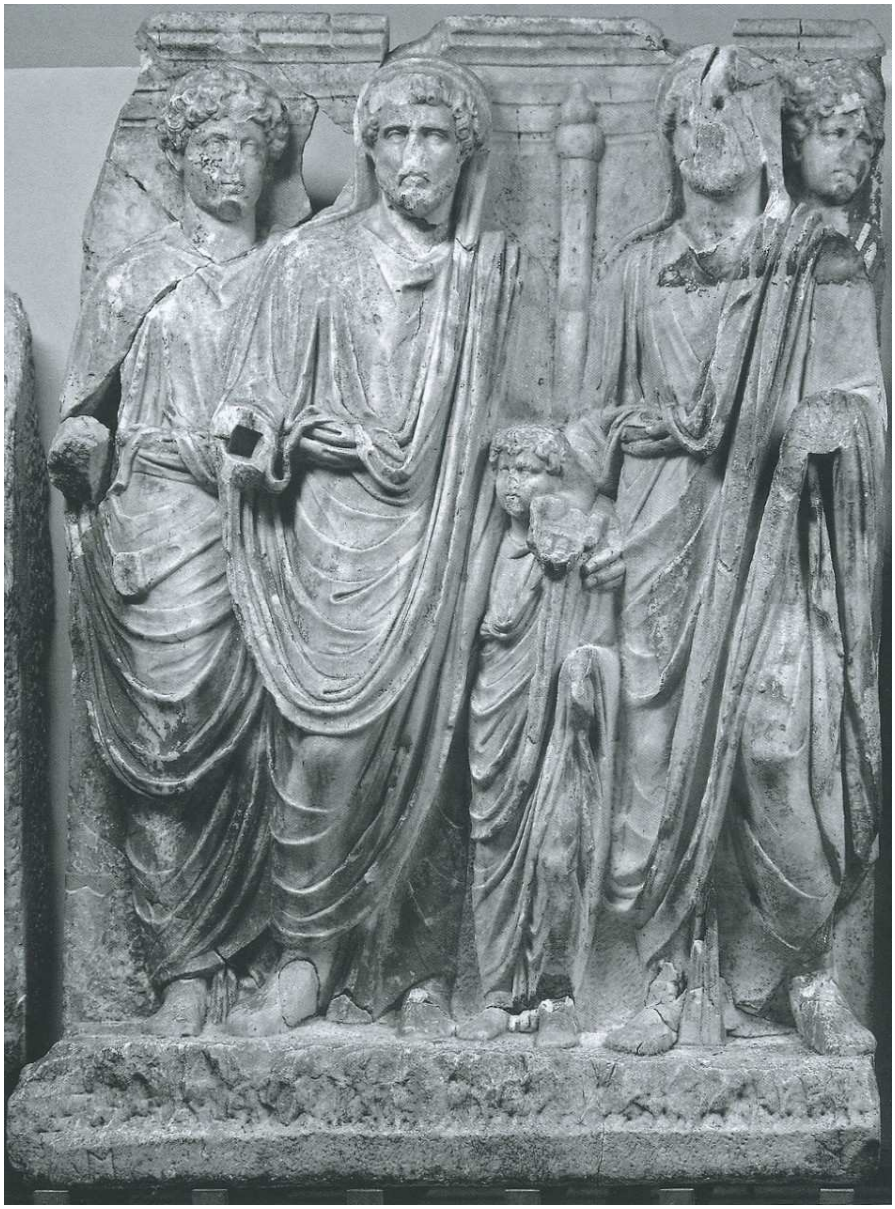


Figure 33: Section of the sacrifice-adoption frieze from the ‘Parthian Monument’ in Ephesus. Marble. Height: c.205 cm. From Ephesus. Now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. c.AD 140-150. An Antonine imperial group is gathered for a ceremonial sacrifice.



Figure 34: Section of the battle frieze from the ‘Parthian Monument’ in Ephesus. Marble. Height: c.205 cm. From Ephesus. Now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. c.AD 140-150. A heroic-divine warrior fights alongside Romans.

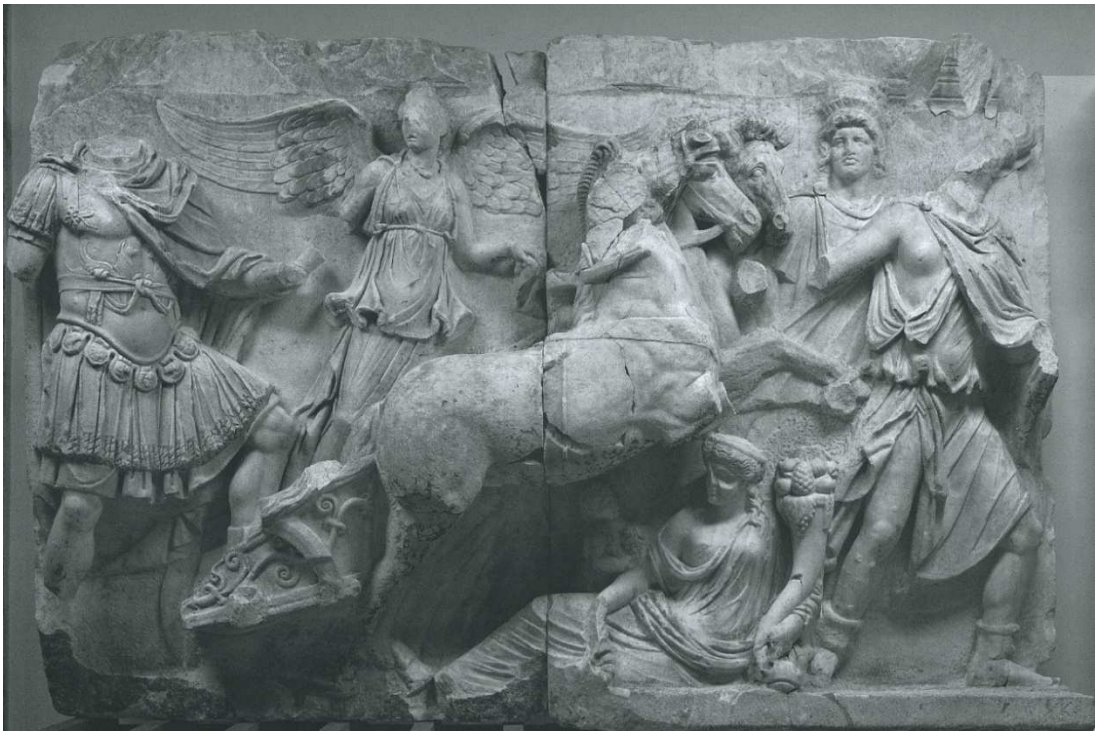


Figure 35: Chariot relief from the ‘Parthian Monument’ in Ephesus. Marble. Height: c.205 cm. From Ephesus. Now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. c.AD 140-150. An emperor steps into a divinely operated chariot.

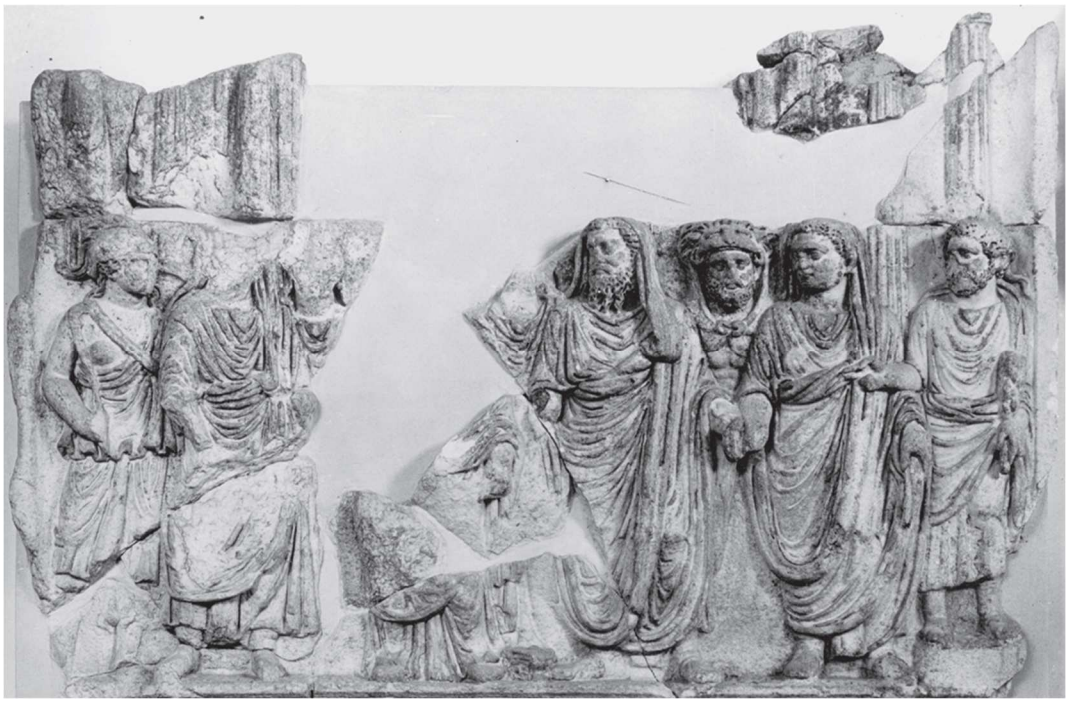


Figure 36: Pier relief from the Arch of Septimius Severus in Leptis Magna. Marble. Now in the Leptis Magna Museum, Khoms. c.AD 203-209. Emperor, prince, and gods stand before a temple.



Figure 37: Pier relief from the Arch of Septimius Severus in Leptis Magna. Marble. Now in the Leptis Magna Museum, Khoms. c.AD 203-209. Julia Domna in action in a sanctuary.

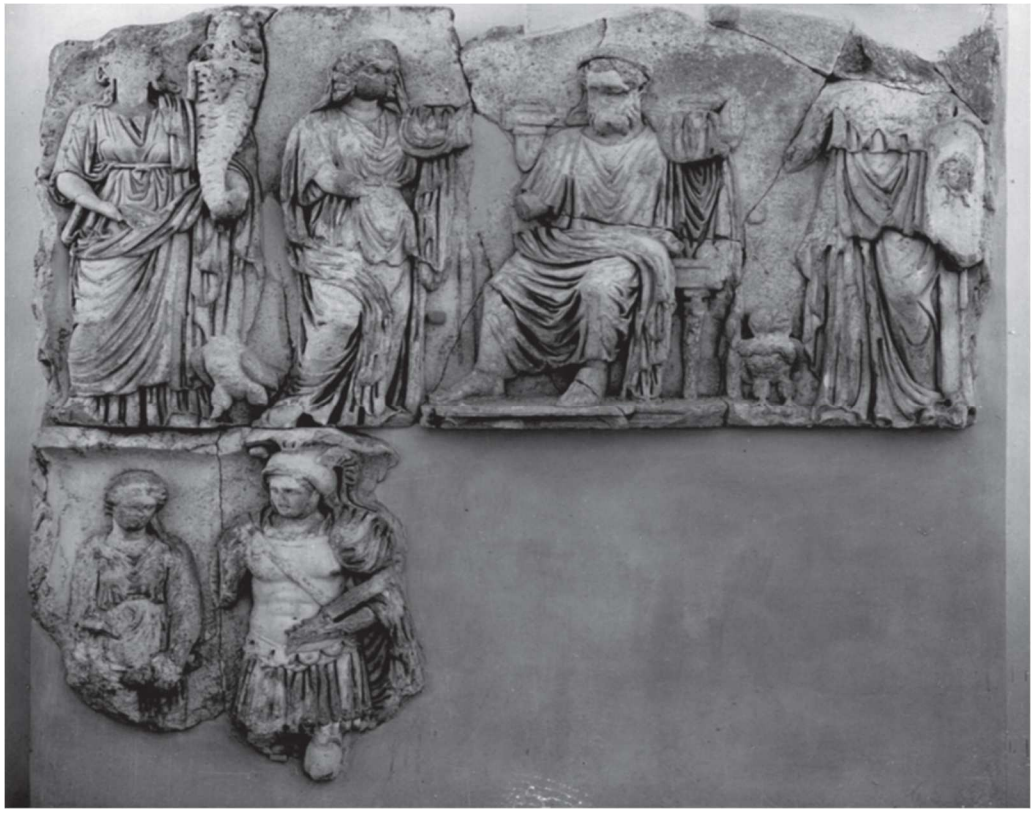


Figure 38: Pier relief from the Arch of Septimius Severus in Leptis Magna. Marble. Now in the Leptis Magna Museum, Khoms. c.AD 203-209. Septimius Severus and Julia Domna arrayed in majesty with gods.



Figure 39: Pier reliefs from the Arch of Septimius Severus in Leptis Magna. Above: relief with prince, Jupiter, and Victory. Below: relief with prince, Victory, Liber, and Hercules. Marble. Now in the Leptis Magna Museum, Khoms. c.AD 203-209. Imperial princes crowned and validated by gods.

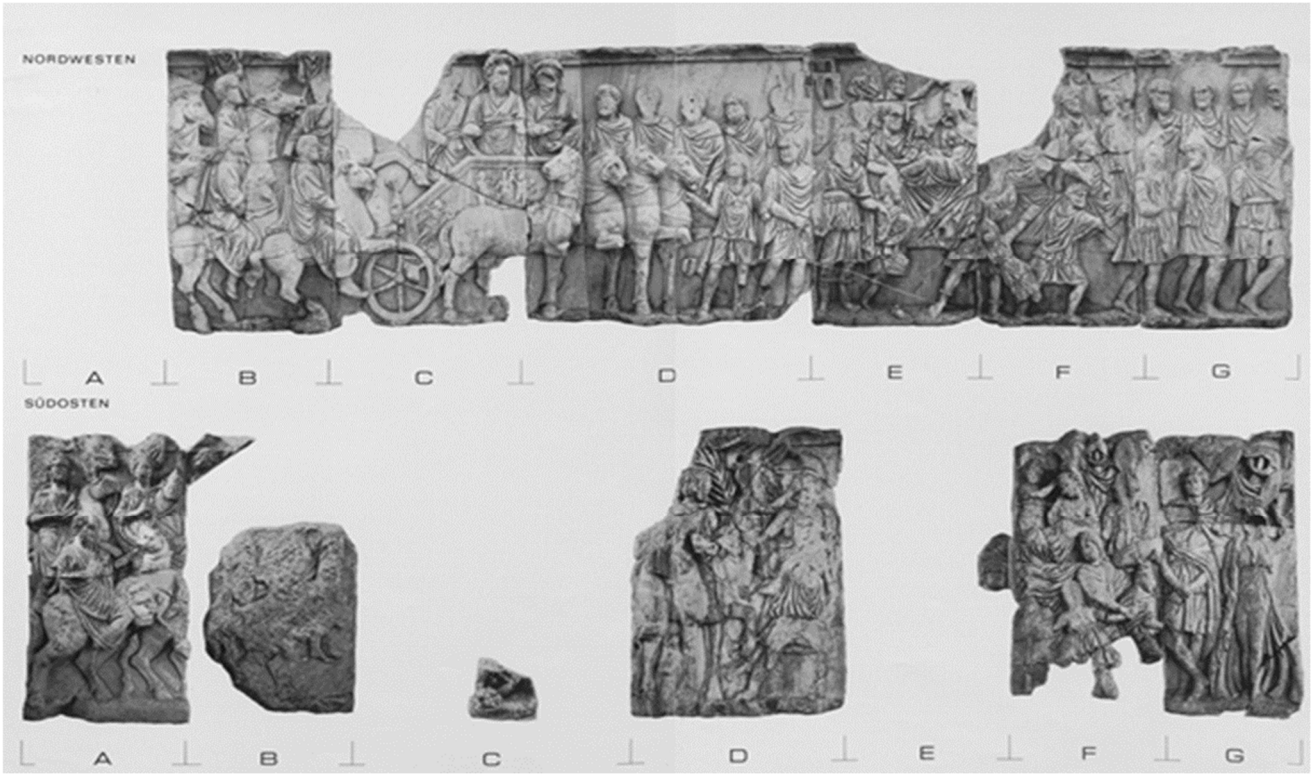



Figure 40: Attic reliefs from the Arch of Septimius Severus in Leptis Magna. Above: north-west frieze. Below: south-east frieze. Marble. Now in the Archaeological Museum of Tripoli. c.AD 203-209. Victorious procession (above) and triumph in Rome (below).

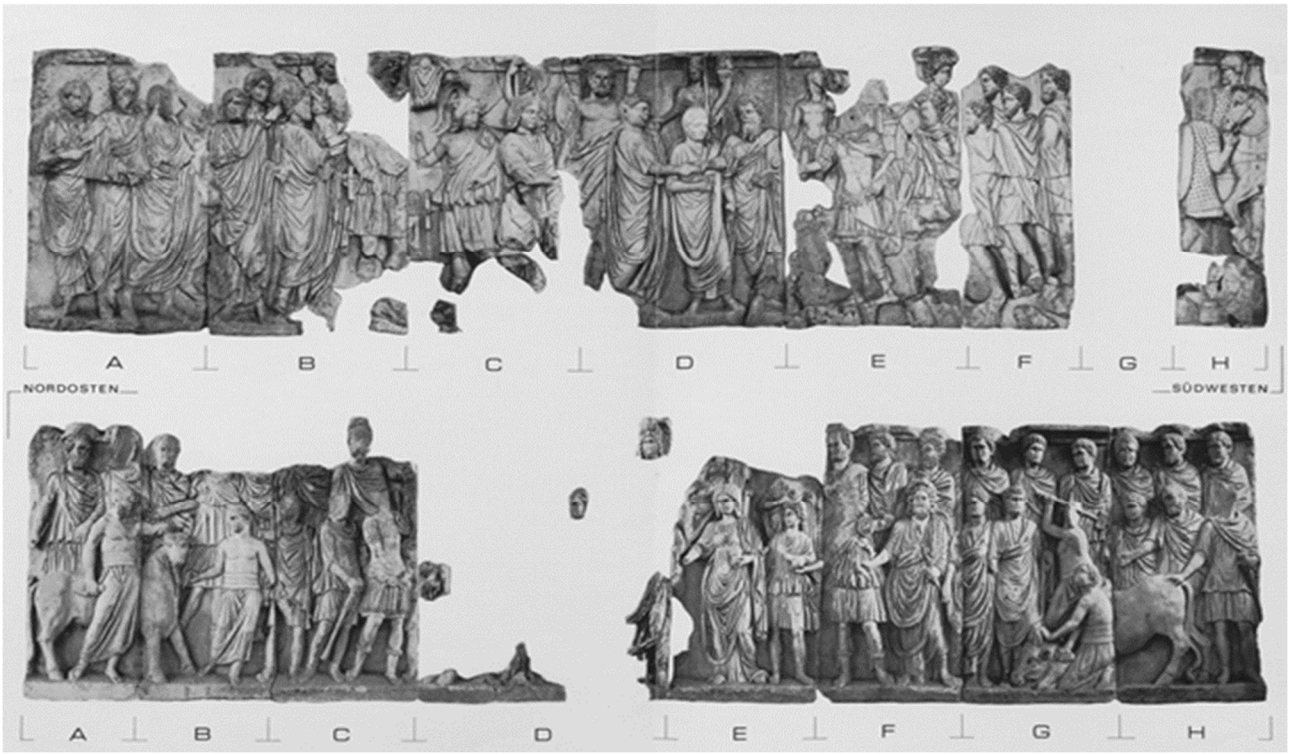



Figure 41: Attic reliefs from the Arch of Septimius Severus in Leptis Magna. Above: south-west frieze. Below: north-east frieze. Marble. Now in the Archaeological Museum of Tripoli. c.AD 203-209. Imperial ceremony (above) and sacrifice (below).



Figure 42: The Arch of Constantine in Rome. Height: 21 m. c.AD 315. South side.



Figure 43: Relief panels from the fourth-century frieze on the Arch of Constantine in Rome. Top: west panel. Middle: south-west panel. Bottom: south-east panel. Marble. Height: c.100 cm. c.AD 315. Military departure (top), siege (middle), and divinely inspired battle (bottom).



Figure 44: Relief panels from the fourth-century frieze on the Arch of Constantine in Rome. Top: east panel. Middle: north-east panel. Bottom: north-west panel. Marble. Height: c.100 cm. c.AD 315. Imperial arrival (top), speech in the Forum (middle), and imperial distribution in Rome (below).