Roman Propaganda in the Age of Augustus

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My thesis is going to examine how Augustus, the first emperor of Rome, influenced the art, architecture and literature of the period to reflect his values and ideals, through his role directly and indirectly as patron in order to appear in accordance with traditional Republican roles and values. The thesis will begin with a portrayal of those military, political and cultural changes which led to and accompanied the breakdown of the Republican form of government in Rome during the first century BCE and thus prepared the way for the entirely new and unique Augustan period. In the main body of the thesis which then follows, I have preliminarily broken down my research into three spheres: public life, religion, and the imperial family.

In the sphere of public life I am going to look at buildings that were used in the secular public sphere, such as victory monuments, the Roman and Augustan Fora, and coinage. The imagery in the coins and architecture are very significant because of how they allow Augustus to speak to an illiterate and non-Latin speaking populace. Most of those who lived in Italy could not read or write, and the rest of the empire would have spoken Greek, if even that. There was of course a literate section of the public, and I will also study the literature he championed and influenced, works by authors Vergil, Horace, and Livy, in theme and style. I will be looking at how Augustus affected the development of the literature, and the artists themselves, to further his propagandistic purposes.

Within the sphere of religion I would like to see how Augustus continued to worship and value the Republican gods, however altered their visibility and significance in Rome slightly in accordance with his new agenda. For my sources I will look at the temples Augustus built and restored, his reinstitution of the ludi saeculares, the Carmen Saeculare, and the budding imperial cult. I will be looking at the symbolism of the gods Augustus chose to highlight, and decoration techniques used in the construction of the temples.

I will be looking at the public image of the imperial family. This is the first time there has been a dynasty in Rome and the portraiture reflects that. The mausoleum of Augustus, which was actually a funerary building for not just him but relatives as well, too reflects the focus on dynasty. The symbolism Augustus utilized in the construction of his private house on the Palatine Hill, the mythical foundation point of Rome, additionally is significant in how Augustus presented himself as the second founder of Rome.

The final body chapter of my thesis will be devoted to the Res Gestae of Augustus, which is a summary of his achievements and accomplishments, which he himself composed and ordered to be published posthumously. Since he took the effort to have it separated from his personal timeline, it is important to look at it on its own, separate from the previous spheres. The Res Gestae provides a very unique opportunity to see just how Augustus wants to be remembered, by how he emphasizes and deemphasizes certain events in his reign.