

Visual Association in Imperial Promotion

With a Focus on Coinage from Trajan to Marcus Aurelius

Instructor Notes

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From Stone to Screen

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Note to Instructors

This module in its current form is suited for use in 200 and 300 level classes. It could easily fit into Roman History, Roman Art and Architecture, or a Roman Women course. The slide show and the following notes cover the broad bases of imperial promotion, touching on forms of promotion and political aims. A case study of Antonine coinage was included to emphasize the technique of visual association. Please note, as this module was designed to work in a variety of courses it is unlikely all the material provided will fit into a 50 minute class. Please add relevant course material, and remove anything you deem unnecessary to tailor this module to your needs.

Depending on the level of assumed knowledge and emphasis on course specific information alterations to the slideshow and notes may be required. There is a worksheet and suggested answer key that may call for more introduction than provided depending on students' prior knowledge. Latin virtues such as *castitas*, *pudicitia*, and *pietas*, generally remain in Latin to allow for your translations.

The notes below follow the slide show, page numbers relating the notes and slides are provided in the lesson plan.

General Bibliography

Note: Bolded citations were of particular use and will be discussed below.

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Boatwright, Mary Taliaferro., Daniel J. Gargola, and Richard J. A. Talbert. *The Romans, from Village to Empire*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

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Wallace-Hadrill, Andrew. "Image and Authority in the Coinage of Augustus." *Journal of Roman Studies* 76 (1986): 66-87.

Zanker, Paul. *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988.

Good Resources and Background Reading

Bergmann, Bettina Ann., and Wendy M. Watson. *The Moon and the Stars: Afterlife of a Roman Empress.* South Hadley, MA: Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, 1999.

Includes a description of Faustina the Elder and a brief description of the Antonine emperors in art and coinage. Discusses the significance of these depictions in the context of the contemporary political atmosphere.

Hannestad, Niels. *Roman Art and Imperial Policy.* Aarhus: Jutland Archaeology Society, 1986.

Discussion of main themes promoted through art and how these themes supported imperial policy

Hekster, Olivier. *Emperors and Ancestors: Roman Rulers and the Constraints of Tradition.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Investigation of how different “media” including coinage and sculpture were used to promote the imperial household.

Hill, Philip V. *The Monuments of Ancient Rome as Coin Types.* London: B.A. Seaby, 1989.

Thorough investigation of Monuments depicted on coinage, using specific examples throughout.

Howgego, C. J. *Ancient History from Coins.* London: Routledge, 1995.

Great introduction to using coins as a source of information about ancient history.

Manders, Erika. *Coining Images of Power: Patterns in the Representation of Roman Emperors on Imperial Coinage, A.D. 193-284.* Leiden: Brill, 2012.

Examines themes in Imperial representation on coinage and how these themes shift and change over time.

Mattingly, Harold. *Roman Coins from the Earliest Times to the fall of the Western Empire.* London: Methuen, 1960.

Early, but good resource covering denominations, mints, moneyers, and coin types.

Melville-Jones, John R. *A Dictionary of Ancient Roman Coins.* London: Seaby, 1990.

Useful resource for technical terms and legends on coinage.

Spaeth, Barbette Stanley. *The Roman Goddess Ceres.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996.

Investigation of Ceres' role within Rome over time, and her connection with different segments of society. Discussion of how and why Imperial women were associated with Ceres.

Lecture Notes

What is From Stone to Screen?

- A digitization initiative founded in 2012 at the University of British Columbia
- This project started by digitizing the Malcolm McGregor squeeze collection housed in the department of Classical Near Eastern and Religious Studies
- From Stone to Screen now has four collections and another one in collaboration with Rare Books and Collections at UBC
- By digitizing teaching collections FSTS hopes to make it easier to integrate material culture into the classroom
- By making digital collections available through the FSTS website their use is no longer limited to UBC
- The From Stone to Screen collections can be found at:
<http://www.fstsartifacts.fromstonetoscreen.com/collections>

O. J. Todd and his Collection

- Otis Johnson Todd was a founder of the Classical, Near Eastern, and Religious Studies department at UBC
- He was head of the department from 1941-1949
- His son Douglas Todd donated his collection to the CNERS department at UBC
- The collection consists of 73 coins minted from 350 BCE to 350 CE
- Includes coins from India, Greece, the Roman Republic, and the Roman Empire
- After being found by accident, this collection was digitized in the summer of 2015 and is currently being researched
- Visit the collection at: <http://fromstonetoscreen.com/collections/the-otis-j-todd-collection/>

Antonine Emperors

- Family tree displays emperors from Nerva to Commodus, emperors' names are in blue, and their adoptions are indicated by blue lines
- The Antonine emperors included Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, Lucius Verus and Commodus
- Antoninus Pius reigned 138-161 CE
- Marcus Aurelius ruled as co-emperor with Lucius Verus from 161-169 CE, and continued ruling as emperor after Verus' death until 180 CE
- The dynasty ended with Commodus whose reign ended in 192 CE

Merit Based Succession

- Unlike the Julio-Claudian model of hereditary rule the Antonines followed the model of the Trajan-Hadrianic emperors who adopted and succeeded based on merit
- Their rule based on merit rather than the familial succession was not due to the “selflessness” of these emperors rather to a lack of biological heirs
- Marcus Aurelius' son Commodus was the first to inherit the position of emperor as a biological heir
- The appointment of emperor to an individual based on merit did produce a number of successful leaders
- Adoption also mitigated the potential disturbance of succession, as there was a clear passing of power from the emperor to his chosen successor
- There were not multiple biological successors vying for control, or stress about not having enough potential male heirs

Trajan

- Though this was a time of unrivalled peace there were still military campaigns
- Trajan's expansionist agenda led to the peak of Rome's territory in 117 CE
- Campaigns in Germania, Dacia, and Parthia
- Much of the frontier territory quickly abandoned

Hadrian

- Hadrian is attributed with withdrawing from Parthia
- He moved away from Trajan's expansionist precedent
- Hadrian sought to consolidate the territory that Rome held and focused much of his efforts internally
- By strengthening communication and administrative infrastructure Hadrian ensured stability at home
- By adopting Antoninus Pius and in turn having him adopt Lucius Verus and Marcus Aurelius, Hadrian ensured the succession of the following two generations

Antoninus Pius

- Hadrian was disliked, and Antoninus Pius had to compel the senate to deify his predecessor, thereby earning Antoninus the epithet "Pius"
- The reign of Antoninus Pius is often overlooked for its uneventfulness, however the uneventfulness and length of his reign is noteworthy
- Antoninus Pius was less involved with the military
- Due to a lull in foreign engagement Antoninus Pius was able to focus inward, promoting himself and the imperial family thereby cementing the Antonine dynasty
- Promoted Augustan morality and virtues
- Used the foundation myths in his iconography as he celebrated Rome's 900th anniversary

Marcus Aurelius

- Lucius Verus and Marcus Aurelius ruled jointly and with equal power, with the exception of Pontifex Maximus, a title that Aurelius held
- These men were adopted jointly to ensure an heir
- Succeeded together to avoid a dispute over power
- Through their reign Concordia was promoted and they were often depicted together
- After the death of Verus in 169 CE Aurelius ruled solely
- External threats including the Marcomannic wars 166-180 CE
- His son Commodus began to rule with him as co-emperor in 177 CE

Commodus

- After his father's death Commodus became widely disliked
- He renamed the months of the year, the provinces and even Rome after himself
- He had many senators executed
- Spent a great deal of money on the games and spent much of his time in gladiatorial shows fighting in Herculean costumes
- After unsuccessful attempts he was successfully assassinated in AD 192
- His memory was erased officially by the *damnatio memoriae*

Forms of Imperial Promotion

- Imperial promotion took many forms throughout the Roman Empire
- Through sculpture, literature, inscriptions, architecture, paintings, and coinage the agenda of the emperor could be dispersed and propagated

Coinage and Promotion

- Coins provided emperors with the ability to widely spread their image and policies empire wide
- On coins, symbolic images promoting the imperial family could be disseminated to and understood by the largely illiterate population
- There has long been discussion regarding how large the propagandic role of coinage was. Ranging from those who feel coinage served a strictly economic role, to those who think coins were singularly used as propaganda pieces.¹

¹ For further discussion of this debate please refer to C. J. Howgego. *Ancient History from Coins*. London: Routledge, 1995, 70 -77.

This debate is also problematized by discussion of who approved coin types, please refer to Howgego. *Ancient History from Coins*, 69-70.

General Aims of Imperial Promotion

- The aims of imperial promotion varied slightly over time, however the general goals remained consistent
- Imperial promotion served to secure the succession of future rulers by showing them as part of the imperial family
 - Coin depicting Trajan clasping hands with Hadrian showing the adoption of Hadrian
- Promotion sought to justify an individual's claim to rule, which was of special importance at the beginning of a new dynasty or after struggle for power
 - Coin: Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius sitting in curule chairs on platform with an officer and lictor, linking Marcus Aurelius to the previous emperor and justifying his claim
- Promotion emphasized the political agenda, programs, and reforms of the emperor
 - Coin: Obverse depicts Hadrian who was known for an extensive building program, reverse shows Hercules within tetrastyle temple
- Show divine lineage by connecting the emperor to deity they claim descent from, or link him to a deified ancestor
 - Coin: Obverse depicts Hadrian, reverse shows Divus Trajan facing bust of Diva Plotina with stars above both their heads, legend: Divine Parents, linking Hadrian to his deified parents
- Often displays of military power and successful campaigns were commemorated in imperial promotion
 - Coin: Trajan, laureate, in military dress, holding spear and parazonium; on ground reclining figures of Armenia, Tigris and Euphrates

Visual Association in Imperial Promotion

- One often-exploited technique of imperial promotion was visual association
- In Imperial promotion images of the emperor or members of the imperial family were displayed alongside images of their predecessors, deities, or personified virtues
- This forced the public to visually associate these images, and to equate the characteristics of the two
- In this way the emperor could solidify himself by association with past successes, powerful figures, the divine, and positive virtues
- Visual association rather than identification is an important distinction to make. Emperors and the Imperial family were often depicted alongside deities or even holding the attributes of a deity, but an individual's identification as that deity is much more rare²

Imperial Promotion Case Study and Lesson Plan

- Using coinage minted by Antoninus Pius some of the ways the emperor was portrayed in Imperial promotion will be demonstrated
- Special attention will be paid to the ways in which emperors and members of the imperial family were visually associated with their predecessors, deities and personifications of virtues

Lesson plan

- Investigation of how Antoninus Pius visually associated himself with Pax, Aeneas, and Pietas and what the benefits of these associations were
- Exploration of how Faustina the Elder was visually associated with Juno and Ceres and for what reasons
- The ways Faustina the Younger was visually associated with her mother Faustina the Elder and why
- Finally a worksheet using coinage minted by the Trajan-Hadrianic and Antonine emperors will be used to reinforce key themes taught throughout the lecture

² B. Spaeth, *The Roman Goddess Ceres*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996, 119-123. and Howgego. *Ancient History from Coins*, 79-80.

Antoninus Pius on Coinage

Aeneas

- Aeneas was depicted on coins as part of the antiquarian or legendary series minted by Antoninus Pius
- In 147 CE Rome celebrated its 900th anniversary since its founding, one reason for Antoninus Pius' minting coins depicting foundation myths
- Antoninus Pius capitalized on the similarity between his name and Pius Aeneas' name³
- By visually associating his image with Aeneas' on coinage and linking them closer by the similarity in name, Antoninus Pius also associated himself with the virtues of Aeneas
- Aeneas was known for his filial piety (shown by carrying his father on his shoulders), and piety towards the gods (shown by carrying his household gods in some depictions)

Pietas

- By depicting himself on coinage offering libations to the gods Antoninus showed his piety towards the gods
- Antoninus Pius visually associated himself with the goddess Pietas, the personified virtue of piety by rendering his image in the same position of offering as she was rendered on coinage
- This link between Pietas and Antoninus is strengthened by the legend PIETAS AVG

Benefits of Promoting Piety

- In addition to emphasizing his piety the promotion of Aeneas and Pietas can be seen as one way Antoninus Pius revived and supported Augustan morality and virtue
- The Aeneas coin depicts the well known statue group of Aeneas in Augustus' forum, strengthening the connection to Augustan virtues
- By promoting piety he also encouraged the public to act piously

³ N. Hannestad, *Roman Art and Imperial Policy*. Aarhus: Jutland Archaeology Society, 1986, 213.

Commemoration of Faustina the Elder

- Faustina the Elder died early in the reign of Antoninus Pius
- Antoninus Pius was devoted to her and commemorated her in many ways, both conventional and without precedent
- Many honours were given to her “a priesthood was assigned to her worship, a temple and altar were dedicated to her, her image was carried in the ‘pompa circensis’, a foundation for orphan girls was established” and many coins were struck in her commemoration ⁴
- Through her deification Antoninus was given closer relation to the divine and through her commemoration he could further promote himself and his policies

⁴ H. Mattingly, "The Consecration of Faustina the Elder and Her Daughter." *Harvard Theological Review* 41, no. 02 (1948): 147.

Faustina the Elder Visually Associated with Juno

- As head of the Roman pantheon, Jupiter and Juno were often associated with the Emperor and Empress
- This association became increasingly popular in the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE
- Faustina the Elder was especially associated with Juno Regina as she was seen as the empress' divine counterpart

Handout

- Handout coin 1: On coinage Faustina the Elder was associated with Juno by displaying Faustina's portrait on the obverse and Juno with her attributes and name on the reverse
- Handout coin 2: The legend on the reverse reads AVGUSTA rather than IVNONI REGINAE this use of Faustina's image on one side and her title on the other alongside an image of Juno serves to closer associate the deity and the empress
- Handout coin 3: Does not depict Juno, Juno's attributes, peacock and a throne are displayed on the coin with the legend AVGVSTA. By visually linking the attributes of Juno with Faustina the Elder (rather than displaying them alongside Juno) the empress is more closely associated with them⁵
- By emphasizing the link between Faustina and Juno Antoninus Pius indirectly emphasized the link between himself and Jupiter, head of the Roman pantheon
- This link between Jupiter and Juno, and Antoninus Pius and Faustina the Elder also strengthened their right to rule and solidified the beginning of the Antonine dynasty

⁵ Spaeth, *The Roman Goddess Ceres*, 119-123. and Howgego. *Ancient History from Coins*, 79-80.

Faustina the Elder Visually Associated with Ceres

- Ceres was also featured prominently on coinage of Faustina the Elder
- Ceres is often depicted holding ears of corn and a lit torch
- Faustina the Elder is depicted as holding the attributes of Ceres and seated in a similar pose
- This visual association closely links Faustina the Elder to Ceres and therefore the ideal virtues of women that Ceres represents
- By associating Faustina the Elder with Ceres Antoninus Pius emphasized the virtues of ideal women chiefly *castitas*, motherhood and fertility
- This association also played into his revival of Augustan virtues that Antoninus Pius promoted

Faustina II Associated with Faustina I on Coinage

- Portraits of Faustina the Elder and Faustina the Younger on coinage show similarities in the depiction of these women
- Both mother and daughter have waved front sections of hair pulled back showing the ear
- These coins also depict intricately woven coils on top of Faustina the Elder's head, and a similar style sitting lower on the back of Faustina the Younger's head
- These portraits show the top of the *stola*—the typical dress of a matrona—and the *palla*—a mantle that could be draped over the head—pulled down over the shoulders
- These conservative articles of clothing indicated a woman's status, and emphasized her *pudicitia*
- The resemblance or visual association between Faustina the Elder and Faustina the Younger in Imperial promotion served to link them in the minds of the public
- This association went further than similarities in portraiture, the images selected for the reverses were often the same
- Some of the most common were: Juno, Ceres, Vesta, and Juno's peacock
- The close visual association of Faustina the Elder and Faustina the Younger had various benefits
- To further solidify the Antonines as a dynasty
- To elevate the status of the Imperial family by association with deified predecessors
- To associate Faustina the Younger with the positive virtues of her mother
- To justify the succession of Marcus Aurelius—the adopted son of Faustina the Elder and Antoninus Pius
- To link Marcus Aurelius' rule to the peaceful reign of Antoninus Pius

Worksheet

- Using information about the Trajan-Hadrianic and Antonine emperors, and visual association in imperial promotion answer the questions on the handout
- The handout focuses on how and why emperors visually associated themselves with their predecessors, deities, and personified virtues
- (There is a suggested answer key with targeted further reading if more background information is required)

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For more information please visit: fromstonetoscreen.com

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