

# Emperor the roman imperial art of traditio legis



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Emperor Augustus of Rome was born Gaius Octavius on September 23, 63 B.

C. Augustus took power in 44 B.

C. after the murder of his uncle, Julius Ceaser. Augustus was a wise, bright and astute politician.

He was able to restore peace in Rome after 100 years of civil war. Augustus was able to commission the following works which influenced the Rome politics (Kleiner, 385). Emperor Augustus ordered Vergil to write an ambitious poem that would represent a legendary origin of the Roman Empire and the Roman people as well. This gave an opportunity to Vergil to fulfill his life time ambition to write a Homeric like epic about the adventures of Aeneas, the ancestor of Romulus and the whole Julian line. He worked on a book called the Aeneid whose subject was not Aeneas. The poem told about Rome and the glories of the Empire. It was a difficult undertaking, and after eleven years of working on it, it was completed when the poet had been already dead.

Vergil wished the poem to be burned if it had been unfinished. Augustus ordered Lucius, Varius, Rufus and Plotus Tucca to publish the poem with as minor editorial alterations as possible. The Aeneid was recognized as a legendary masterpiece and a testament to the dignity of the Roman Empire (Kleiner, 540). Vergil's name was thereafter covered with myths and legends, and his tomb became one of the most popular places of interest. Some Christians believed Vergil to be even a foreteller because he was considered to predict the appearance of Christ in some of his works. Augustus commissioned the erection of a mausoleum for himself and his family in the

present Piazza Augusto Imperatore. The mausoleum was set in a sacred precinct and used for religious purposes.

Augustus inaugurated the altar of the Augustan peace in Rome. The altar was carved by the best sculptors of the day. It took 3 years and a half to create this masterpiece which was dedicated to celebration of Augustus' victorious campaigns in Spain and Gaul on January 30, 9 BC.

### **Changes in the representation of Christ and how they reflect the spread of Christianity and its acceptance by the Romans**

Christianity was drastically transformed when Emperor Constantine defeated his main rival Maxentius at the battle of Milvian Bridge. Description of the battle revealed that Constantine saw a sign in the heavens foretelling his victory. After the victory, Constantine became a supporter of Christianity. This made it possible to transform Rome into a Christian Empire.

Representation of Christ has been also changed in many ways. In the fourth century, a mosaic in Santa Pudenziana represented Christ sitting at the centre on a jewel coated throne. He was dressed in a gold toga with purple trim, the colors showed imperial authority. His right hand was extended in the ad locutio gesture conventional in representations. Holding a book in his right hand signified that Christ was proclaiming his commandments to the word. This representation was accepted in the Roman Empire as another convention of the Roman imperial art of traditio legis or handing down the law. This made a silver plate for Emperor Theodosius seem similar to that of Christ.

Christianity was spread through the Roman Empire as the Romans wanted to identify themselves with Christ. Christianity underwent fundamental transformation after Constantine accepted it. The Christian art according to Constantine was to emphasize on the authority of Christ and His church in the world. A good example proving this fact is presented in the Mosaic of Christ in the archiepiscopal palace in Ravenna. Christ is depicted there wearing the cuirass or the breastplate worn by Emperors. This represented the acceptance of Christ as a leader by the Romans (Kleiner, 335).

### **Byzantine ideal of sacred kingship**

In the basilica S. Vitale, two popular mosaics are used to link it with the Byzantine court. Altar design comes from the imperial work shop. Justinian and his empress, Theodora, are accompanied by representatives, the local clergy, and ladies in waiting to attend the service. We see Justinian and Theodora as analogous to Christ and the Virgin Mary. On the edge of Theodora's cloak, we see three magi carrying their gifts to Mary and the new born king.

Justinian is flanked by twelve men who personify the twelve apostles. This union of political and spiritual authority shows the “divine kingship” of the Byzantine emperor. Justinian, Theodora and their neighbors are intended to be of the same likenesses, but their features are differentiated from those of Archbishop, Maximianus.

## **Influence of 3rd century Frescoes of Dura Europas on Byzantine art**

The oldest surviving examples of art decorating the early churches were found in a synagogue in the town of Dura-Europos, modern Syria. Its walls are painted with animals, people and objects that represent a whole story or a theme across the wall, including Jesus' miracles. The Dura Europas has influenced the growth and development of byzantine art in several ways. The byzantine art emphasized on scriptures which did not depict Christ.

In the byzantine era, painters were encouraged by the sculptures from Dura Europas, such as The purim Triumph, and from these ancient paintings, they generated their ideas for their new masterpieces.

### **Work Cited**

Kleiner, Fred. Gardner's Art through the Ages: The Western Perspective.

Beverly, MA: Wadsworth Publishing, 2009. Print.