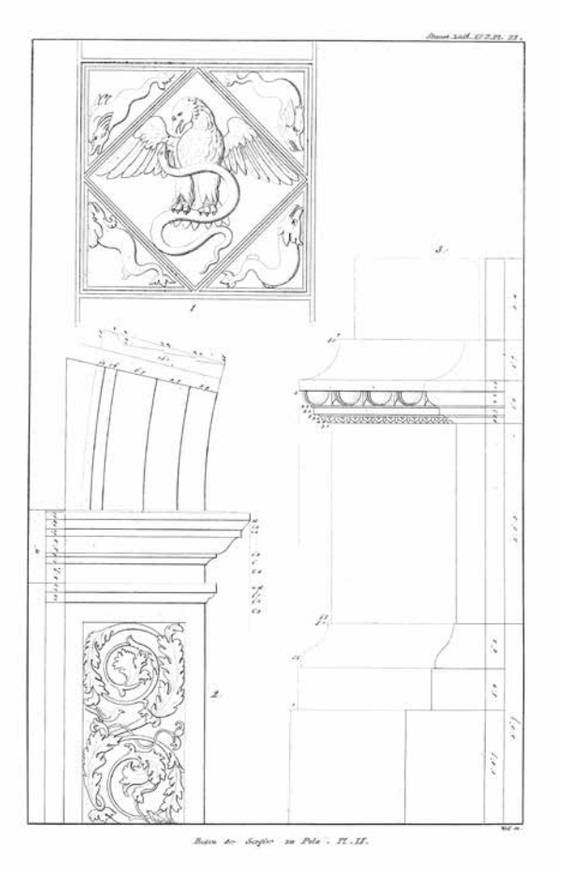


and Nicholas Revett's *Antiquities of Athens*, attests to the enduring antiquarian interest not only in the monument's architecture, but also in its ornamental vocabulary.

The illustration records one of the most distinctive compositions on the arch. Four dolphins surround an eagle grasping a serpent in its talons. Associated with Jupiter and imperial power, the eagle introduces an image of victory and domination. Although later interpretations understood the encounter as an allegory of the struggle between good and evil, within the Roman context it belonged more directly to a visual language of triumph, divine protection, and authority (Starac 2020).

The dolphins add a specifically marine dimension to the composition. In Roman visual culture, they were associated with favourable sea journeys, divine assistance, and the passage of souls, but also with Venus, desire, and abundance. On a monument erected by Salvia Postuma of the Sergii to commemorate members of her family, these motifs brought together personal memory, social distinction, and the imagery of power (Starac 2020).

Their careful reproduction in an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century antiquarian publication demonstrates how the arch came to be valued both as a Roman monument and as a repertory of ancient architectural ornament. The German edition introduced Stuart's documentation of Pula to a wider audience of architects and scholars across German-speaking Central Europe (Soros 2006; Kreeb 2020).

Lit. Soros 2006; Kreeb 2020; Starac 2020.

Jasenka Gudelj

2.5 EMPERORS

Throughout the Middle Ages, the Roman Empire continued to function as a powerful juridical and ideological model, and assumed a salvific role in theological thought, as exemplified by Dante Alighieri's *Convivio* (1.4.4–5), *Monarchia* and *Commedia* (*Paradiso* 6). With the rise of Humanism, however, the Empire as a historical institution—and emperors as individual agents—acquired new prominence. Although medieval historiography had preserved the memory of individual rulers, fifteenth-century philological and antiquarian methods fostered a more systematic interest in reconstructing their lives, deeds, and historical identities.

The rediscovery of classical works, first in Latin and subsequently in Greek, together with a renewed engagement with long-neglected texts, revived biographical interest in the Roman emperors. The ancient source that perhaps best embodies this revival is Suetonius's *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*. Although Suetonius remained known throughout the Middle Ages—Einhard is generally believed to have drawn inspiration from it for his *Life of Charlemagne* (Innes 1997)—it was Petrarch who restored the work to a position of renewed centrality within humanistic scholarship (Billanovich 1954; Bertè 2011; Fazion and Lorenzi 2019). Not only did he study the text extensively, filling its margins with annotations of extraordinary cultural value, but he also drew inspiration from it for the revival of the literary genre of the lives of illustrious men in his *De viris illustribus*. The final section of this unfinished work was intended to include the lives of the first five Roman emperors—Julius Caesar, Augustus, Vespasian, Titus, and Trajan—although Petrarch ultimately limited himself to the first, in the section that later became the independent *De gestis Caesaris*. Suetonius would become one of the most studied authors in the following centuries, and his work was studied closely by scholars such as Poliziano and Filippo Beroaldo, the latter producing an extensive commentary (Gardenal 1975; Tomaiuolo 2020).

Equally important for understanding how the biographical tradition applied to the emperors was the renewed appreciation of the so-called *Historia Augusta*, a collection of imperial biographies traditionally attributed to several late antique authors. Although the work remained known throughout the Middle Ages, it received relatively little scholarly attention before becoming a principal source for the *Historia Imperialis* by the Veronese scholar Giovanni de Matociis, known as the *Mansionarius*, composed during the 1330s (Bottari 1991). Yet, the most remarkable innovation of this work lies in the drawings placed in the manuscript margins, depicting the emperors as they appear in the text. These images were clearly indebted to portraits on ancient coins, whose historical and philological value—together with that of inscriptions and antiquities more generally—was then experiencing a profound revival (Weiss 1969).

It is therefore no coincidence that the highly successful Renaissance tradition of imperial portraiture drew its imagery directly from numismatic sources and, indeed, became increasingly intertwined with them. The best-known examples are Andrea Fulvio's *Imagines* (1517), Johann Huttich's *Libellus* (1525), Enea Vico's *Immagini* (1548), and Hubert Goltzius's *Icones* (1557). The illustrations that populate these works naturally adopted the familiar profile portrait derived from coin specimens, a format that had already entered fifteenth-century portraiture, particularly through artists such as Pisanello, Piero della Francesca, and Mantegna.

Numismatic evidence offered two complementary interpretative frameworks: one historiographical and the other iconographical. Coins transmitted not only the appearance of the ruler whose authority guaranteed both the political legitimacy and the economic value of the currency, but also additional information conveyed through their legends. Combined with literary, epigraphic, and biographical evidence, they enabled Renaissance scholars to reconstruct not only the succession of emperors but also their historical personalities. Thus history, understood as the narrated sequence of events, came to be projected onto the representation of faces, while portraiture became the privileged medium through which individual character and political identity could be visualised.

Numismatic evidence did not, however, constitute the only visual authority for the reconstruction of imperial physiognomies. As archaeological discoveries multiplied and collections of ancient sculpture expanded during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, surviving marble busts increasingly came to complement the testimony of coins. Humanist antiquarians compared sculptural portraits with numismatic, epigraphic, and literary evidence, seeking to reconcile these different sources into historically reliable images of the emperors. The result was an antiquarian methodology in which portraiture emerged from the convergence of multiple forms of material and textual evidence rather than from a single visual tradition (Davenport, Malik 2024). A notable example is Titian's celebrated cycle of the *Eleven Caesars*, painted between c. 1536 and 1540 for Federico II Gonzaga at the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua (destroyed in the fire of 1734 and now known through copies, foremost among them are those by Aegidius Sadeler II and Bernardino Campi). Conceived as a visual counterpart to Suetonius's *Lives*, the series drew upon the rich antiquarian collections of the Gonzaga court, where ancient busts, coins, inscriptions, and other Roman artefacts collectively informed the reconstruction of imperial likenesses.

While studies of the emperors could draw upon a wide range of antiquarian evidence—literary, epigraphic, architectural, archaeological, and numismatic—the question of their likenesses inevitably raised problems of chronological, geographical, and onomastic accuracy. From this perspective, it becomes clear why attempts to establish a reliable tradition of imperial portraits, linking them to the reconstruction of the emperors' lives, developed alongside efforts to establish the most dependable chronology possible. This objective was pursued through the process of chronotaxis, namely the compilation of a chronological list, including the duration of each reign, of all those who had succeeded one another at the head of the Empire—an institution whose continuity could, at least in theory, be traced down to the present. Such is the case, for example, with Heinrich Pantaleon's *Chronographia* (1551) and Onofrio Panvinio's edition of the *Fasti et triumphi Romanorum* (1558), modelled on papal and episcopal chronotaxes and situated within an antiquarian tradition extending from Bartolomeo Platina to Cesare Baronio (Acciarino 2022, pp. 173–213).

During the early modern period, imperial biographies, the episodes they recounted, and, consequently, their artistic and iconographical representation played a central role in shaping the moral interpretation of the emperors themselves (Huijbers 2022). More than simply recording historical events, these narratives encouraged readers and viewers alike to evaluate the virtues and vices embodied by individual rulers, thereby influencing historiographical judgement and promoting particular models of political conduct as exempla either to emulate or to avoid. In this context, Tacitus's *Annales*, Plutarch, and Cassius Dio became fundamental sources and reference points for all scholars.

Portraits and historical cycles of the emperors were therefore never conceived exclusively as antiquarian reconstructions, but as tangible counterparts to the moral lessons conveyed by ancient historiography. In this respect, the opening dedication of Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* offers perhaps the clearest statement of the pedagogical value attributed to historical narration in general. By comparing the study of the deeds of great rulers to the elevated vantage point from which a painter observes the landscape in order to represent it faithfully, Machiavelli showed that knowledge of past princes provided an indispensable guide for understanding political action in the present. Imperial biographies thus became not only repositories of historical memory but also instruments of ethical reflection and practical governance (Martelli 1998).

This moral interpretation of Roman emperors reached one of its fullest expressions in Erasmus of Rotterdam's *Institutio principis christiani* (1516), dedicated to the future Emperor Charles V. Conceived as a manual for princely education, the treatise repeatedly invokes Roman emperors as moral paradigms through which the nature of legitimate authority could be defined (De Michelis Pintacuda 1987). Erasmus presents Augustus, Trajan, and Antoninus Pius as exemplary rulers, praising their moderation, justice, clemency, and devotion to the common good. Their greatness lay not merely in military achievement or political success, but in their understanding of imperial power as a public trust rather than a private possession. Conversely, emperors such as Nero, Caligula, and Domitian embody the degeneration of political authority into tyranny. Their cruelty, *libido dominandi*, moral corruption, and contempt for the law became warnings against the abuse of power, transforming Roman history into a repository of negative exempla. The distinction between the true prince and the tyrant thus rests not upon rank or hereditary legitimacy but upon moral character, a principle that profoundly shaped Renaissance political thought. Read alongside Machiavelli's appeal to the exemplary value of historical experience, Erasmus's treatise illustrates how imperial biography came to function simultaneously as historical narrative, ethical instruction, and a guide to the exercise of government.

Lit. Billanovich 1954; Weiss 1969; Gardenal 1975; De Michelis Pintacuda 1987; Bottari 1991; Innes 1997; Berté 2011; Fazion and Lorenzi 2019; Tomaiuolo 2021; Acciarino 2022; Huijbers 2022; Davenport and Malik 2024.

Damiano Acciarino

2.5.1 Torso of an Armoured Male Figure

First or second century CE
Marble
H. 130 cm; W. 69 cm; D. 35 cm
Findspot: Forum, Pula, 1988
Archaeological Museum of Istria, Pula, Inv. No. A-29837

This torso of an armoured male statue, carved from high-quality Pentelic marble, survives in two joining fragments broken at the hips. The figure was executed slightly larger than life-size. The head, now lost, was originally inserted separately into the torso, as indicated by the conspicuous conical socket preserved at the neck.

The figure is represented in motion. The right arm, now missing, was raised and extended forward, while the left arm, broken at the elbow, descended alongside the body and appears to have supported the military cloak (*paludamentum*). The dynamic pose suggests an official public image intended to convey authority and command.

The cuirass is anatomically modelled and devoid of relief decoration across the chest, emphasising the idealised musculature of the body beneath. Emerging beneath the cloak are the shoulder guards (*epomydes*),

