

The use of historical events

Student 2: High Merit

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For all of the public monuments analysed it can be confidently concluded that particular patterns are apparent in the way the emperors interpreted their

historical involvement. All are based on true events yet none tell the full truth. As Ann Kuttner speaks, they are “an instrument of propaganda”. They do not lie directly but just exaggerate events in order to put the emperor

② of interest in good light by flaunting their achievements and good character. It allows for the era that they

ruled to seem an ideal and successful time. Augustus was one of the first emperors to do this. He chose to

② depict an imperial procession which his “art embodies a politically motivated adaptation of tradition.” – Peter Siebler. He exaggerates this by incorporating the use of divinities and flourishing amounts of nature to create

and ideal world. The arch of Titus uses his battle of Jerusalem in which he was victorious (1). Trajan used his Dacian campaigns implying that he can conquer anything. This adds to his overall authority and strengthens his image as a powerful leader to the public and enemies. It depicts Trajan throughout most of the 150 scenes shown.

③ Realistically we know that it would have been unlikely for an emperor to be present each and every step of the way but when portraying himself to others he must seem his greatest. In the arch of Constantine,

the defeat of Maxentius is told having Constantine appear again victorious. All the historical events may be inaccurate but the audience knew the story, what they didn’t know was how great their emperor was

③ throughout the event. It is evident that as time went on there was a diminishing rate of realism and reality displayed in public monuments but still they fulfilled the purpose of showing the emperor positively.

Deifying and glorifying Romans had always had a strong bond with the gods. It was important to them to be linked with them in any way possible. They represented everything a human desires; power, immortality, unstoppable, respect and beauty. For anyone to truly create the image of being the ultimate emperor, it became a common occurrence to link with ones gods and deify themselves. Peter Siebler pointed out that

“Gods and personifications of abstract virtues become companions of real men,” meaning that with a human and god with a personal quota or relationship allowed them to be seen as their friend or a mutual exchange of respect present which is what every human wants. Augustus achieved this on the Ara Pacis through the use of

① many gods including Apollo. Since he is the god of the sun, a sundial was placed with the alter which coincidentally fell on Augustus’ birthday. This made it seem that he was such a worthy human being that a god had acknowledged him personally. Augustus also used images of Aeneas (ancestor related to goddess Venus) and Tellus who was Mother Nature. With her appearance upon his alter; an abundance of food and natural

② resources would be made available to the public thus making life great for all under his rule. Titus used Virtus, a female divinity who appeared to approve of his actions giving him an image of human perfection and give others an incentive to follow not oppose him. Trajan uses the winged victory figure and the river god Danubis who both appear to be giving divine sanction. Constantine also uses a winged figure giving him godly acceptance.

The different uses of propaganda

③ For all four of the monuments looked at, it is apparent that they all use propaganda in order for the emperor of interests favour but the manner in which they use it does slightly vary. On the Ara Pacis, Augustus is not a stand out figure. He only appears once and is off to one side surrounded by family members. The sculpture has made no attempt of singling him out. It is a very sly form of propaganda in which Augustus seems a very

② humble and modest ruler, not wanting attention and glory for his actions but just the happiness and well being of his people. Titus attempted to also hold this image. One of the main reliefs shows Titus upon a mighty eagle in which Mary Beard thinks Titus appears as a “victim of abduction opposed to a majestic hero.” He attempts a look of being humble and modest, like it is not his choice of his happening but it does not quite pull of the sincerity of Augustus’ representation. Trajan makes no attempt at a subtle use of propaganda. Firstly there is

② that originally there was a statue of himself situated upon Trajan’s’ column made of bronze. He wanted himself well known, seen and acknowledged as a great emperor. He also appears 59 times among the scenes in the column involved in a range of activities seeming a “lifted general above a mundane world”-Martin Siebler. This was a very blunt form of propaganda lacking the complexities of that on the Ara Pacis. The Arch of Constantine simply showed Constantine defeating his Roman enemy Maxentius, making he seem a skilled military leader and the one to follow. Scenes are shown in which Constantine is distributing money out to his people showing that not only is he a great military soldier but a compassionate person as well. The later 3 monuments all used the main focus of victories to exploit themselves to the public.