The Roman cuirass statue is one of a number of important honorific statue types in the ancient Greco-Roman world.\(^1\) The statues depict a military general or emperor in full ceremonial military costume and are representative of the way in which military victory was celebrated in civic life during the Roman era. The various symbolic pictorial displays presented on the breastplates provide a striking visual representation of the mythology of victory in the imperial context. “The result is a form of narrative similar to that found on Roman numismatic reverse types, which employs a combination of allegorical symbols, geographic personifications, and visual references to relay a message of imperial victory to the observer.”\(^2\) The imagery reflects the wider sphere of civic discourse in the Roman Empire, pictorially representing its values and ideology, especially in reference to the emperor. In the following article, I discuss first the role of the cuirass statues in the civic spaces of the Roman Empire, giving consideration to how their programmatic language might be understood by those to whom they were displayed, then I focus more specifically on imagery associated with Nero. In particular, portrait statues like the cuirass played an important role in establishing and maintaining client-patron relationships as a mechanism of social control. I then consider some possible relationships between the meaning carried by the cuirass statues as a sign system which uses the propaganda of imperial victory and divine sovereignty in contrast to Paul’s use of armour language.

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in Rom 13:12 and 1 Thess 5:8. Having established the role of cuirassed statues, I argue that in his use of armour language Paul employs vivid speech to create images in the minds of his listeners consistent with their lived experience of the Roman Empire and redirects them to consider the death of Jesus as a countersign of victory and triumph.

**THE ROLE OF THE CUIRASS STATUES IN THE CIVIC SPACES OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE**

Statues bearing the Roman cuirass are part of a wide range of civic art works designed to adorn cities in public magnificence across the Roman Empire. Most cuirass statues were displayed in the public civic context including the fora, market places, theatres and various temple and religious settings. Such were the number of statues in the civic sphere, they were often viewed and described as another population. Like other aspects of civic (and private) art and architecture, statues were closely linked to ideals of honour, benefaction and personal power. Paul Zanker outlines the way in which Caesar Augustus transformed the use of civic artwork from personal displays of honour and wealth by elite members of society into a means of renewal for the Roman state decimated by civil war at the end of the Roman Republic. Furthermore, under the imperium of Augustus, the discourse of civic art was transformed to reflect a new golden age under which the people of the empire could celebrate the resulting peace and prosperity. The scheme of symbolic imagery used in Augustan imperial art became the sign system

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3 Crucial to any study of the relationship between statues and Paul is the question of context. The need for New Testament interpreters to recognize diversity of imperial expression in different contexts throughout the empire, especially in regards to the “imperial cults,” has been addressed by Karl Galinsky, “The Cult of the Roman Emperor: Uniter or Divider?,” in *Rome and Religion: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Imperial Cult*, ed. Jeffrey Brodd and Jonathan L. Reed (Writings from the Greco-Roman World Supplements Series, 5; Atlanta: SBL, 2011), 1–21. See also the corresponding dialogue in the same edition.

4 Vermeule, “Hellenistic and Roman Cuirassed Statues,” 6. Private use of statues was also common however, for example, the famous Prima Porta statue of Augustus found in Livia’s villa near Rome (discussed further below).


by which the subsequent emperors of the Julio-Claudian dynasty and later imperial dynasties represented their ideals and power.\textsuperscript{8}

The imagery inaugurated during the Augustan era reflects a reformulation of the ideas of status already used in the late Republic. Sign systems in clothing—commonly portrayed in statuary—already played a part in locating identity, and expressed ideas of authority, wealth and social stratification.\textsuperscript{9} Three main representations of clothed statuary included civic dress (the \textit{toga} and \textit{stola}), the heroic nude, and the cuirassed statue. Where the nakedness of heroic nude statues connected the viewer and the viewed with divine power, statues depicting civic and ceremonial clothing celebrated

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\item \textsuperscript{9} Variations on the toga marked distinctive aspects of rank, status and stations of authority within those citizens who were permitted to wear the toga. This is especially so of military commanders who qualified for a Triumph, who wore the most striking form of public dress available: the \textit{vestis triumphalis}—the \textit{tunica palmata} (a purple tunic with gold palm branches embroidered into it) covered by a \textit{toga picta} (a purple toga emblazoned with gold stars). Jonathan C. Edmondson, “Public Dress and Social Control in the Late Republic and Early Imperial Rome,” in \textit{Roman Dress and the Fabrics of Roman Culture}, ed. Jonathan C. Edmondson and Alison Mary Keith (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 27–28. See also Judith Lynn Sebesta and Larissa Bonfante (eds), \textit{The World of Roman Costume} (Wisconsin Studies in Classics; Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001).
\end{itemize}
the achievements of the elite and powerful whose images provided an ongoing exemplar of civic benefaction and virtue. These virtues included, but were not limited to virtus, clementia, pietas and concordia.\textsuperscript{10}

Public representations of these statues were woven into features of Roman life, helping to enhance the authority of the elite, and hence contributed towards cohesion and public order.\textsuperscript{11} As such, identity and clothing formed a significant aspect of social discourse in the Roman world. Derivation from the customs of dress in the civic sphere posed a threat to these ideas and opened individuals up to full-scale assaults on their moral character (particularly in the context of political and judicial rhetoric).\textsuperscript{12} The imagery in part defined civic identity by providing exemplars of Roman life, while at the same time offering a reflection of it, through iconic representation of virtues, values and ideals embodied by those who wore civic garb or aspired to Roman sensibilities. A sentiment reflected by the Apostle Paul’s own use of clothing imagery, including the “put on” (ἐνδύω) language in Rom 13 and 1 Thess 5.\textsuperscript{13}

Portrait statues of triumphant emperors were also an important part of the iconographical program, expressing a consistent theme of peace, victory

\textsuperscript{10} These virtues expressed a set of ideals for emperors and leading men of Rome to fulfil, the exemplar for Roman public life. See Tonio Hölscher, The Language of Images in Roman Art, trans. Anthony Snodgrass and Annemarie Künzl-Snodgrass (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 88–89. Neil Elliott uses these virtues as chapter headings in The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire (Paul in Critical Contexts; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

\textsuperscript{11} Drawing on the work of Wilfred Nippel, Edmondson sees four important mechanisms of control: 1) the discipline and respect for military commanders inculcated through military service; 2) the far reaching extent of the patria potestas, the legal power of life and death over family members that the male head of the household (paterfamilias) possessed; 3) the almost sacred bonds between patrons and clients in Roman society; and 4) the influence of state religion, especially since the state’s priests were at the same time its magistrates and senators and since so much of public life took place in an overtly religious setting. Wilfried Nippel, Public Order in Ancient Rome (Key Themes in Ancient History; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), quoted in Edmondson, “Public Dress and Social Control,” 37.

\textsuperscript{12} Edmondson, “Public Dress and Social Control,” 35. Nero, in particular, is critiqued for his excessive and effeminate attire (e.g. Suet, Ner. 51).

and salvation. Images of emperors alongside their vanquished or diplomatically subdued enemies gave a very public focus on the value of military victory, subsequently reinforcing the importance of the emperor in achieving peace within the civic space. Depicting a complex relationship between the gods, the event of victory and the public exemplars, reinforced this mythology of victory. A statue, for example, among the reliefs of the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias, displays a goddess or Nike in the act of inscribing a cuirass statue above a captured foe. The relief celebrates the very act of inscribing imagery onto a cuirass. The connection between divine blessings associated with victory and the identity and achievements of the wearer were a key aspect of the iconographical program of cuirassed statues. While cuirass statues were found in various temples—some associated with what we might call imperial cults like the Sebasteion, and some temple settings in Rome—the cuirass is found just as prolifically in civic contexts outside the temple precincts of the empire. For example, Simon Rice notes that in Asia Minor cuirassed statues designed for use in a temple form a small proportion of the whole body of imperial cuirassed statues.

Honouring of a general’s achievement in pacifying and subduing the foreign dangers at the boundaries of the Roman Empire was crucial to the ideology of peace represented on the cuirass statues. These honours included images incorporating victory and the importance of Rome over other people groups. The Prima Porta statue of Augustus is perhaps the most recognizable image demonstrating this phenomenon. For additional commentary on the statue, see Karl Galinsky, Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 155–64.

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15 See, for example, Canavan’s discussion on the body, where she indicates that the inscriptions on statues like the cuirass operate in complementary fashion with the head of the statue. “The identity is located in the head and affirmed and described by the body. The clothing chosen for the body constructs a visual identity congruent with the virtues and values.” Clothing the Body, 120–21.
18 For additional commentary on the statue, see Karl Galinsky, Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 155–64.
central being the return of Roman standards from the Parthians in 20 BCE. The iconography celebrating peace is portrayed by a number of images, including fertility (for example, a female image holding the *cornucopia* at the base of the breastplate—also commonly portrayed as vine imagery on other cuirassed statues) and divine benefaction (images of the gods at the top of the cuirass). The central image depicts the return of standards lost in battle to the Parthians. This is an important event in the reign of Augustus, redressing the shame of a past defeat. Moreover, there are two other key images which appear to represent pacified peoples (thought to be female personifications of Gaul and Hispania). The statue is an imposing yet rich visual feast depicting Augustus standing with his left hand holding a spear, and in the right perhaps the recaptured standard.\textsuperscript{19} The Prima Porta statue preserves the “earliest example of a decorated breastplate to celebrate a specific event from Roman history, and it does this, moreover, through a complex iconographical program.”\textsuperscript{20} Representing what is more an example of diplomatic victory, it shares ideas with many other statues which represent the pacification of enemies at the boundaries of the empire, demonstrating a world in which the dangerous margins—especially the Parthians in the east—had been controlled.

Although the iconographic depictions of pacified barbarians and captives find their fullest expression in the Flavian and later dynasties of the empire, they are a striking element of Roman art found in the Julio-Claudian period as well.\textsuperscript{21} Images of humiliated captives, mourning women, trophies from battle, and symbolic imagery deploying mythological representations, provide iconographic connections to the geographical region in which peace had been secured. In many ways these images demonstrate a significant fear within the psyche of the Roman people towards various ethnic groups at the

\textsuperscript{19} Zanker, *The Power of Images*, 189.
\textsuperscript{20} Gergel, “Costume as Geographical Indicator,” 196.
\textsuperscript{21} Gergel, “Costume as Geographical Indicator,” 197. The pervasive nature of this adoption of Roman ideology is clearly represented in Vermeule’s suggestion that in the period ca. 90–150 CE, no provincial theatre was complete without cuirassed statues of the imperial family; “Hellenistic and Roman Cuirassed Statues,” 7. While there was a significant proliferation of the statues under the Flavian Dynasty (69–96 CE) and later under the emperors Trajan (98–117 CE) and Hadrian (117–38 CE), this article focuses mainly on those statue types thought to be located within the civic sphere prior to and during the ministry of Paul and draws on imagery from some later statues only where they reflect commonality with earlier examples.
edges of the empire who were deemed dangerous. In the eyes of the Romans, these so-called dangerous and subversive threats at the borders could only be controlled through their subjugation, either through conquest, or through Romanization.

Triumphal iconography is, of course, part of a larger culture of triumph propagated through the empire. The Roman Triumph—an extravagant procession through Rome—is the highest honour a general can receive for military victory. The language of triumph is, on the other hand, not reserved solely for the procession but relates to a range of civic representations of celebrating and interpreting victory, including construction and display of civic statuary, public buildings, triumphal arches and so on. Both the arch and the cuirassed statue, however, are representative of an ongoing language of victory that transcends the Triumph. Statues, for instance, remain in the civic sphere; they can be placed in many locations across the empire honouring the impact of a victory with increased permanence, whether or not a specific Triumph has occurred. Mary Beard’s recent work on the variation in records of the Roman Triumph is illustrative of the complex reality of both


23 Responses towards Rome sit on a spectrum. On the one hand, acceptance takes on a range of forms of adoption incorporating various traits from Roman civic life, imitating the elite and powerful in Rome through costume and dress in the civic sphere (e.g., the toga or stola). On the “Romanization” of the Britons, see Tacitus Agricola 21. For a nuanced commentary on the adaptation of Roman culture, see Richard Hingley, Globalizing Roman Culture: Unity, Diversity and Empire (London: Routledge, 2005) and David J. Mattingly, Imperialism, Power, and Identity: Experiencing the Roman Empire (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 203–45. Perhaps the most extreme manifestation of “Romanization” was the cultic worship of the emperor in the eastern parts of the empire, for example, Aphrodisias in southwest Turkey. For a description of the emperor cult, including the limits of its application outside of Rome, see Ittai Gradel, Emperor Worship and Roman Religion (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). On the other hand, the rejection of Rome—through the refusal to succumb to Roman authority—is seen in the full-scale civil disobedience of the Jewish Revolt 66–70 CE, which in many ways perpetuated the fear of trouble in the Eastern frontier. Ironically, in quelling the revolt, a foundation through which the Flavian Dynasty inaugurated its reign was given. For the implications of imperium on the lower classes of the empire and those communities on its edges of empire, see Keith R Bradley, Slavery and Rebellion in the Roman World: 140bc–70bc (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989) and Neil Faulkner, Rome: Empire of Eagles (Harlow: Pearson, 2008).

24 In this article I use the proper noun Triumph for the ceremonial event, to differentiate the event from the more general signifying language of triumph.
its depiction and function in the ancient Roman world. On the contradictory reports of the fate of captives at the end of the Triumph, she notes:

The repeated stories in ancient writers of violence not being wreaked on the poor triumphal victims, and their generalisations about normal practice or references to the executions that took place “on other occasions,” undoubtedly served to keep the idea of the death of the captive high on the cultural agenda of the Roman triumph. … The economy of violence and power is extremely complex, and it operated in Rome, as elsewhere, by fantasy, report, threat, and denial as much as it did by the sword or noose itself. … The clever cultural paradox is that Pompey could become renowned for mercy by not doing something that was rarely done anyway.²⁵

The irony of the dramatic propagation of imperial statues throughout the empire, the expansion of the imperial cult and the desire to honour the emperor, is that the Triumph as a recorded civic ceremony within Rome becomes exceedingly rare.²⁶ In this context triumphal iconography like the cuirass became more important than the ceremony of Triumph as a means by which the victory and associated deeds, honour and power of the emperor was expressed and experienced through civic rituals and political imagery of the empire.

Statues also formed a key part of the dynamic that engaged the participants in civic ceremonies. In the context of temples and civic settings, statuary were not seen as static relics, but rather, as part of a symbolic environment in which the Roman world centred so much meaning.²⁷ One extreme of engagement with political art included the physical veneration

²⁶ Beard, *The Roman Triumph*, 69–70. A feature of the later part of Caesar Augustus’s rule is his refusal to permit a series of offers for Triumph for his family members and himself. *The Roman Triumph*, 300.
of statues, kissing, touching, carrying and so on. Similarly, we can see the way imperial statues were very much part of the civic-religious rituals of the spaces they inhabited though various functions the statues played in such rituals, for example, as mediums for divine portents and evocations to the emperor, including payment of fines to imperial images and, surprisingly, even asylum. Statues were also used commonly in processions where their movement heightened the focus on the image being carried—perhaps as a way of reinvigorating an image in the public eye so it did not drift into obscurity.

At the other end of the spectrum is damnatio memoriae, which includes the destruction of monuments, portrait statue types and names from inscriptions of important members of society including emperors and their families who had fallen into public disgrace—most notably Nero. Damnatio can be likened to the “direct antithesis of consecration, the process

28 As Louise Revell notes, “[r]epresentations of deities provided a further means of constructing such knowledge: they formed a physical reality through which worshippers could conceptualise the divine as embodied beings, with their own attributes and histories.” Roman Imperialism and Local Identities (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 116. Where imperial statues embodied aspects of divine identity or attributes, the potent connections would have been obvious and intended for the viewer. Statues contributed to the wider language of power, also seen in the form of imperial buildings. See further Valérie Huet, “Stories One Might Tell of Roman Art: Reading Trajan’s Column and the Tiberius Cup,” in Art and Text in Roman Culture, ed. Jaš Elsner ed. John G Younger; (Cambridge Studies in New Art History and Criticism; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 9–31; and Paul Rehak, Imperium and Cosmos: Augustus and the Northern Campus Martius (Wisconsin Studies in Classics; Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

29 For example, Simon Price notes that imperial statues served as places of refuge, not only in Rome but also in the provinces, and gives several examples including a governor at Aspendus in Pamphylia who was mobbed by a crowd irate at a corn shortage and who took refuge at the imperial statues. Also a slave “whose case came before Pliny as governor of Bithynia-Pontus, had gained safety from his pursuers by suppliancy at statues of Trajan. This was an extraordinary development whereby slaves, the most defenseless section of society, could hope to escape from the inhumanity of their masters through the very present help of the emperor.” Such was the practice that it “was sufficiently important to worry prospective buyers of slaves who might be reassured by the seller that the slave was ‘neither a gambler, nor a thief, nor had he ever fled to (Caesar’s) statue’ [quoting Ulpian in Digest xxi 1, 19, 1].” Rituals and Power, 192.

30 Peter Stewart cites rituals such as funerals, opening of circus contests and other civic ceremonies including the Triumph. Statues in Roman Society, 151.

by which an emperor was declared an official God of the Roman state.”\(^\text{32}\) Furthermore, an emperor’s head could simply be changed from one statue to another like “a visual cannibalism in which the likeness of the successful ruler displaces that of his defeated predecessor.”\(^\text{33}\) This reflects incongruence between portrait and statue iconography where the replacement of the statue’s identity (head) disrupts the congruence between the portrait bearer and the imagery on a statue. The replacement of portraits on imperial statues demonstrates a multivalent relationship with the iconography where the honour portrayed through the armour is transferable and represents one way the identity of an individual emperor was embedded within the corporate identity of the empire.\(^\text{34}\)

The different uses of statues reveal how they had various psychological effects upon the citizens of the empire. As Peter Stewart notes, the descriptions by ancient authors of people’s engagement with statues “lead us to believe that images themselves were exercising a powerful psychological effect on those who experienced them, and that the beholders’ actions are the consequence and symptom of their effect.”\(^\text{35}\) Further, he notes that the reality of anthropomorphic images in the ancient, and even modern, world, “whether portraits or cult images, frequently have the power to provoke respectful, hostile, violent, even erotic responses, many of which have tended in the past to remain on the margins of ancient history or art history.”\(^\text{36}\)

Perhaps the most important aspect of statues in the civic spaces of the Roman Empire is their collective use in forming the social discourse of reciprocity. Here we see that Roman portrait statues modified their use in earlier Hellenistic settings. Unlike Greek statues with a low base which “often left the viewer and statue standing on almost the same level, preserving the illusion of a confrontation between real people,” many Roman statues were “isolated on a pedestal usually bearing a prominent inscription, could

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\(^{32}\) A visual equivalent of the literary vilification of “bad” emperors—the direct antithesis of consecration. Varner, Mutilation and Transformation, 6.

\(^{33}\) Varner, Mutilation and Transformation, 4.


\(^{35}\) Peter Stewart, The Social History of Roman Art, ed. P. A. Cartledge and P. D. A. Garnsey; (Key Themes in Ancient History; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 127–30, esp. 130.

\(^{36}\) Stewart, Social History of Roman Art, 130.
be seen only as a commemorative token, a *signum* on a *monumentum.*”\(^{37}\)

Though imperial portrait statues “purport to relay the real appearance of an individual … under the cover of this inherent claim to veracity they convey tendentious messages about the sitter’s social position, alleged virtues and qualities, public persona, and personality.”\(^{38}\) As well as providing honour for previous action, statues provided a promise of ongoing meritorious service to the people, including the ongoing provision of peace and security in the case of statues representing a military tribune. As a gift, a statue and its public use (primarily display) set up certain sets of obligations between the honorary, the people and the state. Critically, Jeremy Tanner states that, “in the case of an honorific portrait statue, the appropriate response is an attitude of sustained gratitude manifested in continued meritorious action on behalf of the state.”\(^{39}\) The effect creates solidarity between the city or state and the honorary because of the impact of their service.

It is within this context of client-patron relationships, that we begin to see more fully how the influence of cuirassed statues functioned within the communities in which they were erected. The client-patron system was a key mechanism for Roman influence throughout the empire and the late Republic. Tanner describes the way in which “the extension of clientela relationships to communities was a means by which Rome could incorporate and control new subjects, without extending to them the jealously-guarded privilege of citizenship.”\(^{40}\) Further, he notes:

As Rome’s network of alliances expanded, and she became increasingly independent of the support of any one community, so, inversely, subject communities became increasingly dependent upon Rome, and upon patrons as the means of access to central decision-making bodies at Rome in order to secure the material benefits of membership in the Empire, such as support against hostile neighbours or resolution of legal disputes, and protection from the more outstanding abuses of imperial rule.\(^{41}\)

The cuirass made an important contribution to the idea of safety within the client-patron system because it added specific ideas to the overall

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38 Stewart, *Social History of Roman Art*, 89.
40 Tanner, “Portraits, Power and Patronage,” 36.
41 Tanner, “Portraits, Power and Patronage,” 36.
contribution of the emperor as the provider of peace and prosperity to the empire. Public commemoration and celebration of divine honours that had been bestowed upon the Augustan family were central to most cities of the empire.\textsuperscript{42} Relationships between emperors and cities across the empire built upon this tradition, imitating Augustan imagery in public works, statuary and inscriptions.\textsuperscript{43} Importantly, James Harrison has highlighted the link between politically loaded terms in Paul’s First Letter to the Thessalonians and their presence in civic epigraphic material.\textsuperscript{44}

While there are examples of cuirass statues displayed on their own in a prominent singular position, in many instances the cuirass statue type was located either as part of a larger family group, or part of larger narrative friezes displaying important scenes from an individual’s life.\textsuperscript{45} By placing a statue within the context of a wider familial group, the honour gained in military service, leadership and victory is viewed as part of a wider dynastic setting. Military service, generating peace through victory, then complements the wider achievements that a family has gained.\textsuperscript{46} In more localised settings this may refer to the benefactions of a family to a particular city or connect the viewers to the dynastic benefaction of the imperial family.\textsuperscript{47}

The potent images used in these statues “were combined in an expressive culture which sought to bring out (both aesthetically and psychologically)

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item For a comprehensive catalogue of dynastic portraiture and their deployment, see Charles Brian Rose, \textit{Dynastic Commemoration and Imperial Portraiture in the Julio-Claudian Period} (Cambridge Studies in Classical Art and Iconography; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
\item Stewart notes that for honorific statues of individuals to be effective, they were often placed in the most public locations, forcing the milling crowds almost to walk around them. His prime example is that of the cuirass statue of Holconius in Pompeii, which was excavated \textit{in situ} on a junction on the Via dell’Abbondanza; \textit{Statues in Roman Society}, 136.
\item The military champion portrayed in the cuirassed statues as a symbol of corporate identity in Roman citizenship clearly runs counter to the “crucified” champion of Paul’s gospel, who embodies the corporate identity within Paul’s ecclesial settings. The shame of crucifixion could perhaps be likened to the shame of losing in Roman warfare where only victory counts. Hölscher, “Images of War,” 14.
\item For a localised example, see the portrait statue group found near the \textit{Bouleuterion} in Aphrodisias. Christopher H. Hallett, “A Group of Portrait Statues from the Civic Centre of Aphrodisias,” \textit{American Journal of Archaeology} 102, no. 1 (1998): 59–89.
\end{enumerate}
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the patriarchal protectiveness and salvific potency of the patron-soter, whilst evoking corresponding feelings of security in grateful subjection on the part of the Greek clients.”

The use of statues in the provinces highlights the important social connections with Rome. Even though images of the emperor and his family are still present in many civic centres, Stewart notes the room for petty nobility to be “brought into the proximity of the emperor.” Here those who have no possibility of being part of Rome’s elite are able to use “statuary honours in Imperial towns” to “mimic those of the metropolis.” The effect of statues in Roman towns collapses “the distance between the emperor and the local nobility, collectively embodying but also telescoping the social and political hierarchy of the empire.”

The combined effect of statues described above was to build a narrative of divine sponsorship, enforce the value of victory, the importance of Rome’s ongoing support and provide a popular set of images for the people of Rome to locate their own identity. The irony of dependency which existed in the patron-client system, and subsequently the ideology of protectiveness embedded within it (especially through the various representations of subdued barbarians), is that most issues of safety which would affect a community revolved around domestic issues, banditry and so on, rather than those “others” on the edge of the empire. It is revealing, however, that the imagery ultimately served as a critical mechanism of control, entered into voluntarily and deliberately by the elite who ruled the provincial cities of the empire. The memory of victory, and the narrative of pacification and conquest, required gratefulness towards the emperor and his local representatives. To think otherwise would represent a subversion of the natural order of the gods and the stability of the empire which had been legitimized in the crushing of threats to the empire.

The clear correlation in the narrative portrayed on the Augustan statues—including the cuirassed statues of Augustus and his dynastic successors—and those on the reliefs and statues created by the general populace form a powerful set of signifiers for self-identification and

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48 Tanner, “Portraits, Power and Patronage,” 45.
49 Stewart, Statues in Roman Society, 159.
50 Stewart, Statues in Roman Society, 159.
51 Stewart, Statues in Roman Society, 159.
52 Paul Zanker, Roman Art, trans. Henry Heitmann-Gordon (Los Angeles: Getty, 2010), 84.
53 Zanker, Roman Art, 84.
embodiment for people in the Roman world. The deployment of armour language by Paul in Rom 13:12 and 1 Thess 5:8—effectively a cuirass embodying alternate values—in this visually rich and potent civic context, provides an obvious alternative value system to the Roman world. This is accentuated and embodied further in the call to put on the Lord Jesus Christ—the crucified messiah.

**Imperial Imagery and Nero**

If there are any connections to be made between the contexts of the Pauline correspondence and the imperial narrative, Nero is particularly important and relevant. Contemporaneous to a period of Paul’s ministry, Nero’s initial rule was seen as a reinvigoration of the Augustan age of peace. During this time the iconographic material, like cuirassed statues from the Neroic age, provides a somewhat surprising focus on militaristic themes. Furthermore, Neronian imagery needs to be viewed alongside similar Augustan imagery as it operated together with and built upon earlier material, even as Nero placed his own distinctive marks on the use of imperial images.

Though the use of the cuirass in imperial portraiture developed over time to become more standardized, often images inscribed on statues from the first two imperial dynasties can be traced to specific battles or to events in the life of the honoree. This is in contrast to cuirassed statues found in the late Roman Empire where the reuse of statues was common, as was the

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55 Philip Matyszak, *The Sons of Caesar: Imperial Rome’s First Dynasty* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2006), 250. The ancient literature around Nero is mostly polemical (e.g. Cassius Dio, Suetonius and Tacitus, Josephus cf. *Jewish Antiquities* 20.8.3), portraying him as an archetypal figure that threatened the empire through his personal character and political failures. As such, many scholars have sought either to nuance the negative portrayal or in some way redeem Nero. In addition to Matyszak, see further Edward Champlin, *Nero* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Stephen Dando-Collins, *The Great Fire of Rome: The Fall of the Emperor Nero and His City* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2010); and David Shotter, *Nero Caesar Augustus: Emperor of Rome* (Harlow: Pearson, 2008). Nero was viewed positively in the east of the empire, see, for example, R. R. R. Smith’s discussion of the imperial reliefs at Aphrodisias, although signs of damnatio memoriae are evident in the removal of Neronian inscriptions below the reliefs while the images remain; “The Imperial Reliefs from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 77 (1987): 88–138, esp. 118. In addition, many other images of Nero were surprisingly stored away or sometimes even left on public display. Varner, *Mutilation and Transformation*, 67–81.
deployment of more standardized forms. A pre-Augustan example can be seen in a portrait statue group found near the Bouleuterion in Aphrodisias, where one member of the group is depicted in a full cuirass. The statue is perhaps associated with the support Aphrodisias gave to Laodicea in 88 BCE, or against Brutus and Cassius later in the Roman civil war. The statue is similar in style to a Neronian statue currently housed in the Archeological Museum in Istanbul Turkey. The statues represent standard field-ceremonial cuirasses. A knotted cingulum (girdle) binds both cuirasses, and two pendant griffins inscribed on the breastplate face each other. The breastplate of the Neronian statue from Istanbul was originally painted gold and the lower part of the tunic was painted rose making it a particularly striking artefact. It is also conspicuous by its inscription Νέρωνα Κλαύδιον θεοῦ Κλαυδίου Καίσαρος φίλον [Nero Claudius, son of the Divine Caesar Claudius]. Nero and the Senate had divinized Claudius shortly after his death. The inscription appears to make an indirect claim to divinity through Nero’s adoptive father. The statue is perhaps indicative of the kind of honours provided in Nero’s early career as emperor in the eastern parts of the empire.

56 Richard Gergel describes the way that into the late Empire breastplate compositions lose their sense of specificity. “No longer embellished with references to particular victories, breastplate iconography resorts, more and more, to standardized types that celebrate in generalized fashion the military successes of the ever-victorious emperor and the eternal glory of Rome.” “Costume as Geographical Indicator,” 206.


60 Vermeule, Roman Imperial Art, 389.

61 See also the inscription “from the Temple of Apollo Ptoios at Acraephia in Boeotia which includes and responds to Nero’s grandiose decree granting freedom to all the Greeks. In response to this unprecedented gift the boule and demos awarded divine honours. The altar of Zeus the Saviour is to be dedicated to the emperor with a new inscription: ‘To Zeus Eleutherios [‘the liberator’] Nero; and statues—agalmata—of ‘Nero Zeus Eleutherios’ and the ‘goddess Augusta Messalina’ are to be installed in the temple of Apollo Ptoios along with the ancestral gods … Nero is to be called ho kurios (‘the lord’—as is the Lord God in the New Testament) and the New Helios—a divine title with earlier Roman and Helenistic Parallels”. Stewart, Statues in Roman Society, 171.
It may also be reflective of military conflicts, with the Parthians in Armenia in the mid to late 50s CE, that defined this part of Nero’s rule.

The iconography of the Augustan golden age focused on the prosperity of the empire achieved as a result of the victory of Augustus in the civil war. Images of the gods, wealth and fertility were used to cultivate an awareness whereby the citizens of the empire could see themselves as recipients of this gift. We have already noted the way in which statues and other honours were produced by members of the senate and other elite, wealthy families, and by the cities of the empire who, with competitive fervour, sought to honour the emperor.62 Nero’s patron status made him no different and the military crisis in Armenia appears to be a significant point through which to honour the emperor with cuirass statues in his early to mid career. Importantly, Jaś Elsner notes that on the archaeological evidence for Nero’s building programs—allowing for the retrospective barrage of polemic from ancient historians—there is little that can be construed as scandalous.63 Like all Caesars, Nero continued the Augustan building program through “the actual construction of large numbers of prestige buildings and the careful public record of whom these buildings were inaugurated by.”64 Buildings, which “were the most direct, visual and experiential evidence of the emperor’s activities,” marked the definition of the principate—a pattern which no emperor could fail to emulate.65 “The pattern of imperial building became—like that of imperial portraiture—one of emulation, imitation and improvement.”66 Elsner describes the continuities between Nero and other emperors in iconographical representations by presenting on the obverse of their coins earlier monuments as well as those set up by Augustus:

62 Although note that the portrait image itself would be officially sanctioned. See further Rose, *Dynastic Commemoration*, 51.
64 Elsner, “Constructing Decadence,” 114.
65 Elsner, “Constructing Decadence,” 114.
66 Elsner, “Constructing Decadence,” 114.
For instance a copper coin of Nero issued in Lyons, the main mint in the west of the Empire, shows Augustus’ *Ara Pacis* on the reverse. Here not only was an important Augustan monument being associated with Nero, but its particular thematic resonances (to do with peace) were significant.\(^{67}\)

Both Nero and his clients exploited these and other features of triumph language to display his authority and celebrate his achievements as emperor. For example, Edward Champlin discusses the startling extravagance following the unusual resolution to the invasion of the province of Armenia by the Parthians soon after the accession of Nero in 54 CE. The crisis was cut short by the withdrawal of the invaders before Rome could respond; nevertheless the Senate in turn gave Nero an *ovatio* (the lesser triumph):

> Public thanksgivings to the gods were decreed, and on the days of these supplications Nero was to wear the vestis triumphalis ... his statue was to be placed in the temple of Mars Ultor, of the same size as that of the God. Soon after, Nero ordered it proclaimed that because of the successes of Domitius Corbulo and his rival, Ummidius Quadratus, the governor of Syria [the military commanders in Armenia], laurel would be added to the *fasces* of the emperor. He was 17. The young Nero had undertaken no military action to warrant these marks of distinction—indeed, no one had.\(^{68}\)

This description of the Augustan forum imagery and its exploitation was particularly significant because the forum represented—through the commemoration of the Augustan familial connections—the ancestral and divine associations of Rome’s past. Zanker discusses at length the way in which iconographic representations were used to connect the Augustan dynasty with the foundations of Rome.\(^{69}\) The temple of Mars Ultor, the god of war, provided iconographical associations for Augustus between Venus

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\(^{67}\) Elsner, “Constructing Decadence,” 115.

\(^{68}\) Champlin, *Nero*, 216.

\(^{69}\) The imagery associated with this mythology is quite diverse and can be seen in representations on coins, and other iconographical representations. The mythology is also demonstrated in literary form in Virgil’s *Aeneid*.
and Mars. The temple was a cuirassed statue of the god—a marble copy of which exists today in the Museo Capitolino, Rome. The dominant feature of the breastplate is two griffins standing either side of a candelabra beneath which a vine spreads out in a symbol of fertility. Other symbols of fertility (cornucopia) are found on the shoulder straps. Zanker believes the combination of symbols, in conjunction with the fatherly figure, depicts a guardian of peace. The image type is repeated in a number of statues and appears to be one of the more standard representations which are modified through a number of subtle deviations on cuirass statues which use variations on the pendant griffins and the candelabras. For example, an almost exact copy of the breastplate is used in conjunction with the honorific statue of Holconius Rufus from Pompeii. Although some features of the statue differ—for example different footwear, an absence of shield and helmet, icons on the lappets (pteryges)—the similarities are connected through the most central elements of the Mars statue and would be visually obvious for any who had seen the original in the temple.

Ancestral imagery is also present on the Prima Porta statue. Zanker notes that although Augustus himself cultivated a more modest image through his commissioned portrait—perhaps the reason for commissioning the Mars statue instead—the “Prima Porta statue does not hesitate to celebrate the

70 Zanker, *The Power of Images*, 195–201. A statue of Augustus on a chariot was also incorporated in the Augustan forum where there were a number of statues parading great figures of Roman history approaching the temple of Mars. “By embedding himself in Roman history, Augustus guaranteed his own position as a figure who would be seen alongside the greatest.” Barbara Levick, *Augustus: Image and Substance* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2010), 218.


73 Gergel, “Costume as Geographical Indicator,” 194.


75 Stewart notes that the inscription (patron of the colony, priest of Augustus, tribunus militum a populo [military tribune of the people]) and graphic representations on the breastplate suggest a strong link with centre of political power. Further, the seemingly undignified location—a bustling thoroughfare—is perhaps the best place for an honorific statue in order to draw the attention of the crowds. Stewart, *Statues in Roman Society*, 137–38.
radiant conqueror and make clear reference to his divine ancestry.”76 For example, “his footwear, deliberately not that of a mortal, recalls the imagery of gods and heroes, while the Eros riding a dolphin is unquestionably an allusion to his ancestress Venus.”77 Another breastplate depicting similar cosmic associations to that of Prima Porta can be found on the cuirassed statue at Cherchel. The statue depicts the presentation of a half nude caesar being crowned by a Victory, and presenting a small Victoria to the figure next to him, probably Venus.78 The associations on the two statues show how the diplomatic victories achieved by Augustus were represented as evidence of divine blessing assuring peace. They are examples of the divine associations of his ancestry and centrepieces of his benefaction to the empire.79

Similar divine associations can be seen on a cuirassed statue of Nero, later cut to represent Domitian, in the Braccio Nuovo of the Vatican Museum.80 The stance of the portrait has several important and perhaps intentional similarities to the Prima Porta statue, most notably the hip mantle.81 The cuirass is mostly bare, emphasizing the naked chest shape of the breastplate and, with several specific features at the base of the cuirass (a cupid riding a bull, a nereid, a triton, and a dolphin), creates a cosmic iconographical program that is representative of dominion over the sea.82 The left hand of the statue is extended holding a globe alluding to Jupiter, the chief god of Rome. Similarly, a frieze from the Sebasteion in Aphrodisias—though the hands are broken off—depicts Nero with an extended arm holding a globe in his left hand and in the right a spear or sceptre.83 Importantly, the divine and ancestral associations shared by the Braccio Nuovo cuirass with other

79 Zanker notes that the “imagery of military glory, of the divinely sanctioned world order, or of civic peace and prosperity transcended everyday reality, filtered out the undesirable, and created a certain level of expectation, so that even setbacks would be accepted automatically and on faith as the prelude to a turn for the better.” *The Power of Images*, 237.
83 For commentary and a picture, see Smith, “Imperial Reliefs,” 127–30 and plate XXIV. The frieze is the only image of an emperor depicted in the Sebasteion wearing military attire; Rose, *Dynastic Commemoration*, 47.

David Janssen, *The Roman Cuirass Breastplate Statue and Paul’s Use of Armour Language in Romans 13:12 and 1 Thessalonians 5:8*
Augustan works can be seen as an attempt to draw specific links between the military success of Armenia in both 54 CE and later in 58 CE, the divine associations of the Julio-Claudians, and the onset of a new golden age for the empire—all despite the emperor’s lack of personal military experience.84

Apart from the affirmation of a new golden age, the Armenian crisis was also an important way to establish a source of military achievement for the emperor. From this early event in the life of Nero, we see that the association of the emperor with notions of military conquest and victory was not limited to the excesses often linked to his later career.85 The archaeological evidence for cuirassed statues in the reign of Nero is in fact astonishing—as evidenced by the reuse of the statues and their portraits by later emperors.86 Eric Varner argues that a survey of condemnation reveals a “surprising persistence of Neronian military imagery,” including reworked cuirassed images that suggest widespread Neronian innovation of triumphal art.87

Several important examples are revealing here. Firstly, a cuirassed statue of Nero in the Gregoriano Profano of the Vatican museum is inscribed with Helios leading quadriga in triumphant procession.88 The arrangement sits at the top of the breastplate to appear as if the four horses and chariot rider are coming directly at the viewer. Images of the quadriga in Roman triumphal art are synonymous with a victorious general.89 In particular, Fred Kleiner highlights the way in which numismatic representations of the quadriga, in the art representing Nero’s triumphal arch, bear a unique and special focus on the emperor adopted by subsequent emperors.90 The image of Helios on

84 Varner, Mutilation and Transformation, 57.
85 The literary data appears to collaborate this. Neil Elliott, in particular, advocates that the writings of Calpurnius Siculus (e.g. Eclogue 1:25–31 & 45–60) and Seneca (e.g. Clem 1:2–4, 11:3, 13.5) reflect the themes if not the actual speeches associated with the ascension of Nero to Emperor. See further, The Arrogance of Nations, 155.
86 For example, “over forty surviving statues which originally represented Nero have been re-carved into images of other emperors.” Varner, Mutilation and Transformation, 52.
87 Varner, Mutilation and Transformation, 11.
88 For an image, see “Cuirassed Statue of Nero or Germanicus,” marble statue located in the Vatican Museum, Museo Gregoriano Profano, Inv 9948, Photo FA2302-03, Arachne, http://arachne.uni-koeln.de/item/marbilder/3794337 (accessed Jun 1, 2013). For additional commentary, see Rose, Dynastic Commemoration, Cat 5, 4 pl 67.
89 In addition to the triumphal arch, the image was used in a number of contexts including coins and even private silverware, such as the Boscoreale Cups. Kuttner, Dynasty and Empire, 149–51.
the Gregoriano Profano cuirass above the horses has remarkable similarities to the image of Nero sitting above the *quadriga* with the chariot hidden behind found on the arch.\(^91\) The cuirass was originally located in the theatre at Caere. Inscribed below the image of the sun god, two Arimaspes—back to back, either side of a acanthus stalk—feed griffins. Though Varner dates the portrait to the later part of Nero’s reign, Richard Gergel suggests the associations with the east link it more closely to the Armenian campaigns.\(^92\) The scene is also reminiscent of another related theme on Neronian statues, the winged Victories around a candelabra.

Secondly, another group of statues support Varner’s assertion that “martial representations of Nero may have been especially susceptible to reuse under the Flavians, who all stressed their roles as military leaders.”\(^93\) Statues at the Louvre, Vaison and the Palazzo Colonna in Rome all represent statues from the Neronian era which have undergone alteration to represent portraits of different individuals. The Vaison statue—recut to Domitian—shows winged *Victoriae* building a trophy.\(^94\) The Louvre and Palazzo Colonna statues follow the same pattern; however, they also depict a conquered barbarian kneeling in submission, hands bound behind his back looking up at two *Victoriae* who assemble trophies from battle.\(^95\) Each of these cuirasses represents the borrowing of triumphal imagery from Neronian artefacts by later emperors.

Like all triumphal imagery of the emperors, militaristic iconography from the reign of Nero shows how representing victory was seen as an important social value within the Roman world. The related imagery, including the personification of virtues, an emphasis on civic values and other religious practices, helped to portray what it meant to be Roman.\(^96\) Imperial ideology communicated virtues in a number of ways, especially through coinage, and it is of no surprise to see similar elements on the cuirass

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91 For a reconstruction of the arch, see Kleiner, *The Arch of Nero*, plate XXII.
94 For a description and image, see Rose, *Dynastic Commemoration*, 131–32, plate 69.
96 See for example, Galinsky’s discussion in *Augustan Culture*, 80–89. For an example of the written honours (virtues) inscribed below the statues, see Stewart, *Statues in Roman Society*, 168–69.

David Janssen, *The Roman Cuirass Breastplate Statue and Paul’s Use of Armour Language in Romans 13:12 and 1 Thessalonians 5:8*
Tonio Hölscher notes the way in which “the overwhelming superiority and power of the emperor is demonstrated” in Roman statues “not so much by physical vigour as by representative attributes and gestures.”

For example, the “Augustus from Prima Porta and from the Via Labicana” represent “Imperial qualities, such as auctoritas and dignitas, virtus and pietas.” These virtues “are demonstrated by significant equipment (the elaborate cuirass or the toga capite velato) and recognized gestures (the raised right hand or gestures of sacrifice). Such statues represent the claim and the posture of Roman world empire.”

Perhaps the most common idea communicated throughout, is the virtue of victory. Pendant griffins, sometimes personified as winged Victories assembling trophies, or even in the holding of a Victoria on the hand as a symbol of victories won—as seen in the Cherchel cuirass—all represent victory. In turn the features of the vine and other images of fertility are associated with Pax (peace) and other related deities; so too with the deified figures often seen above the central images on cuirass. The deployment of these types within Neronian iconography appears to operate within a very natural order. However, there is a persistence of triumphal imagery among Neronian statues that indicates a very interesting focus on militaristic art during his reign—especially in light of his comparatively light personal engagement in campaigns and wars. Furthermore, Nero’s approach to military spectacle leads Champlin to conclude that:

The cheapening of triumphal vocabulary and paraphernalia, the divorce of these attributes from triumph itself, their assignment to purely civilian non-combatants, the general mixing of military and civilian, and the ready acquiescence, even spontaneous enthusiasm, of the senate and people of Rome: all help us to understand several extraordinary episodes [of Nero’s life].

The use of military language by Paul in this context of heightened civic discourse obsessed with themes of victory—inaugurated by Augustus and

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100 Hölscher, “Images of War,” 12.


102 Champlin, Nero, 217.
accentuated by Nero and his clients—provides significant possibilities for potential engagement with the imperial narrative.\textsuperscript{103} To what extent Paul’s armour language subverts the narratives represented in public art that were associated with the civic discourse of the Julio-Claudian dynasty under Nero and whether it can be construed as subversive or in fact anti-imperial is a question to which I will now turn.

**Mapping the Possible Meaning of the Subversive Re-description of Armour**

The intersection of Paul’s proclamation of the gospel with the imperial context described above is inextricably linked to the lived visual experience of his ecclesiai. In socio-rhetorical analysis, Vernon K. Robbins has argued that in addition to the classical emphasis on speech (logos) for interpreting texts, the visual nature of texts must also be considered.\textsuperscript{104} Rhetography, as Robbins describes it, refers to “graphical images which people create in their minds as a result of the visual texture of a text.”\textsuperscript{105} In classical rhetorical disciplines the rhetorical effect of vivid speech (ekphrasis) was to create images in the minds—or more formally “before the eyes”—of listeners in order to provoke an emotional response.\textsuperscript{106} Here descriptions could be used to involve an audience and make them feel sympathy towards something or to understand a particular speaker’s state of mind in a given situation.\textsuperscript{107}

\textsuperscript{103} Contrary to the claims of John M. G. Barclay, *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, II 275; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011). Specifically Chapters 18, “Paul, Roman Religion and the Emperor: Mapping the Point of Conflict,” and 19 “Why the Roman Empire Was Insignificant to Paul,” where, in particular, Barclay seeks to engage N. T. Wight’s reading of anti-Roman rhetoric in Paul’s letters. See also Seyoon Kim, *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), esp. 34–64, and Colin Finnie Miller, “The Imperial Cult in the Pauline Cities of Asia Minor and Greece,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (2010): 314–32. The prevailing argument throughout these critiques is the diversity or perhaps lack of uniformity in the imperial cult, and further, the propensity for Paul to critique all pagan practice in general rather than specifically the imperial cult or emperor. Certainly the imperial cults were diverse, but the presence of imperial statuary, coins and other images was all-pervasive.


\textsuperscript{105} Robbins, “Rhetography,” 81.


Rhetography refers to the dual process of: i) using vivid language to excite listeners in order to win them over to a particular argument, and ii) using speech which conjures visual imagery in the mind, evoking familiar contexts and encouraging listeners to think differently about them.\textsuperscript{108}

Vivid language serves as an important link between Paul’s rhetorical strategy as an act of persuasion and the role of images as an agent of control. Cuirassed statues sat well within a tradition in which visual images were used to evoke certain responses: the cuirass in particular called forth response towards those whose military achievements were seen as benefiting peace to the city, subduing those “outsiders” (barbarians) threatening Roman peace.\textsuperscript{109} Thus when Paul evokes language of armour in the civic space, the experience of the imperial cuirassed statuary might be more recognizable and portray more accessible meaning than the divine warrior in the Jewish Scriptures—especially if a Roman cohort is camped outside Thessaloniki, or on the plains of Philippi, or marching through the Via Egnatia. Paul had shared somewhat in the experiences of the church at Thessaloniki (e.g., 1 Thess 2:2; Acts 17:1–10), a significant administrative centre of Macedonia.\textsuperscript{110} Provincial cities with this kind of influence were particularly dependent on the benefaction of Rome.\textsuperscript{111} Likewise, Paul, who had not visited Rome, could count on a shared experience of imperial imagery with those Christians who lived at the centre of the empire.

\textsuperscript{108} Maier in particular applies this methodology, see \textit{Picturing Paul in Empire}, 28–31.

\textsuperscript{109} For a discussion of the relationship between Roman iconography, imagination and ancient rhetoric (especially its developments from the early to later Empire), see Onians, \textit{Classical Art}, 217–78.

\textsuperscript{110} Notably, a cuirassed statue at Thessaloniki supposedly of Hadrian has similar iconographical features to one from Zagreb from the time of Claudius revealing either continuity in the use of such images or invoking the success of Hadrian’s predecessor. D. V. Grammenos (ed.), \textit{Roman Thessaloniki} (Thessaloniki: Thessaloniki Archaeological Museum, 2003), 116–17. For an image of the Thessaloniki statue, see “Curiassed Statue of Hadrian,” marble statue of Hadrian in Curiass, \textit{ca.} 2nd CE, located in the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, Greece, Inv 1527+29, Photo Thess-261vos, \textit{Arachne}, http://arachne.uni-koeln.de/item/marbilder/2025481 (accessed Nov 21, 2013).

\textsuperscript{111} For discussions on the impact of this in Paul’s writings, see in particular the work of Craig Steven de Vos, \textit{Church and Community Conflicts: The Relationships of the Thessalonian, Corinthian, and Philippian Churches with their Wider Civic Communities} (SBL Dissertation Series, 168; Atlanta Scholars Press, 1999); Karl Paul Donfried, “The Cults of Thessalonica,” in \textit{Paul, Thessalonica, and Early Christianity} (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 21–48; and Harrison, “Imperial Gospel at Thessaloniki.” Many of the key civic structures that have been revealed in the archaeological restorations in Thessalonica date to the second century. This would not discount the use of statuary in the first century prior to the more significant architectural developments, which postdate Paul’s writing.
In the context of the Pauline communities, many Gentile Christians—who were mainly illiterate—may in fact have been more familiar with the Roman narrative of empire experienced through images of Nero and Augustus, than their developing understanding of the story of the Jewish God acting in this world through Jesus Christ. This is perhaps evident in some aspects of Paul’s rhetorical strategy to proclaim the gospel, which appears to intersect with the narration of empire as well as the visual propaganda expressed in part through statuary.

Several examples will serve to illustrate. For example, as in the Augustan and Neronian propaganda, Paul envisions a new age. Whereas Augustus’s “golden age” is launched by the ending of the civil war and his subsequent diplomatic and military victories (a sentiment reignited in Nero’s reign), Paul’s proclamation of the new age comes in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (e.g. 1 Thess 5:9-10; Gal 1:4; 1 Cor 1:30, 15:3–4; Rom 1:4, 3:21) and is marked by the nations’ entrance into the people of God by the Spirit (e.g. 1 Thess 1:5; Gal 3:1; Rom 1:5)—not their brutal subjugation, or their eager embodying of Roman ideals (Romanization). Rather, Paul insists to his ecclesiai that their citizenship (πολίτευμα) comes from heaven (Phil 3:20).

Paul also honours Jesus because he secures peace with God on a cross (Rom 5:1, 8:6, 14:17, 19, 16:20; 1 Cor 7:15, 14:33; Gal 5:22, 6:16; Phil 4:7, 9, 5:23, cf. Col 1:20), which differs from the imperial virtue of mercy (clementia)—exercised from a position of power—by demonstrating a willingness


113 Statues similar to the Prima Porta Augustus type have been found in the archaeological remains of Thessalonica. Though with a himation about him and holding a spear, the statue is notably without breastplate, posing with heroic nudity, evoking connections to Greek ideals divine power. Cf. Grammenos, *Roman Thessaloniki*, 109–18. For an image see “Statue of Augustus,” marble statue of Augustus in heroic nudity, ca. 1st century ce, located in the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, Greece, Inv 1065, Photo D-DAI-ATH-971-0631, Arachne, http://arachne.uni-koeln.de/item/marbilder/4604627 (accessed Nov 21, 2013).
to suffer for others. So too is Yhwh proclaimed as the God of peace (*shalom*) in a context where peace or *pax*—as absolute for victory—is deified. Paul condemns the violence of the imperial slogans in 1 Thess 5:3 (εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια [peace and security]) and uses the breastplate as a counter-image to portray the *ecclesia* as those who put on the virtues of Christ (1 Thess 5:8, πίστεως καὶ ἀγάπης [faith and love]).

Furthermore, Paul also draws on ancestral imagery from his own Jewish background, although in somewhat unexpected ways. For example, Paul uses ancestral images such as the Abrahamic covenant, Mosaic covenant, the law and prophets (especially towards the nations) in a manner which seeks to include the nations in contrast to the dominant ancestral images of the Julio-Claudian's and their subjugation of nations. In the case of Paul's armour language, it seems that a key image drawn upon for the breastplate is that of the divine warrior (e.g., Isa 59:17). Here the imagery associated with battle is essentially used peacefully to build an identity for

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114 Note in particular Beard’s comments on the economy of violence discussed above and, further, Maier’s discussion of Jesus’ self-emptying and death in Phil 2:6–11 as a carnivalesque engagement with the virtue of *clementia*; *Picturing Paul in Empire*, 47–51. For examples of the influence of honour on behaviour in Roman society and its relevance in Pauline theology and anti-imperial expression, see Joseph H. Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor in Roman Philippi: Carmen Christi as Cursus Pudorum* (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, 132; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); this is a reoccurring theme also in Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).


116 In this regard I agree with the assertions by Barclay that Paul’s first priority is not the imperial cult nor the emperor; however, there are clearly occasions when the proclamation of the gospel intersects with—and perhaps intentionally confronts—the ideology of Rome and its impact upon the wider cultural setting. In cases where confrontation does take place (e.g., 1 Thess 5:3) it is not convincing that any critique of the powers is merely a “general” condemnation of all things spiritually evil nor glossed over as “a specifically Roman, delusion,” lest Barclay also be guilty of the same generalizations he challenges in *Wright et al.* See Barclay, *Pauline Churches*, 375.


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the communities to which Paul writes.\(^{118}\) This is done over and against the context of cuirassed breastplates, which iconographically represent triumphs achieved through violent acts of battle or dominant political prowess. Though such images are especially vivid, they may have particular emotive connections for former Roman soldiers or slaves who have experienced first hand acts of violence or subjugation similar to those commemorated in imperial iconography.

The recent developments of “visual exegesis,” which scholars have used to see how Paul deploys his vocabulary in response to his Roman imperial context, continue to provide helpful ways forward for interpreting Paul’s letters.\(^{119}\) Most recently, using visual material of the Roman imperial context, Harry O. Maier has suggested that the complexity of Paul’s context is not reducible to a static monolithic vision of empire—which can only be


embraced or rejected—but an “irreducibly complex civic and political world.” For Maier the deployment of vocabulary, metaphor and imagery in Paul’s letters should be seen under the postcolonial notion of “hybridity,” in which the social arrangements of Paul’s context are engaged. That is, Paul is in negotiation with his environment, deploying language in various ways, to help his ecclesia negotiate their own context in relation to the proclamation of Jesus. The pervasiveness of imperial imagery reveals various aspects of the complex set of ideas operating at the centre of Roman civic life under Nero, including significant militaristic exemplars. The visually engaging nature of Roman clothing and its ubiquitous representation through statuary served as a model for virtue and behaviour in the civic sphere. This model is contradicted by the call of Rom 13:12, 14 to “put on” the “armour of light” and “the Lord Jesus Christ.” The armour language in 1 Thess 5:8 in particular appears to expresses virtues to describe the behaviour that a follower of Jesus must embody. Likewise in Rom 13:12 the armour is described in apocalyptic dualism—i.e., light compared to darkness. Though the apocalyptic backdrop reflects engagement with an eschatological discourse, the dualism between light and dark is served somewhat by the image of the cuirass. In picturing iconographical artefacts like statuary that serve to support the pagan claims of the empire—which sit in binary opposition to the claims of the gospel—the themes and motifs displayed are rejected. Likewise, reimagining the armour as light connects the behaviour of the ecclesia to their “new” identity in Christ. Just as the portrait statue groups of the imperial family locate the benefactions of a family in a divinely honoured dynasty, the call to put on the armour of God locates followers of Jesus within the divine blessing of the family of God. To “put on” Christ (Rom 13:14) and

120 Maier, Picturing Paul in Empire, 8.
121 Maier, Picturing Paul in Empire, 38.
122 Canavan highlights the importance of the relationship between social location and statuary in the Roman civic context in Clothing the Body, 115–33. See also Jim Harrison’s argument on Paul’s intentional use of imperial language in First Thessalonians to confront imperial ideology: “Imperial Gospel at Thessaloniki,” esp 82–88.
123 While a number of commentators note the contrasting relationship between Paul’s proclamation in Romans and the imperial context, none make a connection with the armour portrayed in the imperial context. See for example, Elliott, The Arrogance of Nations, 143–62; Jewett, Romans, 824; Ben Witherington III, Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 304–24; see also, Neufeld’s discussion on 1 Thess 5, which gives reference to the context of Rom 13 and the state, Put on the Armour, 73–93.
124 See, for example, Jewett, Romans, 818–28.
“live honorably as in the day” (Rom 13:13) is a way of identifying with the achievements of Jesus and the family of God.

So to do the virtues of “faith” and “love” pictured on the breastplate in First Thessalonians stand in contrast to the virtues of victory and domination expressed on cuirass statues across the empire—especially in relation to the pacified “nations.” In the context of Rom 13, the call to put on the armour comes after a discussion of civic responsibilities, which Paul wants his readers to continue to enact (respecting authorities and paying taxes). Such civic responsibilities were, however, part of the central elements of the Roman cultural system that reinforced the power, structure and dominance of the empire and the rule of the emperor, under whom these systems were embedded.

When Paul speaks of armour before his listeners in the context of civic activities and slogans—like the paying of taxes (Rom 13:1–7) or

125 Lopez, for instance, outlines the relationship between Paul’s use of the term “nations” (ἔθνη) in Galatians and its negative use in Roman imperial imagery and literature; Apostle to the Conquered, 1–25.


David Janssen, The Roman Cuirass Breastplate Statue and Paul’s Use of Armour Language in Romans 13:12 and 1 Thessalonians 5:8
condemning the *Pax Romana* (1 Thess 5:3)—I have suggested that the vivid language might evoke images of the personified virtues expressed on the statue types and the discourses commonly represented in cuirassed statuary throughout the empire. We might well imagine that the symbolic meaning of the armour—traditionally covered with various images of victory, humiliation of foes and/or trophies—has been replaced with an image or persona of Jesus who is pictured as being graphically, dare I say in Roman terms, defeated on the cross in Rom 3:21–26, 1 Thess 5:9–10 or even Phil 2:6–8. The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, however, reflects a crucial way in which the virtue of love functions (Rom 5:8), and is affirmed in the resurrection of Jesus. Such language appears to intentionally subvert the principles and authority of virtues portrayed by the iconographic representation of Roman armour. In turn the armour language provides an alternative set of virtues for the *ecclesial* to embody. The purpose of putting on the armour of light (Rom 13:12) or the breastplate of faith and love (1 Thess 5:8) is, therefore, not an invitation to identify as a soldier who will fight to bring some kind of salvation on behalf of Jesus (or in the name of, or in partnership with, Jesus), rather it is a call to identify with a set of virtues which are radically different to those commonly offered by Rome.

Peter Oakes categorizes four ways in which scholars believe that Christians engage with imperial language. Oakes’ categories can be paraphrased as coincidental parallel, uncritical borrowing, critical borrowing, and deliberate and subversive mimicry. Oakes believes that the deployment of imperial imagery is primarily world building in function rather than polemical, while as I have shown for Maier, a much more nuanced and dynamic approach to the deployment of civic imagery is possible. When we consider the way in which Paul’s armour language intersects with the visual narratives of Rome, however, in many ways there appear to be overlaps between Oakes’ categories (as I have summarized them) of

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129 The armour of Eph 6:10–18, by contrast, represents a development of the tradition, not least because of its highly liturgical form and its movement away from a direct counter-example of the virtues represented in the cuirassed breastplates to a model for Christian life. See, for example, Maier, *Picturing Paul in Empire*, 134–37. For a detailed discussion of the armour language in Ephesians, see Neufeld, *Put on the Armour*, 94–153.
“critical borrowing” and “deliberate subversive mimicry” of Roman imperial themes—which are both polemical and formational in describing important behaviour for Paul’s ecclesiai. In light of this, perhaps notions of parody, irony and catachresis (i.e., the deliberate misuse of words to give them new meaning) are the best way forward in understanding Paul’s use of the armour language.

The discussion of the relationship between the Roman cuirassed breastplate and Paul’s use of armour language in Rom 13:12 and 1 Thess 5:8 provides a targeted example of “visual exegesis” of Pauline texts and raises opportunities for further study of Paul. Though the visual nature of texts is complementary to other forms of textual engagement including speech, it provides an interesting and important reminder that imagery of the Roman imperial world should not be ignored when considering Paul’s letters nor be consigned as helpful background material. As such, iconographical material is an important way in which we understand how the Greco-Roman world marked out the status and relationships of its citizens. This includes recognition of the vividness of Roman imperial statuary that was experienced by those in Roman society. Their vividness illustrates the way violent language embodied certain virtues of Roman life and the mechanisms of control in patron-client relationships, which cities and citizens alike had to negotiate and engage during the time of the Julio-Claudians. More specifically, when Paul “brings before the eyes” of his listeners a graphic image like the cuirass, we can consider the way in which early believers were asked to consider their values and behaviour, especially in regards to early Christian relationships with narratives of power and virtue. The crucified messiah represents a new vision of victory and embodies another way of being and doing life together.

133 The data regarding Jewish engagement with imperial authorities is complex. Philip Harland, for example, arguing for a more positive view of engagement with empire, highlights a number of instances in which imperial honours and prayers were given for the emperor, but maintains that points of tension existed through their non-participation in imperial cults; Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 213–37. It is however, one thing to “negotiate” empire and another to embody its values. For example, if engagement in certain aspects of the imperial cult is meant—or perhaps a given—in Rom 13:1–7, the embodiment of imperial values certainly is not. For an example of this kind of “negotiation” in Josephus, see John M. G. Barclay, “Snarling Sweetly: A Study of Josephus on Idolatry,” in Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, II 275; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 331–44.

134 Social status and gender are significant qualifiers for the way in which people would have inhabited the civic spaces of the empire; Mattingly, Imperialism, Power, and Identity, 203–45.