



CONSTRUCTING POWER IN AUGUSTUS' ROME

PRESENTER: DR. CLAIRE HOLLERAN, UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

Claire: Huge aqueducts running for many miles from the countryside brought fresh water into the city of Rome. Over the course of thirty years, the Emperor Augustus constructed the Aqua Julia. This brought 48,000 cubic metres of fresh water into the city every day, enough for 500,000 modern households.

Augustus provided the funding to build this aqueduct to provide clean water for the people living in the hot and crowded city, where diseases and fire were rife. But it's not easy to imagine what this aqueduct would've looked like in ancient times, surrounded by contemporary buildings, which has brought me here, to the University of Reading, to meet Matthew Nicholls, who's produced an amazing 3D replica of the imperial city of Rome.

Claire: So what are we looking at here, Matthew?

Matthew: We're looking at a 3D, digital model of the ancient city of Rome as it might've appeared in the early 4th century AD, and it's made from archaeological evidence, literary testimony about life in the city, pictures from coins, fragments from an ancient marble map of Rome, whatever evidence we could find to give an impression of what the city might have looked like around that date.

Claire: And what can we learn from this about the Augustan building project?

Matthew: Well, although the city model is set some centuries after Augustus' time, his buildings still dominate parts of the map, popping up all over the city. And what we can see is how later emperors restored them, imitated them, tried to get their own buildings close to them, using Augustus as a pattern or template for how a good emperor, a successful emperor, should adorn the city of Rome with marvellous buildings. And we can see that Augustus fulfilled his boast in some sense, that he found Rome a city of brick and left it in the end a city of marble monuments.

Claire: So the question is, why did this one man invest such a huge amount of money in this extensive building programme?

This is a copy of a text, written by Augustus, to be inscribed after his death outside his mausoleum, on pillars. Augustus writes that he restored several buildings without

any inscription of his name, so maybe he wants to be thought of as modest. Yet here, he also boasts that in one year, he restored *duo et octaginta templa*: eighty-two temples. Clearly he wanted the world to know about his generosity.

[quoting] *I rebuilt the Capitol and the Theatre of Pompey, each work at enormous cost. I rebuilt aqueducts, completed the Forum of Julius and the Basilica. I rebuilt the Flaminian Road. I built the Temple of Mars Ultor and the theatre at the Temple of Apollo.*

Under Augustus' building programme, the face of Rome was changed dramatically, and in the midst of this shabby, crowded city, marble structures, gardens and forums arose, open for all of Rome's population to enjoy.

Perhaps his most impressive project was the Forum of Augustus, which he built right in the civic centre of the city. At one end, there was a great temple to Mars that Augustus constructed to celebrate his military victory over his enemies on the battlefield. In the colonnades flanking the sides, stood statues of the great men of Rome's historical past, with pride of place going to the city's mythological founding fathers, Romulus and Aeneas, from whom Augustus claimed to be descended.

What a visitor to Augustus' forum would've been told by looking at these statues is that Augustus is the next great man of Rome, and his family is destined to rule. A statue of Augustus himself stood in the centre of his forum, surrounded by his great historical forefathers. It would've been clear that his rule was legitimised by his ancestry, and that Augustus' reign was the next great chapter in the history of Rome.

Augustus' construction of a huge temple to the god of war, right in the middle of the city, sent a clear message about his military power. In the middle of the forum, he placed a statue of himself in full armour; a visual reminder of his military victories and authority.

And Augustus's buildings show that his ambitions extended beyond his own lifetime. At the *Ara Pacis*, the altar of Augustan peace, the reliefs portray Augustus' family, including his heirs, whom he hoped would succeed him. In the images on this monument, Augustus is building a dynasty to last.

Augustus' buildings were a powerful demonstration of the power and strength of Rome, and allowed all people, rich and poor, to share in the greatness of the emperor. Yet this splendour was clearly centred around one man and his family; the man whose statue stood at the centre of his forum, and whose buildings now dominated the city of Rome.