Salutes took a variety of forms in the different cultures of antiquity. Among the gestures important for our subject are those involving one or both hands. In the ancient Near East, for example, raising one’s right hand to one’s forehead seems to have been the standard form of greeting. In classical Greece, raising one’s hand when greeting someone in the street existed alongside linking hands. Ancient Roman hand gestures were similar to those of the Greeks and encompassed hands grasped—dextrarum iunctio: the joining of right hands—and, in military contexts, a salute comparable to the modern military salute: the right hand raised to one’s head.

Sculptures commemorating military campaigns and victories such as those on the arches of Titus and Constantine or on the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, to mention only the best-known examples, are the most obvious candidates for visual evidence of scenes incorporating the raised-arm or “Roman” salute if such a form of greeting had existed at the time, but these monuments do not display a single clear instance.

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1. Zilliacus 1983 provides a convenient summary and further references.
4. Zilliacus 1983, cols. 1216–17. Knippschild 2002 presents a detailed update on hand gestures in various ancient contexts of what we would today call international relations. Cf. especially Knippschild, 16–54 and 55–63 (chapters entitled “Die rechte Hand und der Handschlag” and “Die Handerhebung”; in these 29–48 and 59–61, respectively, on Greece and Rome); see also below on fides/Fides.
Three scenes on Trajan’s Column, here identified according to the standard numbering system first employed by Conrad Cichorius, deserve mention; I quote relevant excerpts from the description accompanying photographs of them in the recent work of Filippo Coarelli. These are (Figures 1–3):

Plate LXII, Scenes LXXXIV–LXXXV (Cichorius) = Plate 99 (Coarelli): Before Trajan conducts a sacrifice, “crowds of onlookers . . . raise their arms to salute the emperor.” Only half of the six or so raised arms are clearly extended straight, the others are bent at the elbow. On the straight arms, only one palm is open but held vertically; on the others, thumb and index finger are extended, the other fingers are bent back. The fingers on the hands of three of the bent arms are pointing downwards.

Plates LXXIV–LXXVI, Scenes CI–CII (Cichorius) = Plates 122–123 (Coarelli): “The emperor on horseback . . . is welcomed outside the walls of a city by a unit of legionaries, preceded by a high-ranking officer, trumpeters (cornicines) and standard-bearers.” Of the fifteen or so legionaries depicted, none is raising his entire arm. The officer, facing Trajan, is holding his upper right arm close to his body; the lower arm is raised, with the index finger pointing up and the other fingers closed. Above (i.e., behind) him, two raised right arms display hands with fingers spread wide. Trajan himself is holding his upper right arm close to his body, extending only the lower part. The marble forming his hand is damaged, so the exact position of the fingers is unrecognizable. No straight-arm salute occurs in this scene.

Plate CIII, Scene CXLI (Cichorius) = Plate 167 (Coarelli): In his last appearance on the column, Trajan “is about to receive an embassy of Dacian pileati [men wearing felt caps] who are escorted by auxiliary troops.” Three of the Dacians are extending their right arms toward Trajan, their open hands held vertically and their fingers spread. None of the Romans is returning their gesture.

The later Column of Marcus Aurelius is comparable to Trajan’s Column in this regard. It shows raised-right-arm gestures but with fingers apart.
Figure 1. Trajan's Column. Scenes LXXXIV–LXXXV: Trajan conducting sacrifice. From Conrad Cichorius, Die Reliefs der Trajanssäule, vol. 4 (Berlin: Reimer, 1900).
Closest to the raised-arm salute, although by no means identical to it, are scenes in Roman sculpture and on coins and medallions which show an *adlocutio* (“address”) or *acclamatio* (“acclamation”) or an *adventus* (“arrival”) or *profectio* (“departure”). These are occasions on which a high-ranking official, most often a general or the emperor, addresses or greets individuals or a group, the latter usually soldiers. The *History* of Ammianus Marcellinus, a late Roman historian, provides a detailed description of an *adventus*, that of Emperor Constantius II in the city of Rome in A.D. 357. Unlike the modern custom, in which both the representations of Roman emperors since Hadrian show them with their right hand raised “in repräsentativem Gruß” (i.e., in a representative greeting) but admits that the meaning of the gesture seems unclear and that further research is desirable (56–57 note 30; he adduces references to different interpretations). Bergemann 1990, 6–8, discusses raised-right hand gestures in equestrian statuary—cf. Plates 8d (from an early Augustan group of statues from Cartoceto di Pergola now in the National Museum, Ancona), 14 (equestrian statue of Augustus now in the National Museum, Athens, with only the lower right arm and hand raised), and 68–69 (early Augustan Pompeian statue now in the National Museum, Naples)—and summarizes different scholarly views of their potential meanings, giving extensive references. He emphasizes that none of these interpretations can be documented conclusively and that the gesture is chiefly a visual demonstration of, e.g., an emperor’s active or decisive participation in a particular action, such as a battle. Cf. Bergemann, 42–43.


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**Figure 2.** Trajan’s Column, Scenes CI–CII. Trajan being saluted. From Conrad Cichorius, *Die Reliefs der Trajanssäule*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Riemer, 1900).
leader and the mass of people he addresses raise their arms, most of these Roman scenes—but not all; the iconography varies—show only the man of rank with his right arm extended as a sign of greeting and benevolence but chiefly as an indication of his power.

This latter aspect is worth our attention at some length. A marble relief with the departure of Emperor Domitian on a military campaign as depicted on a frieze now in the Palazzo della Cancellaria in Rome contains two figures as idealized representations of the Senate and the Roman People, the *genius populi* and the *genius senatus*. Both raise their right arms in a farewell greeting. The gesture of neither resembles the modern raised-arm salute even slightly. Before them, Domitian’s right arm is raised as well, not as high as that of the Senate figure but only horizontally. From parallel scenes on imperial Roman coins depicting from ancient texts). The emperor’s *adventus* is, or at least can be, a kind of triumphal procession (*triumphus*), as Ammianus’ description makes evident. Its iconography, based on ancient textual and visual sources, was made popular by Andrea Mantegna’s late-fifteenth-century series of nine paintings, *The Triumphs of Caesar*, on which cf. Martindale 1979, especially 55–74 (chapter entitled “The Triumphs of Caesar and Classical Antiquity”). Cf. also Alföldi 1970, 79–118, on public ceremonies of saluting the emperor, with 93–100 on his parades and triumphs, and Hölscher 1967, 48–67 (*adventus* and *profectio*) and 68–97 (*triumphus*).

9. The scene is discussed in detail by Koeppel 1969, 138–44, whom I follow here; his Ill. 3 provides a photograph of Frieze A.

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**Figure 3.** Trajan’s Column, Scene CXLI. Trajan receiving Dacian chiefs. From Conrad Cichorius, *Die Reliefs der Trajanssäule*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Riemer, 1900).
an adventus, on which the emperor raises only his lower arm from the elbow held close to and low beside his body, scholars have concluded that such gestures are not primarily gestures of salute but rather gestures of power.\textsuperscript{10} For this view there exists extensive visual evidence which, in turn, is borne out by Roman imperial literature. The emperor’s raised right hand (dextra elata) becomes an eloquent symbol of imperial power in poems by Statius and Martial. In a consolation on the death of his wife composed for Abascantus, Domitian’s “secretary of state” (\textit{ab epistulis}), Statius has the dying wife recall her husband’s closeness to the emperor: “I saw you approach ever more closely the right hand on high” (\textit{vidi altae propius propiusque accedere dextrae}). In another poem the same emperor’s favorite boy, Earinus, is said to have been “chosen to touch so many times the mighty [lit., huge] right hand” of Domitian (\textit{ingentem totiens contingere dextram / electus}).\textsuperscript{11} The immediately following mention of foreign nations—Getae, Persians, Armenians, Indians—reveals that an emphasis on imperial power underlies these references to the ruler’s hand. This view is corroborated by some epigrams of Martial in which the emperor’s right hand is described as the greatest—in earth (\textit{manumque . . . / illam qua nihil est in orbe manus}, in a phrase following immediately on the word \textit{dominum}, “lord”) or carries the same or a synonymous attribute that Statius gives it: \textit{ingenti manu} (“in his mighty hand”) or \textit{magnas Caesaris in manus} (“into Caesar’s mighty hands”).\textsuperscript{12}

So it is no surprise that the author of the standard modern work on the subject should frequently speak of “the uplifted hand of gesture” in Roman art. He comments: “Behind all these usages lies the element of force, given or received, which is fundamental to the symbolic character of the hand.”\textsuperscript{13}

\begin{flushright}
\textit{Cf.} Brilliant 1963, 215. He provides an appendix on \textit{manus} and its implications at 215–216. Cf. also Vincenzo Saladino, “Dal saluto alla salvezza: valori simbolici della mano destra nell’arte greca e romana,” in Bertelli and Centanni 1995, 31–52 and figs. 1–14; see especially 35–36 (on the raised right hand) and 43–46 (on \textit{adventus}).—In a different but influential ancient context, the Old Testament contains numerous textual examples of the raised arm or hand of power, e.g. at 2 Mos. 6.6 and 17.11; 5 Mos. 4.34, 5.15, 7.19, 9.29, 11.2, 26.8; 1 Kings 8.42, 2 Kings 17.36; 2 Chron. 6.32; Jes. 5.25, 9.11, and 40.10. New Testament examples are significantly fewer (Luke 1.51, 1 Peter 5.6).\end{flushright}
Here it is worth our while to consider what Quintilian, the first-century-A.D. teacher of rhetoric and author of the most detailed Roman handbook on oratory, had to say about hand and arm gestures in Book 11, chapter 3, of *The Instruction of the Orator*. He states that an orator’s arm can be “stretched out to the side” (*expatiatur in latus*), but this is only to accommodate moments in which words are being delivered in grand style; otherwise Quintilian refers to “restrained extension of the arm” (*bracchii moderata proiectio*) during which the fingers are being opened while the hand goes up (11.3.84). The more emphatic gesture appears to be parallel to one described in earlier rhetorical treatises. But to deduce from any of these passages that Roman orators employed any gestures even vaguely resembling the rigid raised-arm gesture toward the front of their bodies or slightly to its side is unwarranted.

Quintilian observes that a hand may be raised above shoulder height as if in warning; *illa cava et rara et super umeri altitudinem elata . . . velut hortatrix manus* (11.3.103). But he condemns the raising of the hand above eye level and any excessive gesticulations with the arms (11.3.112 and 118–19). An emperor’s mighty raised hand or arm, then, may well have been intended as clearly signaling to his subjects his awareness of virtually unlimited power. If such a view is indeed correct, it may even throw light on a particular aspect of the modern straight-arm salute in Nazi Germany. There, the man in absolute power very often, and almost casually, bent his raised right arm so far back that his palm could be horizontal while those facing him made their salutes as smart and snappy and as straight as possible—playing by the rules, as it were, and thereby demonstrating their faith, their unquestioning obedience, and their inferiority.

Pertinent passages from Roman literature are comparable to the ancient visual evidence. The historian Livy reports that Pacuvius Calavius, a nobleman from Capua, had been instrumental in handing over his city to Hannibal after the latter’s great victory over the Romans at Cannae in 216 B.C. Pacuvius’ son, however, had been strongly against his father’s action. In violation of the principle of hospitality, one of the most com-

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14. On Quintilian and Cicero see in particular Fantham 1982; Maier-Eichhorn 1989, with a commentary on all relevant passages and expressions; Hall and Bond 2002; and Hall 2004. The last two contain up-to-date additional references. Maier-Eichhorn, 137–43, provides illustrations of the hand gestures Quintilian describes; none of them fits any raised-arm saluting gesture. Fritz Graf, “Gestures and Conventions: The Gestures of Roman Actors and Orators,” in Bremmer and Roodenburg 1992, 36–58, likewise does not mention this kind of gesture.

15. Cicero, *Orator* 18.59: *brachii porrectione* (“the arm extended”) at impassioned speaking; *Rhetoric to Herennius* 3.15.27: *porrectione percelerri brachii* (“with a very quick extension of the arm”).
pelling ancient moral codes, the son then planned to assassinate Hannibal at a banquet. When he revealed his intention to his father, Pacuvius succeeded in dissuading him with an impassioned speech. At its beginning the father refers to the right hand of fides ("trust, reliability"): 

"Per ego te," inquit, "fili, quaecumque iura liberos iungunt parentibus, precor quae soque ne ante oculos patris facere et pati omnia infanda velis. Paucae horae sunt intra quas iurantes per quidquid deorum est, dextrae dextrae iungentes, fidem obstrinximus—ut sacras fide manus, digressi a conloquio, extemplo in eum armaremus?"

"By all the lawful ties, my son," he said, "which join children to their parents, I beg and implore you not to commit any such unspeakable crimes before your father's eyes or allow them to be done. It has been only a few hours since we pledged our trust, swearing by all the gods and joining right hands to right hands—only to arm our hands, hallowed by this trust, against him immediately after we leave our conference with him?"¹⁶

Fides, allegorized as a goddess, may herself be said to stretch out her right hand to humans. Valerius Maximus characterizes her in the following terms: venerabile Fidei numen dexteram suam, certissimum salutis humanae pignus, ostentat ("the venerable divine power of Trust, the most reliable pledge of human security, stretches out her right hand").¹⁷ Virgil says of Anchises: dextram Anchises . . . / dat iuveni atque animum praesenti pignore firmat ("Anchises . . . gives the young man his hand and encourages him with this pledge").¹⁸ Ovid refers to the joining of right hands as a token of trust in the context of Odysseus' confrontation with the sorceress Circe: fides dextraeque datae ("right hands given in trust").¹⁹ Tacitus summarizes the mission of the king of Parthia's ambassadors to Germanicus in comparable terms: Miserat amicitiam ac foedus memoraturos, et cupere novari dextras ("He had sent them in commemoration of their friendly alliance and because he wished to renew their treaty [lit., their right hands]").²⁰ It is evident that throughout Roman culture the goddess Fides and the right hand were closely associated.²¹

To Romans, *fides* and *foedus* ("treaty") were related as words and concepts. Both are closely related to hand gestures or handshakes. But more important for our topic are what Romans called *supinae manus*, hands stretched toward heaven. For these Horace and Virgil provide literary evidence to supplement the surviving visual examples, which occur mainly on Roman coins. Horace begins one of his *Odes* with the description of a poor countrywoman’s simple prayer and sacrifice: *Caelo supinas si tuleris manus . . .* ("If you stretch your hands to the sky . . ."). In Book Three of the *Aeneid* Aeneas receives in his sleep a vision of the Penates, the household gods, rescued from the burning city of Troy; he reports:

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corripio e stratis corpus tendoque supinas  
ad caelum cum voce manus et munera libo  
intemerata focis.
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I jump up from my bed and stretch my hands up to the sky, praying, and pour an offering of undiluted wine on the hearth.

In his biography of Marius Plutarch describes a similar moment when Marius, solemnly pledging a sacrifice to the gods, stretches both his hands toward heaven.

The raised hands with which Aeneas, Marius, and the ancients in general prayed to the gods signify both a salute to the gods and an acknowledgment of their superior powers. But these hand gestures do not express the routine kind of greeting on social occasions among humans. Such gestures are not identical to the modern Roman salute in either purpose or appearance, for hands were held vertically or with palms facing up, not down. Parallel to this is the ancient custom of raising one’s hands in acknowledgment of earthly power.

Related to the religious aspects of the raised right hand is that of swearing an oath. This side will become important in chapter 2, which deals with a famous painting of a supposedly archaic Roman oath scene. Therefore the ancient literature referring to this gesture deserves our

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attention. 26 Clear evidence of Roman oaths involving raised arms or hands is scant. 27 Early in the last book of the Aeneid, Aeneas, in a religious context—he invokes the gods, and a priest and animals are present for a sacrifice—delivers a promise about the Trojans’ future treatment of the Latins according to the outcome of his impending duel with Turnus. Latinus, king of the Latins, then replies with a comparable oath, and the sacrifice confirms their solemn agreement (foedera, 212). 28 While he swears, Latinus looks up at the sky “and stretches his right hand to the stars” (tenditque ad sidera dextram, 196). If this were all Virgil says about his gesture, we could assume that Latinus’ palm is facing upward while he invokes the gods above and that, when he mentions the underworld (199), he turns his palm downward and lowers his arm as well; further that, when he touches the altar (tango aras, 201), his right hand is on the altar palm down and remains in that position. This, then, would be a clear case of an oath ceremony resembling a salute—after all, an invocation of gods implies a greeting. But Virgil tells us that Latinus’ right hand was not empty: he was holding his scepter (dextra sceptrum nam forte gerebat, 206). It is possible that Latinus began his oath with an empty right hand and during its delivery picked up his staff. But it is more realistic to assume that he was holding it all along. The passage does not provide any clear evidence for a salute-plus-oath gesture that involves a raised right arm and an open palm.

Less ambiguous is Ovid’s description of Clymene’s reaction to her son Phaethon’s question concerning the identity of his father. This, Phaethon is about to learn, is none other than Sol, the god of the sun:


27. Given its context and the general spirit of irreverent wit and satire in Petronius’ Satyricon, the moment in which Trimalchio’s dinner guests raise their hands and swear to their host’s ingenuity (40.1) is not necessarily conclusive but reveals ironic exaggeration, although it is doubtless based on custom. It expresses, at least in part, utter astonishment, as does the same gesture at, e.g., Cicero, Letters to His Friends 7.5.2 (sustulimus manus: “we threw up our hands”).

28. Cf. Aeneid 7.234–35 in a speech by Ilioneus, who swears by Aeneas’ fate “and his mighty right hand” (dextranque potentem), with fides mentioned in the following line. Different is Aeneid 3.610–11, where Anchises gives Achaemenides his right hand as a pledge (pignus) of his good faith. Achaemenides may well have accompanied his earlier invocation of heavenly gods (599–600) by raising his arm or arms, but Virgil does not say so. The plea of Volteius Mena at Horace, Epistles 1.7.94–95, does involve his right hand, but there is no description of the gesture he may be employing while speaking. A miniature Pompeian wall painting depicts a priestess, her right arm raised and held straight, her palm (probably) facing down, before Apollo and Diana; illustration at Berry 2007, 186–87.
She stretched both arms to the sky and, looking at the light of the sun, said: “By this bright light clearly visible in its flashing radiance, my son, I swear to you: this which hears and sees us, this one at whom you are looking, this one who masters the world and the sun’s course, from him, the Sun, you are born. . . .”

It is self-evident that both mother and son are looking up at the sky while this scene is going on. Equally clearly Clymene keeps her arms raised during her entire speech, which continues for several lines. But it is reasonable to assume that she keeps her palms turned upward, pointing them, as it were, at the sun. Her gesture is intended to reinforce what her words reveal to be a highly emotional moment to her, for Ovid gives her speech an excited, almost breathless rhythm and a sentence structure that is anything but smooth.

Another comparable epic passage occurs in Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, a poem on the subject of the civil war between Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great, a war that will culminate in the bloody battle of Pharsalus of 48 B.C. and leave Caesar sole ruler of Rome and its dominions. In Book 1 Caesar’s soldiers, swayed by inflammatory speeches, promise him unconditional allegiance in the upcoming campaign:

*His cunctae simul adsensere cohortes elatasque alte, quaecumque ad bella vocaret, promisere manus.*

All army cohorts unanimously agreed to these words; they stretched out their hands, raised high, and promised their support for whatever campaigns he would call them to.

My translation is no more than an attempt to render the complexity of Lucan’s words intelligible. The poet emphasizes the decisive importance

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of the moment that set an irrevocable course of history ruinous for Rome by compressing—cross-wise, as it were—two meanings into the phrase _promisere manus_. The verb _promittere_ literally means “to send forth,” here in the sense of stretching out (i.e., one’s hands), and “to promise,” the word’s most common meaning. As a result, _manus_ both keeps its literal meaning (“hands”) and acquires the figurative meaning of “support” (cf. an English expression like “giving someone a hand” in an emergency). But exactly how the cohorts sent forth their hands at this moment, characterized by such great noise and general commotion that Lucan can only describe it with an epic simile (389–391) that is actually more detailed than what it describes, remains unclear to us. It is possible, if unlikely, that the soldiers all employed the same kind of hand or arm movement and for the moment would have appeared far too orderly. Large-scale disorder of a kind that leads to even larger discord is Lucan’s very point here.

In his epic _Punica_ Silius Italicus has Regulus, a famous Roman hero, invoke the goddesses Fides and Juno, by whom he had sworn to return to Carthage. Regulus informs the Roman senate about the weakness of the Carthaginians and urges the Romans not to accede to an ignominious peace with Carthage. By way of emphasis Regulus lifts his open palms and eyes to the sky before he begins his speech: _palmas simul attollens ac lumina caelo._31 His hands will have been held in the palms-up position common for such prayers, oaths, or invocations. The gesture, of course, has nothing to do with the modern raised-arm salute.

Although they mention and describe acts of salutation, Greek texts are equally inconclusive about raised arms. Greek art works also do not provide substantial evidence for the straight-arm salute. I adduce only a few pertinent instances from Greek literature and art here since Roman, not Greek, saluting customs are my chief concern. In his _Anabasis of Alexander_ the historian Arrian reports an episode from the life of Alexander the Great in which his serious wound disconcerted his soldiers to such an extent that they readily believed rumors which pronounced him dead. They were reassured only when they saw him alive with their own eyes. Alexander, Arrian says, “stretched out his hand upward to the crowd” to convince them; they in turn “shouted out, stretching their hands to the sky and some to Alexander himself.”32 Arrian provides no further description of their mutual greetings, and it seems unlikely that either a weakened Alexander or his soldiers employed anything as rigid or formal as the straight-arm salute or indeed any other gesture resembling it. The

31. Silius Italicus, _Punica_ 6.466. The references to Fides and Regulus’ oath are at lines 468–69.
soldiers in their joyous relief at seeing Alexander alive may well have waved their arms and hands about excitedly.

My first example from Greek art is especially striking in view of a modern work that takes recourse to its ancient precursor. The gigantic statue of the sun god Helios that Chares, the disciple of the famous Hellenistic sculptor Lycippus, built for the Rhodians in the third century B.C. was a marvel to the ancients and deservedly counts among the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. The bronze colossus, said to be about 30–35 meters high, was destroyed in an earthquake. Although it could be seen in its ruined state for centuries, no trace of it has survived, and ancient Greek and Roman descriptions of it are inconclusive as to the god’s posture. The Renaissance view that Helios’ legs were straddling the entrance to the harbor has now been abandoned. It is likely, though, that the statue carried a torch and so served as a kind of lighthouse. The American Statue of Liberty is loosely modeled on this traditional view of the Colossus of Rhodes. Modern archaeologists and art historians have proposed a variety of reconstructions of what the statue may have looked like. Possible evidence derives from small-scale representations of Helios that show the god with his right arm raised and extended, palm down but fingers slightly spread. His arm is bent at the elbow, sometimes more, sometimes less. The posture clearly indicates a saluting gesture, but it is in no instance identical to the modern form.

A marble relief by Archelaus of Priene shows the hill of the Muses with Zeus, Apollo, and the Muses on its two top panels. Below, on the third panel, a seated Homer is being crowned by the personifications of

34. Pindar, *Olympian Ode* 7.54–76, recounts the myth that explains why Helios was associated with the island of Rhodes. Scholarly literature on the colossus is extensive; see especially Vedder 1999–2000. See further Reynold Higgins, “The Colossus of Rhodes,” in Clayton and Price 1988, 124–37 and 171–72 (notes); Vedder 2003; and Brodersen 2004. Brodersen provides the texts of the ancient sources.
35. Belief in the ancient Colossus’ torch is based on the literal understanding of a phrase in its dedicatory inscription that refers to the torch of freedom; cf. *Greek Anthology* 6.171. Langglotz 1975–76 corroborates that the Colossus of Rhodes had held a torch in his right hand.
36. The Statue of Liberty was referred to as “The New Colossus” in Emma Lazarus’ well-known poem by that name (1883); see Lazarus 2005, 58.
37. Cf. especially the illustrations in Hoepfner 2003, 65–73, ills. 91–97, 99–101, and 103 (bronze statuettes, gems, and coins). Hoepfner, 66 ill. 96, shows a bronze statuette with Helios’ upper arm stretched out horizontally but his lower arm raised at a ninety-degree angle; his right hand is held vertically.
38. Cf. especially Hoepfner 2003, 80–82 (section entitled “Die Skenographia des grüßen- den Helios”), with color drawings of a reconstruction of the Colossus greeting sailors approaching Rhodes and discussion of the suitability of this gesture. See also note 24 in chapter 6 below on a modern painting of the Colossus.
World and Time; facing him across an altar are several male and female figures. Two of these have raised their right arms in salute, but their fingers and thumbs are kept well apart. In front of them another figure has raised both arms at the same angle; significantly, both hands hold flaming torches. Behind them there appears yet another saluting figure, partly covered, whose right arm is raised but held considerably lower than the others'. Presumably this third figure is greeting Homer by raising only the lower arm, a common way of saluting. The relief, found at Bovillae near Rome, dates to around 150–125 B.C.

Back to Rome. If, as we have seen, Roman literature is at best inconclusive, although tantalizing, about raised-arm gestures, what can the visual evidence tell us beyond the information considered above? Raising one’s arms in prayer—commonly both, but sometimes only one and then usually the right arm—is a universal religious gesture that can be traced back to prehistoric art. Frequently the upper arm or arms are held close to the body, the lower arm is raised from the elbow, with the open palm held vertically and facing out. 39 A well-known example appears on Relief B of the Cancellaria scenes, in which we witness an adventus. Emperor Vespasian, facing the viewer but looking to his right at his son Domitian, has raised his right hand in this manner. 40 An instructive scene of what an elaborate religious ceremony will have looked like occurs in a wall painting from Herculaneum, now in the National Museum of Naples. Although it depicts an Egyptian cult, it is representative of the syncretism prevalent in the Roman world since the late republic. (By the time of the early empire, Eastern and especially Egyptian cults had spread to Rome and Italy.) The Herculaneum painting shows the central figure of a priest extending his right arm horizontally toward a group of musicians and worshippers on the viewer’s left, while some members of another group of worshippers on the right raise their right arms, either stretched out or lifted from the elbow. 41

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39. As the title indicates, the study by Demisch 1984 deals primarily with the prayer gesture in which both arms are raised, but see pages 131–34 and 232 (notes), ills. 168–76, and ill. 14 (page 331) for examples of the raised right arm. Cf. further Neumann 1965, 41–48, on saluting gestures in Greek art (with ills. 19–22 of right-arm salutes with elbows bent, open palms, and fingers spread) and 78–82 (with ills. 37–39) on comparable postures as gestures of prayer, and Groß 1985, 25–28 and, for an overview of the importance of the gods’ hands in Roman cults, 383–417.

40. Koeppel 1969, 172–74, discusses this image and provides a photograph. Cf. also Koeppel, 184, on a comparable coin type.

41. Mielsch 2001, 175 with ill. 206, provides a description and a color photograph of this painting. So does Berry 2007, 208.
painting.\footnote{So Mielsch 2001, 175.} In retrospect it may remind us of similar (but not identical) modern gestures and contexts.

Other Roman examples are more pertinent to our topic. The so-called Altar of Domitius Ahenobarbus, dating to before 107 B.C., shows the standing figure of a soldier who is attending a census ceremony. He is holding a shield in his left hand and appears to be saluting with his right arm. His hand touches his helmet at the temple in a gesture familiar to us from modern military salutes, so his arm is bent, not straight. This gesture may be a salute or not; if it is one, it is not analogous to the raised-arm salute.\footnote{Andreae 1999, 52–55, gives a description and interpretation of the monument. (It is a pedestal rather than an altar.) Cf. also Ann Kuttner, “Some New Grounds for Narrative: Marcus Antonius's Base (The Ara Domitti [sic] Ahenobarbi) and Republican Biographies,” in Holliday 1993, 198–229, with illustration of the census at 200–201 ill. 69. Further illustrations appear in Andreae, 360–61 ill. 220; Brilliant 1963, ill. 2.74; Henig 1983, 72 ill. 53; and, in greatest detail, in Stilp 2001, figs. 22–23, 40–41, 48, and 51. Stilp, 67–68, discusses the figure of the soldier and follows earlier scholarship in his conclusion that the soldier's gesture is inexplicable to us.} A closely similar gesture appears considerably later on a sarcophagus from the early third century A.D. that depicts Dionysus and Ariadne and is now in the National Museum in Rome. (Figure 4) Earlier, the posture of Nero on the Augustan cameo showing Augustus' apotheosis—the Grand Camée de France, now in Paris—is somewhat comparable to that of the soldier on the Altar of Ahenobarbus as well. The cameo further shows Drusus Caesar saluting Augustus with his outstretched right arm, fingers slightly bent and apart.\footnote{Cf. the color plate at Andreae 1999, 141 ill. 54.} The apotheosis of Emperor Antoninus Pius and his wife Faustina, originally on the base of the column of Antoninus dating from the second century A.D., shows the goddess Roma as an observer; she is seated in a relaxed position and raising her right arm and open palm toward the imperial couple above. In keeping with her relaxed posture, her arm is bent at the elbow, and the fingers of her right hand are slightly bent forward while her thumb points straight up.\footnote{Color illustration at Andreae 1999, 232 ill. 111.} A Pompeian wall painting in the house of the Vettii showing the victory of Apollo over the dragon Python includes a standing female figure saluting Apollo with her raised right arm. The gesture appears to be formal, as is appropriate in the god's presence.\footnote{Color plate at Andreae 1999, 155 ill. 69.} Such examples, isolated as they are, cannot sufficiently account for the supposedly Roman nature of the raised-arm salute in the political ideology of the twentieth century. More common variants of the ancient gesture occur with statues of orators addressing their audiences, although even these conform to the modern
Figure 4. Detail from Dionysus and Ariadne sarcophagus. Author’s photograph.
Saluting Gestures in Roman Art and Literature

Salute only loosely if at all. Some Etruscan statues and statuettes, including the Arringatore or Orator (Aule Metele, i.e., Aulus Metellus) now in Florence, are familiar examples. As we have seen, however, ancient Roman rhetorical treatises refer chiefly the orator’s hand gestures, not to his raised arm or arms.

The Prima Porta (or Prima porta) marble statue of Emperor Augustus, discovered in 1862 and now in the Vatican Museums, may be the most famous statue of a Roman addressing someone with his right arm raised. Later ones are the equestrian bronze statues of an emperor, possibly Caligula, in Naples, of Nero in Ancona, and of Marcus Aurelius on the Campidoglio in Rome. But the statue of Augustus did not represent him as saluting or in an act of adlocutio at all, as has been and still is popularly assumed. The statue’s right arm is not original but seems to have been restored in antiquity, perhaps more than once. Originally the

47. Illustrations in Brilliant 1963, figs. 1.24–31 (all with palms outward but vertical, elbows bent), and 1.43 (the Orator). Andreae 1999, 64 ill. 20, provides a large color plate of the Arringatore. Cf. also Aldrete 1999, figs. 1 (schematic drawing of an orator exhorting his audience with raised and open right hand, arm bent at elbow), 18 (coin of Emperor Hadrian addressing and being greeted by a group of people, right arms raised; cf. Aldrete, 93 and 185 note 15, and see below). Cf. further Aldrete, 94 (on a coin of Trajan) and 104–14 (section entitled “Greeting and Praise”). Corbeill 2004, 20–24 (section entitled “Hands”), does not specifically refer to hand gestures as salutes. Neither Aldrete nor Corbeill refers to any modern analogies, connections, or connotations that the Roman gestures they examine might have acquired. Flaig 2003 presents a different theoretical perspective but does not include the raised-arm salute. Neither do Boegehold 1999, Morstein-Marx 2004 (with a photograph of the Arringatore on the dust jacket), or the essays collected in Cairns 2005.

48. Simon 1986, Plate 1, and Andreae 1999, 104 ill. 36, furnish large color photographs.


50. For recent statements of this view see Kleiner 1992, 63–66, and Galinsky 1996, 24–28, both with illustrations. Several other examples could be mentioned. Galinsky, 24 and 27 ill. 7, adduces as a parallel a denarius of Octavian from ca. 31–28 B.C. whose reverse shows “Octavian addressing the troops.” Elsner 1995, 161–62, is less decided: Augustus “appears to be proclaiming victory to the army or the people, or at any rate addressing the spectator.” The epic-size painting by Thomas Couture, The Romans of the Decadence (1847), one of the most famous and iconic works about the moral and implicitly political decline of Rome, shows on its far right a statue modeled on that of the Augustus of Prima Porta, right arm raised but fingers spread.

51. So already Köhler 1863, at 433. Köhler’s essay is more accessible in a German translation (slightly abridged): “Eine Statue des Caesar Augustus,” in Binder 1991, 187–203; here 188–89. Köhler, 435–36 (original) or 190–91 (translation), discusses the traditional position of the restored right arm as a representation of an adlocutio on the part of the world’s most powerful
hand of his raised arm was holding a spear, its tip on the ground. The ring finger of this hand has survived separately; it is pointing downward. In the case of Marcus Aurelius’ statue, the emperor’s extended right arm is not raised to even a horizontal level, and his hand and fingers are not stretched out. Nevertheless the statue was made to serve as model for an equestrian statue of Benito Mussolini by Giuseppe Graziosi and provided the backdrop to Fascist rallies. It is, of course, possible to view the statue from a low angle which makes the emperor appear to be giving a kind of pre-Fascist salute. (Figure 5) But this would be no more than a calculated perspective on the part of a photographer, far removed from the impression the statue makes on a neutral observer. Rather, it expresses a combination of both majestic power and dignified benignity. A modern literary author perhaps shows best the impression that the statue of Marcus Aurelius makes on its viewer. In chapter XVIII of his 1860 novel The Marble Faun Nathaniel Hawthorne gives the following description:

The moonlight glistened upon traces of the gilding, which had once covered both rider and steed; these were almost gone; but the aspect of dignity was still perfect, clothing the figure as it were with an imperial robe of light. It is the most majestic representation of the kingly character that ever the world has seen. A sight of this old heathen Emperor is enough to create an evanescent sentiment of loyalty even in a democratic bosom; so august does he look, so fit to rule, so worthy of man’s profoundest homage and obedience, so inevitably attractive of his love! He stretches forth his hand, with an air of grand beneficence and unlimited authority, as if uttering a decree from which no appeal was permissible, but in which the obedient subject would find his highest interests consulted; a command, that was in itself a benediction.


52. Simon 1986, 56–57, gives a reconstruction of the Prima Porta statue, with illustration (ill. 59) and supporting iconographic evidence. (Galinsky 1996, 396 note 54, cites this among other studies.) Cf. also Simon’s essay “Altes und Neues zur Statue des Augustus von Prima-porta,” written in 1983 but not published until 1991 in Binder 1991, 204–33 and Plates 30–35; see especially Plate 34. Bergemann 1990, 6 note 58, follows her. Andreae 1999, 89–90, adheres to the traditional reconstruction of the right arm.

53. Cf. the gold coin (aureus) of ca. 29 B.C. and the denarius of ca. 41 B.C. depicting the equestrian statue of Octavian, the later Emperor Augustus, in Galinsky 1996, 46 ill. 21 and 167 ill. 78. On both coins the emperor’s raised arm is slightly bent at the elbow.

54. Cf. the illustration in Malvano 1988, ill. 30.

55. The text of The Marble Faun; or, The Romance of Monte Beni is here quoted from Hawthorne 1983, 990–91. The description of Emperor Justinian’s equestrian statue in the Augustaeum in Constantinople by the historian Procopius (On Buildings 1.2.10–12) indicates how closely Melville captured the spirit of such statuary. Procopius’ text is translated and quoted in
Hawthorne’s words are admirably sensitive to the aura of unlimited and, in this case, benign imperial power that is embodied in an emperor’s mighty hand, the *ingens dextra* of imperial Roman literature.\(^{56}\) A modern

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MacCormack 1981, 77 and 308 note 305. L’Orange 1982, 147 ill. 104, reproduces an image of Justinian’s statue. (His right arm, raised from the elbow up, and its open hand are positioned significantly differently from Marcus Aurelius’.) L’Orange, 143, further remarks: “After Constantine [the Great] the raised right hand is repeated as a typical gesture of majesty right down to the middle ages.”

56. Koeppel 1969, 182 and 192, emphasizes that this posture of the emperor’s arm is not only a greeting and that it is a standard aspect of equestrian statues of Roman emperors.
art historian, discussing this statue’s fate in the Middle Ages, similarly speaks of the emperor’s “commanding gesture of benediction” and continues:

The sense of the gesture of Marcus Aurelius’ right hand and, in consequence, the effect of the entire work would, indeed, be quite different were that gesture deprived of the universal meaning with which it greets and blesses its viewers.\(^57\)

Art historian Hans Peter L’Orange called this imperial posture the “gesture of power and benediction” and observed:

The supernatural redeeming power in the emperor’s outstretched right hand presupposes higher powers and abilities dwelling in him. Through the emperor, manifesting his power in this gesture, divine interference in human affairs takes place.\(^58\)

So it is difficult to agree with the assessment by a modern military historian that Marcus Aurelius here “is returning the equestrian military salute with his right arm raised and extended.”\(^59\) That the gesture is military is open to doubt. Nevertheless even recent scholars somewhat fancifully and, as seems likely, under the influence of the gesture’s modern history retroactively apply it to the military culture of the Roman Empire.\(^60\)

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58. L’Orange 1982, 145 and 147. Comparable points may be made about the tradition of Christian iconography, especially images of Christ enthroned as cosmic ruler (pantokrator) and of scenes with angels. One random but important example of late-ancient to early-Christian art illustrating the latter kind of image is the Reidersche Tafel, an ivory tablet from Northern Italy (about 400 A.D.) now in the Nationalmuseum, Munich. It shows Christ’s empty tomb and his ascension, with a seated figure in the left foreground, presumably the angel at the tomb, greeting the three Marys with his raised right arm, index and middle fingers extended. Descriptions and illustrations in Guterlet 1935, 63–83 (description and interpretation, but without mention of the salute) and Plate II, and Schiller 1971, 21–22 and ill. 12. This angel’s saluting gesture frequently recurs; representative examples from later centuries may be seen in Schiller, figs. 8 and 17–21. The topic of Christian iconography is too large to be incorporated into the present argument, nor is it crucial for our purpose.

59. Rankov 1994, 15 (part of a caption accompanying a low-angle photograph of the statue that hints at its military purpose).

60. Here is an example taken from Rankov 1994. This slim volume has color plates by Richard Hook. Plate G on page 39 shows a scene Rankov describes on page 51 in part as follows: “A trooper of the Emperor’s Horse Guards (Equites Singulares Augusti) reports to his decurion during Trajan’s First Dacian War [A.D. 101–102]... The trooper greets his officer with the cavalry salute of the extended right arm.” The color picture shows the trooper giving what
Other equestrian statues of Roman emperors also show them raising their right hand or arm in salute, so an over-life-size statue of Augustus in the National Museum, Athens, and a reconstructed gilded statue of Nero Caesar, son of Germanicus, now in the Palazzo della Gherardesca in Florence. The latter horseman raises his right hand above his head. Both riders exemplify the *adlocutio* type of Roman statuary. The life-size marble statue of Marcus Aurelius standing, his right arm raised and elbow bent, now in the National Museum in Rome, is a comparable type. (Figure 6)

We may now conclude that the open raised hand sends the viewer an obvious message of power and authority but that its Roman examples do so in ways not consistent with the modern political iconography of a “Roman” salute. Concerning such a salute the record of Roman art is inconclusive. Nor does any Roman text refer to or describe it. It is revealing that in his exhaustive 1890 study of Greek and Roman gestures Carl Sittl neither discussed nor illustrated raised-arm salutes, as he would doubtless have done if he had found any evidence for them. (At his time *German Altertumswissenschaft* was famously, or notoriously, thorough and exhaustive.) Nevertheless their ubiquity in the modern popular imagination has led even classical scholars to assign them to the ancient Romans. A representative example is the following statement by Jérôme Carcopino in his widely read book *Daily Life in Ancient Rome* about the arrival of gladiators in the Colosseum:

The gladiators . . . marched round the arena in military array. . . . They walked nonchalantly, their hands swinging freely, followed by valets

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63. Sittl 1890, a classic work. Likewise Andrea de Jorio, *La mimica degli antichi investigata nel gestire Napolitano* (Naples, 1832), another standard work, neither mentions nor depicts the salute. The latter is now easily accessible in English (de Jorio 2000). Gilbert Austin, *Chironomia, or A Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery* (1806; now Austin 1966), refers to ancient gestures on several occasions but does not know the raised-arm salute.
carrying their arms; and when they arrived opposite the imperial pulvinar [boxed seat] they turned toward the emperor, their right hands extended in sign of homage, and addressed to him the justifiably melancholy salutation: “Hail, Emperor, those who are about to die salute thee. Ave, Imperator, morituri te salutant!” 64

64. Carcopino 1940, 239–40.
A note now refers the reader to the author’s source, a passage in Suetonius’ biography of the Emperor Claudius. Suetonius, however, describes an entirely different situation, which did not even take place in Rome. It occurred well before the building of the Colosseum, the most famous site of Roman gladiatorial games, and did not involve gladiators. A closer look at Suetonius’ text is therefore in order. He reports:

Quin et emissurus Fucinum lacum naumachiam ante commisit. Sed cum proclamantibus naumachiaris: “Have imperator, morituri te saluant!” respondisset: “aut non;” neque post hanc vocem quasi venia data quisquam dimicare vellet, diu cunctatus an omnes igni ferroque adsumeret, tandem e sede sua prosiliit ac per ambitum lacus non sine foeda vacillatione discurrens partim minando partim adhortando ad pugnam compulsit.

Even when he [Claudius] was about to drain Lake Fucinus, he commissioned a sea battle first. But when the combatants in the sea battle exclaimed “Hail, Emperor, those about to die salute you!” he answered “Or not,” and when after these words no one wanted to fight, as if they had been pardoned, and he hesitated for quite a while whether he should have them all killed by fire or sword, he finally jumped up from his seat and, running along the edge of the lake with his repulsive reeling walk, he finally got them to fight, partly with threats, partly with promises.  

Suetonius only reports the combatants’ words and does not mention any gesture accompanying their greeting. And he avoids using the term gladiators, which would have been inappropriate anyway. The kind of sea battle (naumachia) here described occurred only at irregular intervals in Roman history, unlike the regularly offered gladiatorial games, and the words reported by Suetonius are not a customary or standard greeting. Moreover, the whole scene is replete with absurdity: Claudius’ joke in reply to the fighters’ words, their reaction to it, his weird behavior, and the futility, not recorded here, of the entire undertaking because

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65. Suetonius, Claudius 21.6. The event is also reported by Cassius Dio, Roman History 60.33, who quotes the greeting slightly differently and in Greek, and by Tacitus, Annals 12.56.

66. This was recognized several decades ago by Leon 1939; he surveys occasions of naumachia and describes the differences between gladiators and naumachiares, men condemned to death as criminals or captives. He also cites (46 note 1) Carcopino and older scholarship that attributes the fighters’ phrase to gladiators. He concludes that the words of the naumachiares were not a regular salute at all but were uttered on this one occasion only.
Claudius’ attempt to drain the lake failed. So this passage in Suetonius does not bear out Carcopino’s conclusion about gladiatorial customs, nor does Carcopino’s description warrant a reference to Suetonius except as a source for his Latin quotation of the fighters’ words. On these a modern expert on gladiatorial Roman combat concludes: “there are no records proving that this famous remark was ever uttered by gladiators in the amphitheatre.” But Carcopino’s error has drawn wide circles and appears to be ineradicable, both in popular culture and in works of scholarship. Its verbal part is still indispensable in Ridley Scott’s *Gladiator* (2000).

The standard iconography of the moment when gladiators salute the emperor in the arena owes much to cinematic recreations, which show them either extending their right arms and holding their swords in their hands—unlike Carcopino’s, these gladiators do not have valets—or, like Carcopino’s, extending their right arms and empty hands. Both ways occur frequently. An early example of the former occurs in Carmine Gallone and Amleto Palermi’s *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1926; *The Last Days of Pompeii*). A prominent example of the latter is the opening shot of Henry Koster’s *The Robe* (1953), the first widescreen film Hollywood released after World War II. The identical shot recurs in the sequel, Delmer Daves’s *Demetrius and the Gladiators* (1954), since both films were made almost at the same time. (Figure 7) It is possible that Carcopino’s book was consulted by historical advisors or researchers for a number of films with scenes of gladiatorial combat. Another possible inspiration is painting: the gladiators in Jean-Léon Gérôme’s popular *Ave Caesar! Morituri te salutant* (1859) are all raising their right or left arms, holding tridents and other weapons. Even so, there is no uniformity in the gladiators’ greeting in *Demetrius and the Gladiators*. Some arms are held out straight, others are bent. The opening scene of Nick Nostro’s *Spartacus e i dieci gladiatori* (Spartacus and the Ten Gladiators or *Day of Vengeance*, 1964) shows gladiators in the arena saluting first the presiding official and then, after a 180-degree turn, even the crowd of spectators; they hold up their sword arms and say “Hail!” but nothing else. Conversely, a scene in Douglas Sirk’s *Sign of the Pagan* (1954) shows a contingent of Roman druids raising their shields and speaking in Latin.

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67. The biographer of Emperor Hadrian in the *Augustan History* reports that Hadrian drained the lake in the following century (*HA Hadrian* 22.10). Complete drainage was not achieved until 1875.


69. It appears in, e.g., Quennell 1971, 45; Hopkins 1983, 26; and Aldrete 2004, 124.

70. Redi 1994, 164, provides a still image of this moment.
soldiers greeting Attila’s daughter by carrying their right arms straight up while holding swords in their hands. The gesture, which combines the regular raised-arm salute and the gladiatorial salute, goes back at least to 1917, when it occurred in an Egyptian context. In J. Gordon Edwards’s *Cleopatra*, a film that survives only in a number of stills mainly featuring its star Theda Bara, Cleopatra is walking past two lines of an Egyptian honor guard whose sword arms are raised in salute. As will become clear in my later discussions, to film directors it is not historical accuracy that counts but only spectacle. The answer to the question “How will a scene or a particular moment look on the screen?” decides about salutes and other gestures, just as it does about practically everything else.

If, then, the straight-raised-arm salute is not actually Roman, what is its origin, how did it come to be appropriated for Fascist ideology, and why did it become popular so easily? To answer these questions we must turn to the visual culture of the modern era. The early appearances of the salute in fact predate Fascism and do not carry any Fascist connotations, just as the salute was originally not as fixed a gesture as it was to become in twentieth-century political contexts. A thorough answer to our questions must begin with late eighteenth-century painting.

*Figure 7. The Robe/Demetrius and the Gladiators.*. Gladiators saluting Caligula. Twentieth Century-Fox.