

Ralf von den Hoff, Wilfried Stroh and Martin Zimmermann, **Divus Augustus. Der erste römische Kaiser und seine Welt.** Publisher C. H. Beck, Munich 2014. 341 pages with 74 mostly coloured figures, 2 plans and a map.

The 2014 bimillennial of Augustus' death offers an occasion to rethink the Augustan legacy. Was Augustus the embodiment of »una monarchia perfetta« – Dante Alighieri's paragon of good civic leadership? Or was he instead Edward Gibbon's »subtle tyrant«, who with »a cool head, an unfeeling heart, and a cowardly disposition [...] wished to deceive the people by an image of civil liberty, and the armies by an image of civil government«? Is Augustus first and foremost a »friend« of the »free world« (and of the academy)? Or should he – like so many more recent political autocrats – be treated with outright ideological suspicion?

»Divus Augustus« does not offer a uniform answer to such questions. But it does join numerous other 2014 projects – not least the grand »Augusto« exhibition at the Scuderie del Quirinale in Rome and the Grand Palais in Paris – in introducing Augustus to a new audience, attempting to explain Rome's first princeps »step by step« (p. 9). Although it will become a standard German undergraduate textbook, the volume is not primarily intended for scholars. As introductory guide, the book's target readership is less the Bonner Jahrbücher than the Frankfurter Allgemeine or the Süddeutsche Zeitung: »Es gibt gleichwohl kaum einen Herrscher der europäischen Geschichte, bei dem sich die Frage, ob das Ergebnis die dafür eingesetzten Mittel rechtfertigt, so dringend stellt wie bei Augustus« (p. 14).

Academically speaking, the volume's great innovation lies in its arrangement. The book is organised around a series of distinct temporal periods, charting Augustus' world from cradle (63 B. C.) to grave (A. D. 14). But each part is also split into three subchapters. Rather than offer the standard sort of biography, the authors – each towering figures in their respective disciplines – explore Augustus' »Aufstieg« in »Tat, Wort und Bild« (p. 9): if Martin Zimmermann begins each section with an expert historical overview, Ralf von den Hoff follows with a thematically-led survey of the art and archaeology, while Wilfried Stroh provides a richly wide-ranging (if slightly idiosyncratic) overview of contemporary literature (p. 7). The overarching framework is therefore chronological, according to five carefully delineated periods: 63–44 B. C.; 44–27 B. C.; 27–17 B. C.; 17–2 B. C.; 2 B. C. – A. D. 14. A final »Ausblick« in effect treats A. D. 14–2014, although concentrating on the Julio-Claudian »Abschied von einem Gott«. At the same time, the book is organised around different media: it is not just variables of time, but also those of Ancient History, Classical Archaeology and Classical Philology, that structure this account of Augustan Rome.

This arrangement brings numerous advantages. Despite their different medial remits, the authors do try to cross-reference materials between chapters (albeit most often between their own); sometimes we also find the same epigraphic, archaeological and literary sources being subjected to subtly divergent disciplinary interpretations (above all across the chapters by Zimmermann and von den Hoff). The book consequently offers something to general readers and seasoned scholars alike: one thinks, for example, of the contrast between the omnipresence of the civil wars in the thirties B. C. (»Die dunklen Jahre«, pp. 61–81) and its near »Unsichtbarkeit« in contemporary imagery (pp. 100–102); likewise, Stroh nicely points out how, despite the burden of Ciceronian literature in the late first century B. C., it was only after Augustus' death that anyone ventured »den Namen Cicero auch nur in den Mund zu nehmen« (p. 109). Throughout, chapters also do an excellent job in situating Augustus' biography within a larger cultural historical context: the Catilinarian affair takes on a whole new poignancy when situated in the year of Augustus' birth (pp. 20; 42); a nice touch too to consider the deaths of Augustus and Ovid in close chronological proximity (p. 267).

From the perspective of an (Anglophone) classicist, perhaps most interesting here are the different ways in which a German ancient historian, archaeologist and literary critic approach their shared Augustan subject. Different »sources« lead to wholly different accounts. For Zimmermann, concerned with the historical »facts« (but also proving the most interdisciplinary of the three), Augustus emerges as a ruthless and pragmatic Machiavellian figure. If the Preface (pp. 9 f.) talks of »rücksichtslose Brutalität«, »Gewalt« und »endlose blutige Bürgerkriege«, it is only really in Zimmermann's chapters that this »Nachtseite des Herrschers« comes to light: analysing how Augustus learned his »dirty political handiwork« (p. 25), or indeed the ruthlessly high »ransomes« placed on his adversaries (pp. 63 f.), Zimmermann pulls no punches about Augustus' pitiless purging of peers: »auch im Jahr 27 v. Chr. war das Blut an seiner Toga« (p. 81). Von den Hoff's take on the Augustan »Bilderwelt« looks markedly tamer in comparison: although Augustus is presented as a master of »Bildsprache«, the princeps presides first and foremost over an artistic »renaissance«. Of the three authors, Stroh's literary focus is the least engaged with the bloody pragmatics of power. For Stroh, Zimmermann's »Blut-Zeit« magically flowers into »die augusteische Blütezeit der römischen Poesie« (pp. 143–170) – a period of »große römische Dichtung, die erst eigentlich wieder unter dem jungen Nero aufblüht« (p. 267). Such concern with a literary Golden Age (»ein Höhepunkt der europäischen Literatur«, p. 10; cf. pp. 266 f.) leads Stroh to quite different »historical« questions, like »Was [...] der künftige Augustus im Unterricht gelesen [hat]« (p. 47), or indeed which »Barbarensprache« Ovid

learnt in Tomis (p. 266). But his approach also brings with it a wholly different authorial style, peppered with aphorisms, exclamations and rhetorical flourishes: »Épatez le bourgeois!« (p. 145), »Welch ein Gedicht!« (p. 209), »Starker Tobak!« (p. 212), »qui s'excuse, s'accuse« (p. 259). These disciplinary differences are played out most starkly in Stroh's »Bibliographie zur Literatur der augusteischen Zeit« (pp. 311–331): where Zimmermann and von den Hoff offer concise, subject-led guides (pp. 295–303; pp. 304–310), Stroh embarks on a bizarrely detailed literary excursus, all the while professing (p. 311) that »die folgenden Hinweise [...] nicht in erster Linie für Fachleute bestimmt [sind]«. I resist the temptation to comment on Stroh's puzzling omissions; it seems a glib oversimplification, however, to dismiss those who dare problematize Vergil's Aeneid as »moralisch empfindsame Forscher [...] vor allem zur Zeit des amerikanischen Vietnamkriegs« (p. 156).

Its medium-specific organisation is undoubtedly the book's strength. For this reviewer, it is also its Achilles' heel. As structuring principle, chronology works well for Zimmermann's historicizing narratives. When it comes to literary texts, however, the sands of time risk constantly slipping through our fingers: how exactly to construct a relative chronology for respective works by Horace and Vergil, for instance (pp. 103–118)? The problem is all the more acute in the field of archaeology. While coins might lend themselves to precise dating (hence perhaps their abundant illustration), the majority of the book's archaeological materials are much more difficult to pigeon-hole: in which periodized chapter should we situate the Boscoreale silver cups and Gemma Augustea (pp. 239–243), or for that matter the Prima Porta Augustus (pp. 133–137)? Of course, scholars have come up with complex systems for dating Augustan portraiture. Here, though, the complexities are somewhat ironed out. Readers – and, general readers in particular – perhaps deserve a slightly more circumspect introduction: on the one hand, archaeology relies on scholars constructing chronological sequences and imposing them back onto their buried objects; on the other, displayed materials often collapse our assumed chronological categorisations – think of the naked columna rostrata Augustus (p. 68), a statue that remained on display even when togate figures seem to have become the norm (pp. 238 f.). As von den Hoff rightly concedes, archaeology has more to say about some periods than others. But can we really work backwards from later materials (»die uns erhalten sind«) to a reliable image of Augustus' beginnings (»Diese Bilder [...] lassen aus dem Rückblick nach 27 v. Chr. seine Anfänge geschönt erscheinen«, p. 28)?

As a collective, the book works hard to combine historical, archaeological and literary perspectives. Individually, however, chapters seem resistant to putting materials together. Zimmermann is most successful at working between different media, as, for example,

in his nice analysis of ›Schrift, überall Schrift‹ (pp. 190–192). Archaeological chapters prove somewhat more isolationist. For better or worse, German Classical Archaeology seems rather stuck in the eighties, frozen in a Zanker-esque discussion of the ›Macht von Bildern‹ (p. 41) on the one hand, and a Hölscher-derived rhetoric of ›Bildsprache‹ on the other, with all its associated talk of ›Symbole‹, ›Vokabular‹, ›Bildprogramm‹, and ›Symbolsprache‹ (e. g. pp. 129–131; 140; 194–198; 202 f.). Such frameworks have been hugely important, but has this ›semantische System‹ not had its day?

Most disappointing of all is the lack of engagement between visual and literary perspectives. A monstrous shame, for example, that archaeological and literary chapters don't connect their discussions of Horace's *Ars Poetica* (pp. 206–208) and the ›monstra‹ of Vitruvian wall-painting (pp. 140–142, twice misplacing the relevant Vitruvian passage): whether one thinks of Livia's Garden Room, or indeed the lower panels of the *Ara Pacis* (pp. 194–196), the whole question of ›ars‹ and ›natura‹ might have forged an interesting cultural historical bridge – framing in turn the political monstrosity that was Augustus (cf. P. Hardie [ed.], *Paradox and the Marvellous in Augustan Literature and Culture* [Oxford 2009], especially Verity Platt's chapter). ›Klassische Philologie‹ perhaps deems Vitruvius a literary embarrassment, leaving him to the archaeologists to ignore (p. 144; the *De Architectura* is in fact only mentioned in conjunction with Mau's Second and Third Pompeian Styles, pp. 140–142). But literary criticism would appear to judge imagery an irrelevance tout court. Virgilian ecphrasis, in particular Virgil's evocation of the shield of Aeneas (pp. 155 f.), constitutes just one such missed opportunity: literary chapters never risk soiling their hands with material and visual culture, and archaeological chapters rarely stray beyond their ancient ›historical‹ texts and Horace's *Carmen Saeculare* (cf. e. g. pp. 133–136, on the epic panoply of the *Prima Porta Augustus*).

With the historical, archaeological and literary chapters each working in traditional disciplinary isolation, it is left to audiences to read between the lines and put the parts together. Authors rarely consider the shared mythological themes between texts and images, like Aeneas' profile in Vergil and the *Ara Pacis* (pp. 154–156; 196–198), or Romulus' respective fashionings in Livy and the *Forum Augustum* (pp. 162–164; 198–202). But chapters do nonetheless hint at some potentially rich cross-fertilisations. Perhaps most startlingly, the talk of Ovidian mischief and resistance (›Ovid. Ein erster Dichter der Opposition‹, pp. 209–211; 247–267) might prompt a rather less ›stable‹ image of the standardized Augustan ›Bilderwelt‹. While von den Hoff (like Zanker before him) frames the ›Stabilisierung des neuen Systems‹ (p. 140) around ›weiteste Verbreitung und Akzeptanz‹ (p. 131) – as something ›thematisiert und akzeptiert‹ (p. 241) the empire over – one wonders how to square this with

the playful dynamics of the *Metamorphoses* (›ein großes Sammelepos von Verwandlungssagen‹, p. 250). I couldn't help but think that many materials had been suppressed in this archaeological account, as, for example, the ›aping‹ images of Romulus and Aeneas from Pompeii's *Masseria di Cuomo*, or the fate of the British Museum's Meroë bronze Augustus head. But I also wondered what the literary concern with changing bodies (pp. 250–252) might mean for approaching the unstable bodies of Augustus on the *Prima Porta* statue or *Boscovale* cups (pp. 133–136; 240 f.): just what did Augustus' combined ›body politic‹ and ›body natural‹ embody in the late first century B. C. and early first century A. D. (cf. J. B. Meister, *Der Körper des Prinzipals. Zur Problematik eines monarchischen Körpers ohne Monarchie* [Stuttgart 2013])?

Such qualms need not detract from the quality of the book. The authors have provided a timely synopsis, expertly guiding audiences around a wide range of materials. Uninitiated readers will have lots to learn from so readable an introduction. (The only thing missing is a timeline, perhaps omitted for fear of highlighting the problems of chronology?) But academics will find much of interest too. There are some wonderful vignettes along the way, as, for example, the rival etymology of ›augustus‹ that sanctioned Napoleon's ›Augustan‹ papal title (p. 292); some great new finds are likewise thrown into the mix, like the *Antalya Gaius Caesar* cenotaph reliefs (p. 182 fig. 43). Susanne Muth's splendid reconstructions of the *Forum Romanum* should not go without mention either, emblazoned as they are on the book's inside front and back covers.

Ultimately, though, this volume reveals as much about ourselves as about the world of the first Roman emperor. Anniversaries inevitably have us look back and reflect – and reflect upon retrospective reflections before us, perhaps none more important than the Fascist celebrations of Augustus' two-thousandth birthday in 1938 (pp. 9 f. 276; 283 f.). Amid such reflections, it can prove all too easy to forget our own finite parameters (›Im Jahr 2014 können wir bei der Erinnerung an den 2000. Todestag des Augustus ausgewogener urteilen‹, pp. 9 f., cf. 284). Although a lot has happened in the Augustan life-span between 1938 and 2014, twentieth-century ghosts still haunt this early twenty-first century account. Savonarola might have burnt Ovid's ›lewd‹ books in 1497, for example, and Ovid himself claims to have rescued his verses from his own (meta)poetic fire (e. g. *Tr.* 4, 1, 99; cf. F. A. Martelli, *Ovid's Revisions. The Editor as Author* [Cambridge 2013] esp. 52–54); but Stroth's talk of ›Ovid being burnt‹ has to do with the book-burnings of a very different Reich (pp. 256 f., cf. F. H. Cramer, *Book-burning and censorship in ancient Rome: A chapter from the history of freedom of speech. Journal Hist. of Ideas* 6, 1945, 157–196, with timely conclusion on 196). If the Augustus theme is immortal, we seem forever destined to construct Rome's first emperor in our own historical mirage.

Anniversaries should make us think forwards as well as back. With that in mind, I couldn't help but wonder: in the year 2114 (if not by 2038), will this book be read as an account of *divus Augustus*? Or will *Divus Augustus* be read as a monument to 2014 *Altertumswissenschaft*?

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