

Karl Galinsky, *Augustus. Introduction to the Life of an Emperor*. Cambridge University Press, 2012. ISBN 978-0-521-74442-3 (paperback). Pp. xxiv + 200).

This is a very good book, and is now the best place for students to start if they wish to pick up a toolkit of analytical approaches towards the age of Augustus and to access painlessly an excellent narrative. In addition, it is attractively presented, with useful maps and illustrations, a genealogical chart, timeline, note on ancient sources, and further reading (which could perhaps be extended a little more without becoming off-putting) and contains very few typographical errors. I shall be recommending it to students as essential reading before they embark upon their Augustus module when I next teach it.

Lots of introductory books on Augustus have already been written, but this one has several distinctive features to recommend it. Firstly, the book itself is almost a demonstration of the validity of Augustus' favourite motto *festina lente*: Galinsky has come to writing this after many years of research upon the period in question. There is nothing over-hasty here in terms of historical judgement, and the book benefits hugely from being a response to Augustus and his era that has matured over many years. Introductory studies often suffer from having to over-simplify their subject-matter. Galinsky succeeds in constantly reminding us that other interpretations of particular issues exist, and that his chapters are the proverbial tip of the iceberg. He acknowledges complex scholarly debates very concisely (for example on the question of the *horologium*) without letting them cloud the discussion. He makes many wise observations about problems of interpretation, pointing out, for example, that there has been too much of a tendency to concentrate upon the flashpoint of the battle of Actium, rather than to analyse the long drawn-out sequence of events surrounding it. His reminder to us that the *Aeneid* is the product of the precarious 20s BC is essential for understanding that poem's tenor. One of the best features in the book is the individual sources, texts, and images, presented in their own boxes. By demonstrating what sort of evidence underlies at least some of the analysis, these go some way towards slaking my inevitable thirst for footnotes, which, for the sake of fluency and attractiveness for the non-expert, Galinsky has eschewed. Nor are the contents of these boxes entirely predictable: although well-known sources like the *Gemma Augustea* find their place there, my personal favourite of an unexpected insight is 'Livia's prescription for nervous tension', from the *De Medicamentis* of Marcellus Burdigalensis. The final major achievement of the book is that it is written in a very accessible manner that is nevertheless completely safe from any criticism of dumbing-down. I appreciated headings like 'Augustus gets a "Life"' and an expression describing 'Octavian' as a 'Caesar wannabe'.

One of the potential pitfalls of choosing to write a biography of any Roman emperor is that it runs the risk of implying that the individual in question stage-managed everything that occurred whilst he was in power. Galinsky maintains a fine balance between on the one hand intimating that Augustus personally was indeed himself responsible for some striking features of his era ('he had a definite vision of where he wanted Rome to go'), whilst at the same time reminding us of other players in the game – not just notables like Agrippa, Maecenas, or Herod the Great, but

unnamed provincials who creatively embraced and responded to new images and ways of thinking that emerged at the time. In the final chapter, Galinsky helpfully reminds us ‘that not everything that happened under Augustus happened because of Augustus’.

Inevitably, there are minor points to question, such as whether Galinsky is too hesitant to give much importance to the iconography of Augustan coinage, or whether he is too willing to account for ‘Egyptomania’ at Rome as reflecting the impact of Cleopatra (how would that account for the Palestrina mosaic?). I also feel that he underplays the importance of the army as a basis for Augustus’ power, as reflected in his radical professionalization of the legions and monopoly on their loyalty. In box 7.4, I suspect that the lack of punctuation in the translation of the inscription may mislead students, who may perhaps end up reading ‘son of the divine Augustus’ instead of ‘son of the divine, Augustus’.

A reader coming to the age of Augustus for the first time will not appreciate how judiciously Galinsky sails the perilous seas of historical interpretation, but a further strength of the book is the author’s success in vividly evoking a coherent framework within which Augustus operated. He threads through his narrative key themes such as the balance of tradition and innovation; the transformation of society at Rome, in Italy, and in the provinces; the opening up of new spheres of interest to the non-elite; pragmatism coming before ideology; the importance of polyvalence for understanding how contemporary viewers were engaged actively in ‘reading’ Augustan art and architecture; and the importance of local identities in shaping a shared imperial identity. It is refreshing to see an abandonment of the endless debates over Augustus’ ‘restoration of the Republic’, although replacing it with a new slogan ‘Constitution Plus’ may not perhaps stand the test of time. Galinsky has produced an eminently readable book, and it is written in informal language not usually found in the realm of Cambridge University Press. I have one tiny reservation in terms of accessibility to student readers this side of the Atlantic, namely that Galinsky’s parallels from the history and contemporary world of the US will elude some readers (I’m sorry to admit that I doubt that my students would recognise the significance of probity being tested by a cherry tree mentioned on p.2 and may just get confused at this point), whilst some of his turns of phrase, designed to engage readers, run the risk of confusing non-American readers: it took me a little time to work out that a *résumé* equates to a *curriculum vitae*.

Galinsky has achieved his aims admirably, ‘to provide a concise and informative introduction, to set some accents, and to stimulate the reader to explore any of its topics further’. All this provides a very tantalising taster for the 2014 celebrations marking Augustus’ bimillennium, and demonstrates all too clearly that the image of Augustus is likely to continue to stir up controversy for some years to come.

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