



The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus

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"Art and architecture are mirrors of a society. They reflect the state of its values, especially in times of crisis or transition." Upon this premise Paul Zanker builds an interpretation of Augustan art as a visual language that both expressed and furthered the transformation of Roman society during the rule of Augustus Caesar. The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus illustrates how the establishment of monarchy under Augustus Caesar led to the creation of a new system of visual imagery that reflects the consciousness of this transitional age.

The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus Details

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From Reader Review The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus for online ebook

Gabriele Sorrentino says

Un testo fondamentale per capire il periodo augusteo

David says

Zanker pulls together so many different Roman media and makes sense of them in the light of the monumental shift that Augustus brought to the Mediterranean world. Images, symbols, and designs that may seem random or meaningless suddenly have significance, communicating a message of peace, stability, and prosperity ushered in by the princeps. Zanker starts with the competition for self-aggrandizement in the Old Republic, shows how Octavian participated in this himself in his rivalry against Marc Antony, and then traces the gradual change toward an attitude of pietas (devotion) and virtus (courage).

I loved the images chosen. Many were very familiar--the Ara Pacis reliefs, the Prima Porta statue, the veiled Augustus; but many were not, and some were obscure, which was fun for me. I especially enjoyed the comments on wall paintings. The only complaint I had was that none of the images are in color, which is understandable due to publishing costs, and the absence of any dimensions for the individual works.

Incredible book, though. I hope to you read Zanker's other books on Pompeii and Roman Art.

EAL says

Augustus is the bomb and this book was very useful in examining how he created his public image. Accessible writing.

Diana says

I'm such a geek, I actually snapped this up as an undergrad from the graduate course list. A friend said, "you know they only order so many of those for grad students"....I apologize to the grad student who was slower than me and may have missed out.

I am addicted to Augustus art...he was such a propaganda master that we still think of Cleopatra as rather "whorish" today....it's all because of Augustus.

Brenda says

Really enjoying this romp through Augustan and pre Augustan Rome through its visual culture.

Aabis says

Had to read some parts of it for a class, interesting enough that I decided to read it all

Alison says

Perhaps I should have begun with Zanker, as he was really the introducer of the “power of images” to the field of Roman history, as opposed to art history. Quoting his preface can summarize the sort of change that his book brought to Roman studies:

Art and architecture are mirrors of a society. They reflect the state of its values, especially in times of crisis or transition. Yet it is notoriously difficult to analyze any particular work of art as an historical document in and of itself. This book tries to illustrate how a fundamental change in the political system led to a new visual language that reflects both an altered mentality and contributed significantly to the process of change. . . . I have sought to emphasize questions such as the societal forces that fueled the change as well as the effect of psychological factors. Thus the form of the work is of no less importance than its message (v).

What Zanker did was to connect analysis of the enormous body of Augustan art—complex, varied, and beautiful as it is—to the analysis of the societal and political changes of the period. Based on the evidence (amply illustrated; there is at least one image on nearly every two-page spread), he envisions an Augustus who propagated his values through a sort of dialogue with his subjects, and did not simply impose them from the top down. Rather than a one-hundred-percent cult of personality, he rather attempted to disentangle the threads of “the complex machinery of [Augustus’] cultural program,” which he described as “the collaboration and mutual influence one another of princeps, political cronies, creative poets, architects, and artistic ateliers” (102).

I was not totally convinced by this argument. While I agree that Augustus’ recreation of Rome in an “archaicized” mode owed a lot to the antiquarian interests of the Late Republic, could it have gone so far without his own intense personal interest? At times Zanker himself cannot avoid making certain aspects of “cultural renewal” in the city of Rome seem like they were imposed from above: “But in general people were reluctant to wear [the toga]. . . . Augustus had to give them a push” (163). However, the chapter on the spread of Roman “classicism” from the center of Rome to the outer fringes of the Empire is incredibly valuable. In the past, Republican Rome had absorbed artistic styles from the Hellenistic world even as it largely rejected monarchialism. Once Augustus introduced one-man rule, his persona as the center of the state was projected far and wide. Zanker argues, “. . . in both East and West it was the rapidly spreading cult of the emperor that was the principal vehicle for propagating the Augustan program and its attendant imagery” (297). Once again, uniformity is the key to impressing as many people as possible with the power of Rome and the centrality of its at least partly-divine princeps. [from an annotated bibliography i wrote a few years ago. don't go looking for this on most goodreads entries]

Roman Clodia says

Zanker's book has become a classic for scholars working on the visuality of Augustan Rome and deservedly so. Here he explores the use of images to create a vocabulary for the articulation of Augustan political, moral and religious 'regeneration'.

While the use of images in a political context was not new, Zanker shows how no-one before Augustus had

quite harnessed visual imagery in the same concerted and integrated way.

Much of this book is excellent but Zanker's readings of the Augustan poets is very unsubtle taking no account of irony and opposition to Augustan ideology, for example, in Propertius and Ovid.

But, that aside, this is an indispensable work, and gives us a flavour of what it might have been like to actually walk around Rome under Augustus.

Alejandra Rotondaro ferreira says

Por qué tratan así al pobre Ovidio.

Michele Stefanile says

Lettura fondamentale per chi si avvicina al mondo romano e alla storia antica. Una splendida opera di un grande studioso.

Simon Eyles says

Fascinating stuff, some of the images are not great, but I compensated by googling them and reading alongside.

Lili Kyurkchiyska says

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I finished it at last. Very useful and shows aspects that I haven't realised.
