

A.K. Bowman, E. Champlin, A. Lintott (edd.) *The Cambridge Ancient History*:  
Second edition: the Augustan empire, 43 B.C. - A.D. 69. Pp. xxii + 1193; 21 maps, 10  
figs, 3 tables, 5 stemmata. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. ISBN: 0  
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Reviewing such a major work as the new edition of the *Cambridge Ancient History* is a pointless task. The real test of success will be not lie in the ephemera of reviews, but in the extent to which the coming generations of students and scholars use it as a work of reference. Indeed, reading through the 978 pages of main text is a somewhat perverse way of gaining an impression of the volume's value. Nevertheless, there can be doubt that it is an authoritative text, written with scholarship and care by leading figures working in the field. It is a volume in which, one feels, every word is weighed and behind each paragraph stands a vast array of scholarship, as displayed in the extensive bibliographies.

The *Cambridge Ancient History*, however, serves a purpose beyond being a work of reference. It is also a gift to historiographers of the future, epitomising the nature of ancient history at the period of its publication and although the editors comment that they do not wish the first edition to be seen as a relic, of use only to the historiographer, both volumes become by their very nature important historiographic texts. But the future historiographer needs to be a little careful since, in some ways, the whole project is out of keeping with the times.

The first surprise of the volume is that this is not a manifestation of ancient history in the 1990s but in the 1980s. Most of the texts were written between 1983 and 1988, though the bibliographies take into account work published in the 1990s. The delays in publication have led to the volume already appearing somewhat dated in methods and approach. For instance, one of the major developments in the historiography of the empire has been an increased awareness, heavily influenced by Zanker, of the importance of art and architecture in constructing the public image of the emperors and the intimate relationship between these constructed images and other parts of their political agenda. The contributors to the main political chapters are certainly aware of this aspect of the careers of the emperors, but it does not achieve the prominence that perhaps it has had in 1990s, a period which has seen an increased awareness of the importance of image in so many areas of life. Interest in construction of official images and identities and the subversion of these has, of course, been central to literary criticism in Classics in the 90s and the post-structuralist agenda (if there can be such a thing) has provided a new way of discussing the narratives of the period that one does not sense in this volume. Whereas some recent accounts are happy to discuss the Julio-Claudians in terms of generated and subverted images

whose relationship to historical fact is often obscure, the chapters of this volume are concerned with the concrete, with facts.

The conservative feel of the work is also a problem of structure. The contributions are limited to the chronological spread of the volume. The general concentration of the last half century on the economic and social structures of the empire is not fully represented here, presumably because it does not fit within the tight chronological framework, though, of course, the contributors' knowledge of this work informs their individual essays. This is particularly true of the chapters on the provinces in which themes are atomised in the description of the particular as each contributor tells us what happened in his province. Few contributions escape the reporting of facts and, indeed, given the space available and the authority of their work, the pressure to include all the facts seems to have been overwhelming. It is (with a few notable exceptions) a volume of reference not of ideas and it is no coincidence that some of the most interesting contributions pay comparatively little regard to the chronological limitations.

To pick out two of the several exceptions is undoubtedly unfair but Wallace-Hadrill's chapter on the imperial court seems oddly modern in much of this, being both thematic, relevant to 90s' obsessions and sitting comfortably in the chronological framework. Crawford's contribution on Roman Italy from Sulla to Augustus (though its presence here rather than in volume IX seems extraordinary in spite of editorial justification) is tightly related to the issue of Romanisation and is focused and interesting, though perhaps does not give the 'complete story' in the same way as other 'provincial chapters'.

The volume contains thirty-three chapters and one set of appendices but I do not wish to use the remainder of the available space to enumerating the many weighty contributions. Instead I shall concentrate on the 'key-note sections' for the volume, the chapters on political history. This is the 'Augustan Empire' and most views of this period draw their inspiration and foundation from events in Augustus' reign. The most coherent depiction of that reign comes in two chapters by Crook. Like the majority of the other chapters in this volume, C.'s contribution is a model of caution and good sense, covering each stage, each point, without prejudice and with a detailed knowledge of the available information: the very epitome of the dispassionate historian picking through the evidence in search of the truth, even if, from time to time, the elliptical structure of his sentences, the fondness for antithesis, and the building of sub-clause on sub-clause risk obscuring meaning, though representing the reflexive nature of the analysis. C.'s Augustus is very different from the proto-fascist of Syme and Zanker or from the Bismarckian constitutionalist of an earlier generation. He rejects the tendency of scholars to see Augustus struggling to establish his position

in the face of opposition from various factions or working to establish an ideal constitution. This is an Augustus whose power was firmly established by 30 B.C., whose attempts to establish a constitutional framework were, though interesting, essentially technical, and who faced little opposition. The various 'crises' are summarily dismissed and the conspiracies, as others have suggested, considered as marginalia. This is an Augustan juggernaut crushing all in his path and, though feeling the bumps, unswayed by the political events of the reign, a power unquestionable in spite of the reinvention of some of the political structures of the Republic. The history of the period (though not the emperor) becomes somewhat bloodless on this reading, without real conflict. Politics ends with the fall of the Republic. This is an Augustus for the 80s, when conservatism in Britain and America seemed to crush all ideological debates to the extent that the 'end of history' was predicted in manner reminiscent for Classicists at least of the *Aeneid*. On the evening May 1st 1997 (the day of the British general election), as I write this, the dominant ideology of Conservatism seems to be being swept away and one wonders whether 'Augustanism' similarly only quietened rather than destroyed the opposition.

Wiedemann's Julio-Claudians seem also compressed by this lack of ideological struggle. The creativity of the Julio-Claudian period is lost and the sense of intellectual and political adventure as each emperor and each generation attempted to re-work the Augustan revolution and come to terms with the politics and new social pressures is rather downplayed. This is also reflected in the chapters on the provinces in which there is also little sense of a negotiation of the relationship with the imperial power. Recent work on the ambiguity of responses to Rome is not represented here.

This is a volume of considerable scholarship but already seems a work of its period. In its desire to establish an authoritative text, a version of what happened in ancient history to which we can all refer and accept, the many voices of a what is supposed nowadays to be a fragmented academy are here reduced. The Cambridge Ancient History offers certainties in a scholarly world that is increasingly obsessing on ambiguities.

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