

Typology and diversity in the portraits of Augustus

R. R. R. Smith

including discussion of D. BOSCHUNG, *DIE BILDNISSE DES AUGUSTUS. DAS RÖMISCHE HERRSCHERBILD I.2* (Gebr. Mann, Berlin 1993). xv + 237 p., 239 pl., 9 Beil. ISBN 3-7861-1695-4.

In the history of the Roman imperial image Augustus' portraits occupy a special position in terms both of self-representation and of their reproduction. Augustus was the first Roman leader whose image was widely disseminated and replicated, and we have far more of his sculptured portraits than of any other emperor. They have been much studied both in older and more recent studies, from which a near-consensus has emerged on the level of both facts and interpretation. There were three main Augustus portraits which presented him first in the manner of a Hellenistic-style leader, later in the classicising manner of Polykleitan art.

Boschung's excellent new book in the revised *Das römische Herrscherbild* series¹ now provides the complete evidence, collecting and illustrating all the surviving versions of Augustus' portraits in one place — some 210 sculptured heads, busts, and statues. The picture of Augustus' image that he presents is inevitably more complicated than that based on partial collections of the material, but, while there is much to adjust in detail and some new ideas to propose, by and large Boschung's volume provides the underpinning for the consensus view, both for the isolation of the three portraits and their meaning.

Boschung is primarily concerned with the appearance and details of the main portrait conceptions or types, and his book is a state-of-the-art application of the typological method in the study of imperial portraits. Since it stands very close to the material, it may be useful to provide some preliminary sketch of this method and why it is important. It is easy to misunderstand detailed copy comparison in the study of imperial portrait sculpture (and ideal sculpture) as some kind of misguided, positivist exercise, out of touch with ancient realities and complexities. Some English-speaking scholars seem, in general terms, sceptical of how imperial portrait types worked and behaved, what they were for, and why they matter. Detailed copy comparison that involves the counting and verification of the components of repeated hairstyle systems can be off-putting, but some engagement with the phenomenon and its modern scholarship is necessary before it can be dismissed.

Type and replication: identity and recognition

Augustus' portrait image stands at the beginning of what became regular imperial portrait practice, that is, the creation of successive, centrally defined, three-dimensional images (heads or busts) which were each then made available around the empire and assiduously replicated in local contexts as part of a whole physical apparatus of loyalty-demonstration (figs. 1-2). Other image-types, for example, classical statues of divinities and athletes, such as the Doryphoros and Pheidias Athenas, or portraits of culture heroes, such as Aristotle and Demosthenes, had already in the late Republic been the object of organised replication for the Italian villa market, so that some centres would already have been familiar with and have had practice in the reception and replication of a given sculptured image. Augustus, however, remains the first living subject whose image went through this system. The creation and appearance of the centrally defined portrait image (the original model, the portrait type), its

¹ The first volume of the revised series to appear was D. Boschung, *Die Bildnisse des Caligula. Das römische Herrscherbild I. 4* (Berlin 1989). The new direction of the series was discussed by the present writer in *JRS* 82 (1992) 270-73.