

*Magnus, Maior, Maximus: Degrees of Greatness on the Ides of January in Ovid's Fasti*

One of the principal features of Ovid's *Fasti* is its devotion to imperial holidays and the act of honoring members of the imperial household—none more so than Augustus himself. Scholars, however, are divided on the issue of whether these honorific celebrations are meant as an endorsement of imperial politics or perhaps as a way of undercutting them. While Herbert-Brown (1994) and Fantham (1995) are adamant in their view that Ovid indeed praises Augustus often and fulsomely, Hinds (1992), Barchiesi (1997) and Newlands (1995) read these episodes with a bit more skepticism, acknowledging the double-edged nature of any Augustan discourse, particularly that of Ovid. Applying the principles of the latter group, I aim to address the episode of the Ides of January, the day on which Octavian is said to have received the title “Augustus” (*Fast.* 1.590) and the day on which he gave the provinces back to the people (*Fast.* 1.589). Much attention has been paid to the apparent discrepancy between Ovid's dating of the former event to the 13<sup>th</sup> of January and the date of January 16<sup>th</sup> assigned by the *Fasti Praenestini* (Degrassi 115). My focus, however, will be on Augustus' conflation with Jupiter, which is sustained throughout the duration of the entry, and which is quite problematic for a variety of reasons.

The extended comparison between the Princeps and Jupiter occurs for the first time in the *Fasti* on the entry for the Ides of January. Yet, it is a parallel which also exists elsewhere in Ovid's corpus. In book one of the *Metamorphoses*, the reader is privy to a magisterial depiction of Jupiter who is said to reside in the Palatine of the sky (*Met.* 1.163 ff.). The motif occurs again in book 15 where Jupiter is said to rule over the sky and other realms, while Augustus rules over the earth (*Met.* 15.858-60). It then takes on a new more targeted form in Ovid's exile poetry where Augustus is depicted as an angry Jupiter having exacted punishment upon Ovid with his mighty thunderbolt (*Tr.* 1.4.26; 1.5.78-84; 2.179; 4.4.12-20 to name a few). The *Fasti*, however,

offers perhaps the most complicated Ovidian comparisons between Jupiter and Augustus, given its religiously charged status. It is the goal of this paper to explore the many subtle ways in which Ovid establishes this initial comparison, which sets the tone for other such comparisons throughout the remainder of the poem.

The placement of this comparison on the Ides of January is especially suitable, given that the Ides of every month belongs to Jupiter, as Ovid informs the reader earlier in the first book (*Fast.* 1.56). We are faced, however, with an immediate problem. Ovid designates the sacrifice as taking place in the temple of *magni Iovis*, yet his ultimate intention – or so it would seem – is to connect the root of *Augustus* with the highest form of Jupiter. By initially referring to Jupiter as *magnus* rather than *summus* Ovid undermines his subsequent hierarchy of Roman leaders. If Jupiter is *magnus* than surely Pompey *Magnus* and those ahead of him in the hierarchy are also equal to Jupiter. This in turn detracts from the solemnity of the episode and problematizes the idea that Augustus alone deserves to be equated with Jupiter.

In addition, I expand upon Barchiesi's recognition of "syntagmatic tensions" related to this episode. Barchiesi (1997: 93-9) had noted that the Ides of January is sandwiched between two entries devoted to the Carmentalia and that the events of the episode that follows are negatively charged. There we hear the story of how Roman matrons were deprived of the privilege of riding in carriages and subsequently withheld sexual intercourse from their husbands, culminating in self-mutilation in order to drive home their point (*Fast.* 1.619 ff.). The act of violently stabbing their own wombs and denying their husbands children clashes directly with the notion of *augustus* and its association with "augmenting." Many features of this passage reflect back on the previous entry and invite the reader to reconsider the concept of Augustan greatness.

## Bibliography

- Degrassi, A. (1963) *Inscriptiones Italiae*, vol. 13, Rome.
- Barchiesi, A. (1997) *The Poet and the Prince: Ovid and Augustan Discourse*, Berkeley.
- Fantham, E. (1995) "Rewriting and Rereading the *Fasti*: Augustus, Ovid, and recent Classical Scholarship," *Antichthon*, 29, 42-59.
- Herbert-Brown, G. (1994) *Ovid and the Fasti: A Historical Study*, Oxford.
- Hinds, S. (1992) "Arma in Ovid's *Fasti* – Part 2: Genre, Romulean Rome, and Augustan Ideology," *Arethusa* 25, 113-153.
- Newlands, C. E. (1995) *Playing with Time: Ovid and Ovid's Fasti*, Ithaca.