

Corpus Imperii: Figuring the Augustan 'body politic'
M. J. Squire

This paper examines the intersection between ancient theoretical discourses of the body in antiquity and their literal embodiment in figurative art. My starting-point is a metaphor: the idea of the state as organic body. Although this idea has its loose conceptual origins in the Greek world (and in Stoic philosophy in particular), I argue, it was only developed into a full-blown conceptual paradigm in the late Roman Republic – according to the notion first of the *corpus rei publicae*, and then (in the early principate) that of the *corpus imperii*.

This figure of the 'body politic' provides a new framework for approaching the material bodies of Roman portraiture in the late Republic and early empire. Taking its cue from Meister's ground-breaking 2012 book on the *Körper des Princeps*, my paper exploits the Roman art of the body to bring together the (all too often disconnected) *membra* of ancient philosophy, Roman history and classical archaeology. On the one hand, I argue that the corpus of Roman portraiture acquired a whole new political dimension in the wake of this conceptual shift (something that helps to explain some palpable departures from earlier, 'Greek' traditions). On the other, I suggest that Augustus' body provided a material space for negotiating that new conceptual understanding: the figurative portrayal of Augustus' body incorporated questions about not only the nature of Augustus, but also the political system for which he stood.