

AUGUSTUS' PRESENTATION OF "EMPIRE" IN HIS *RES GESTAE*

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Abstract

Having defeated all his political enemies and expanded the rule of Rome enormously, Octavian, from 27 BC known as Augustus, ended the civil wars which had plagued the Late Republic and founded the system known as the Roman Principate. The *Res Gestae* purports to be a retrospective survey by Augustus of his own public achievements in restoring the *res publica* and conquering the world. It was published in Rome but the only surviving copies were found in the new and distant province of Galatia. In this paper I will try to explain how Augustus, as the founder of the new era known today as 'the Roman Empire', envisages and presents Roman rule under his leadership by analysing the content of the *Res Gestae*. The narrative structure of the *Res Gestae* shows that Roman imperial rule is conceived of by Augustus in a scheme of core-periphery, in which the core is composed of the provinces under direct Roman control, while the periphery is an area of more vaguely subject people or places maintained by threats and intervention, or more weakly by 'friendship' (*amicitia*), which vary according to the historical specifics of contact between these areas or peoples and Rome. In both cases, whether subjection is in the name of the 'rule' or the 'friendship' of Roman people, it is Augustus' personal authority that appears to matter the most, which indicates that the personal role of 'princeps' became increasingly important in the development of the Romans concept of their rule.

Keywords: Augustus, Empire, *imperium*, *provincia*, *amicitia*.

1. Introduction

In studying how the Romans of the Augustan period viewed and conceived of their ‘empire’, an obvious starting point is the summary account of his achievements written himself by Augustus, his so-called *Res Gestae*, because it is a coherent survey of events by the main agent in the changes that took place in his time.

The *Res Gestae*, possibly one of the documents entrusted to the Vestal Virgins before his death, is the final statement of the first Roman emperor on his achievements.¹ It was inscribed on two bronze pillars and set up in either side of the entrance of his Mausoleum (the *tumulus Iuliorum*), completed in 28 BC in the Campus Martius, according to Augustus’ own will. These pillars do not survive, and it is only from Suetonius and the title of the *Res Gestae* that we know the original publication of the text was in front of the Mausoleum.² What we know today about the text itself all comes from the single distant Roman province of Galatia.³ Despite the lack of firm ancient statements and the fact that the only copies found are in Galatia, we can on the analogy of practice with other important imperial texts, be fairly confident that the text was disseminated by the Senate to the governors of each province, probably on the proposal of Tiberius, but that it was left to the individual cities to decide how and where to publicize it.⁴ The form of this document has been a subject of intense modern debate with little agreement, and it seems to be distinctive with no single model for its composition.⁵ Basically it takes the form of the funerary inscriptions commonly inscribed at Rome which served to enumerate and honour the achievements of the deceased in the form of *elogium*.⁶ The standard view of scholars such as Mommsen, Dessau and Hohl considers the primary intended audience of Augustus to have been the citizens at Rome (*plebs urbana*), since the tedious enumeration

¹ Four documents listed by Suetonius, *Aug.* 101.4: his will, directions for his funeral, an account of what he had accomplished (*index rerum a se gestarum*) and a summary of the condition of the whole empire (*breuiarium totius imperii*).

² It is curious that although Strabo (5.3.8) gives a detailed description of the monument, he does not mention the text itself. About the text inscribed on bronze at Rome, see Güven 1998; Cooley 2009; Brunt & Moore 1967: 2.

³ But a new fragment has now been identified in the province of Asia, see note 13.

⁴ Cooley 2009: 18-21.

⁵ Ramage 1987: 15; Cooley 2009: 30-34; Brunt & Moore 1967: 3.

⁶ Brunt & Moore 1967: 2-3; Cooley 2009: 30.

of games and circuses for the benefit of the people of Rome and distribution of land for veterans would not have interested the provincial inhabitants.⁷ Some scholars even argue that Augustus tried to appeal to a specific group of the citizens, such as the more educated young men (*iuventus*).⁸ There is no need to reopen the debate here, but it is more likely that Augustus did not have a single audience in mind when he wrote the *Res Gestae*. Because he was a Roman and was buried in Rome, his primary intended audience must have been the Roman people, but he may also have had some thoughts for audiences beyond Italy, since the possibility cannot be excluded that he may have intended the text to be sent to the provinces.⁹

Although scholars have debated whether there are compositional strata in the *Res Gestae*, it seems to have been revised and updated, if not written, in his final years, and possibly touched up by Tiberius.¹⁰ Augustus himself states at the end of the work that 'when I wrote this I was in my seventy-sixth year' (35.2), which indicates after 23 September AD 13, less than one year before his death on 19 August AD 14. It echoes the words near the beginning that 'I have been consul thirteen times at the time of writing, and I have been the holder of tribunician power thirty-seven times' (4.4). Since his first accepted tribunician power was in summer 23 BC, 10 December AD 13 was the thirty-seventh time of this grant.¹¹ Also, in 8.4 he mentions a *lustrum*, a ceremony of purification after the census, conducted 'in the consulship of Sextus Pompeius and Sextus Appuleius'¹², which was also in the first half of AD 14. Therefore, the *Res Gestae* should present us with a conclusive view of how Augustus perceived the 'empire' of Rome as he had added to and bequeathed it.

What we have today are three published sources for the text from Ancyra, Pisidian Antioch and Apollonia, all in the province of Galatia in Asia Minor, annexed by the Romans in 25 BC, plus an unpublished fragment from Sardis in the Roman province of Asia.¹³ The most complete copy of

⁷ Yavetz 1984: 8; Brunt & Moore 1967: 4.

⁸ Yavetz 1984: 19.

⁹ Cooley 2009: 39.

¹⁰ Ramage 1987: 13; Cooley 2009: 42; Gagé 1935: 22-23; Brunt & Moore 1967: 6.

¹¹ On the date of the acceptance of the tribunician power, see Brunt & Moore 1967: 6, 10, 44; Cooley 2009: 42.

¹² Dio 56.29.5.

¹³ For the Sardis fragment identified in 1929, see Thonemann 2012: 282-288. As it has not been properly published, this version will not be referred to in the current study.

the *Res Gestae*, inscribed on the marble walls of the Temple of Roma and Augustus at Ancyra and known as the *Monumentum Ancyranum*, was first properly published in Mommsen's second edition of the text in 1883, who called it the 'Queen of Inscriptions'.¹⁴ It has both the Latin text inscribed in six columns inside the porch on either side, and a Greek version in nineteen columns on the external wall. One problem is that the Latin inscription was seriously damaged, so its content has to be supplemented by the better preserved Greek text, which is at best a paraphrase of the Latin rather than a faithful translation. Parts of another Greek copy were also discovered at Apollonia (the *Monumentum Apolloniense*), and about 270 small fragments of the Latin version have been found at Antioch (the *Monumentum Antiochenum*), which are important for completing some of the lacunae in the Latin version from Ancyra.¹⁵

As all the three sources give the same texts with minor differences, it is almost certain that they sprang from the same originals. The Latin one was presumably written by Augustus and inscribed outside the Mausoleum at Rome as mentioned above. Both Greek versions seem to be copies of an identical text, which was in fact an adaptation of the Latin with occasional deviations, rather than a word-for-word rendering.¹⁶ It is not clear who made the translation. The alterations to the original text and comparisons with Greek versions of earlier *senatus consulta* both indicate a native Greek speaker.¹⁷ Since both Greek copies are identical, it is unlikely to have been a local decision. Possibly the translation was made in the province of Galatia or rather the province of Asia, where cities were long used to translating Roman documents, but not without the consent of the Roman authorities.¹⁸ This chapter, in search of Augustus' own idea of the 'empire',

¹⁴ Mommsen 1906: 247.

¹⁵ As the excavation has not been completed, there are still new fragments being found, see Cooley 2009: 257.

¹⁶ It is notable that there is only Latin version at Antioch without any Greek translations. This is partly because Antioch was re-founded in 25 BC as a Roman colony (*colonia Caesarea Antiochia*) by Augustus for the veterans, thus the inscription had both veteran colonists and indigenous Anatolians as its readers. Whether the texts were legible for the locals, for all the inscriptions found at Galatia we should also consider their symbolic meanings in a monumental context apart from their textual meanings. See Cooley 2009: 13-16. About the further discussion of the 'visually written' narrative and of the symbolic meaning of *RG*, see Güven 1998: 39-40.

¹⁷ Wigtil 1982: 189-194; Gagé 1935: 12.

¹⁸ Brunt & Moore 1967: 2; Gagé 1935: 10-13.

will be mainly based on the Latin text. The Greek version has made some of the language more acceptable to a provincial audience.¹⁹ The Greek version will only be referred to where there are any significant differences that suggest divergent attitudes towards Roman rule.

This study will use the edition of Cooley (2009), which is the most recent edition and English translation and has comprehensive notes. I also use the commentaries of Brunt and Moore (1967), Gagé (1935), Scheid (2007), as well as Mommsen's second edition (1883) when necessary.

2. World Conquest

The preface to the Ancyran inscription of the *Res Gestae* says: 'Below is a copy of the achievements of the deified Augustus, by which he made the world subject to the rule of the Roman people, and of the expenses which he incurred for the state and people of Rome, as inscribed upon two bronze columns which have been set up at Rome.'²⁰ The question of who wrote the preface still remains, despite many confident claims, a puzzle among scholars. As the word 'copy' (*exemplar*) and reference to the original inscription in Rome indicate, it was obviously not taken from the original at Rome, and it is hard to decide whether the original one would have had a preface at all.²¹ But as we will see below, the grandeur of the language does echo the main text.²² Presumably the preface of the Ancyra copy was based on excerpts from the letter of the governor of Galatia to the cities, ordering them to publish the text, and he in turn may have drawn on the letter from the senate sending the letter to him.²³

In any case, the heading shows an official view of the main content and claims of the *Res Gestae*: the phrase 'the whole world' (*orbis terrarum*)

¹⁹ Cooley 2009: 22-26.

²⁰ *Res G.* heading: *rerum gestarum divi Augusti, quibus orbem terrarum imperio populi Romani subiecit, et impensarum quas in rem publicam populumque Romanum fecit, incisarum in duabus aeneis pilis, quae sunt Romae positae, exemplar subiectum.*

²¹ Most scholars, mainly based on Suetonius, agree that it did have a preface, which might have been similar to that of the surviving inscription at Ancyra. See Suetonius, *Aug.* 101.4: *index rerum a se gestarum.* Cf. Brunt & Moore 1967: 1-2; Gagé 1935: 9; Cooley 2009: 102; Koster 1978: 241-246.

²² Cooley 2009: 102.

²³ As there are numerous similar examples to show that it is the case with most of the other letters issued by the Senate to the governors, such as Ehrenberg & Jones 1976: 131-149.

claims that Augustus' conquests had made the world subject to 'the rule of Roman people' (*imperium populi Romani*).²⁴ And, whoever wrote it, the heading echoes passages in the *Res Gestae*, most notably where Augustus asserts that he had often conducted wars by land and sea, civil and foreign, across the whole world, which is also the only place where he himself uses the phrase *orbis terrarum*.²⁵ Related to this is Augustus' claim to have reached the all-encircling Ocean, which marks the edge of the world in Greek and Roman writers.²⁶ Another hint at world conquest is his assertion to have 'extended the territory of all those provinces of the Roman people which had neighbouring peoples who were not subject to our authority'.²⁷ Both of the latter two claims will be discussed further below.

But before we leave *Res Gestae* 3.1, there are two more points worth noticing. Firstly, the implication of the territorial extent of the Roman rule is emphasised not only by the term *orbis terrarum*, but also the term 'by land and sea' (*terra et mari*). Besides 3.1, this formula appears another three times. Once at 4.2, where Augustus refers to his 'successes by land and sea',²⁸ another time at 13 as 'peace by land and sea',²⁹ and third time, albeit indirectly, at 26.4 'either by land or sea'.³⁰ Rule over land and sea had been a compliment traditionally used of political hegemony in the Hellenistic world.³¹ But at Rome celebration of an individual as ruler over land and sea, as far as we know, did not appear until Pompey was exalted

²⁴ About when the expression *orbis terrarum* began to be used in Roman political contexts, see Nicolet 1991: 31 ('Indeed, it was towards the beginning of the first century BC that the slogan based on the expression *orbis terrarum* (*orbis* by itself dates from the Augustan period) appeared in Roman political terminology, although it did not yet appear in official documents'). Vogt's 'Orbis Romanus' is also one of main collections about the use of *orbis terrarum* (J. Vogt (1929) 'Orbis Romanus'. Tübingen.)

²⁵ *Res G.* 3.1: *bella terra et mari civilia externaque toto in orbe terrarum saepe gessi.*

²⁶ *Res G.* 26.2: *item Germaniam, qua includit Oceanus a Gadibus ad ostium Albis fluminis, pacavi*, 26.4: *classis mea per Oceanum ab ostio Rheni ad solis orientis regionem usque ad fines Cimbrorum navigavit.*

²⁷ *Res G.* 26.1: *omnium provinciarum populi Romani, quibus finitimae fuerunt gentes quae non parerent imperio nostro, fines auxi.*

²⁸ *Res G.* 4.2: *ob res a me aut per legatos meos auspiciis meis terra marique prospere gestas.*

²⁹ *Res G.* 13: *cum per totum imperium populi Romani terra marique esset parta victoriis pax.*

³⁰ *Res G.* 26.4: *quo neque terra neque mari quisquam Romanus ante id tempus adit.* Moreover, the naval power of Augustan Rome was also underlined at 25.1 with the assertion 'I made the sea peaceful' (*mare pacavi a praedonibus*).

³¹ Momigliano 1942: 53-54.

as 'ruling the world by land and sea'.³² It is therefore striking that it appears quite frequently in the *Res Gestae* to indicate the geographical universality of Augustus' victories.

Both formulae of Roman rule 'over the whole world' and 'by land and sea' serve as precursors for the claim of a world-wide peace, which is the third key factor in *Res Gestae* 3. Augustus sets the tone in 3.2 when he asserts that 'as for foreign peoples, those whom I could safely pardon, I preferred to preserve than to destroy'.³³ But it is in *Res Gestae* 13 that Augustus first links his world conquest with universal peace by referring to the closing of the Janus Quirinus, which he claims was closed, according to Roman tradition, 'when peace had been achieved by victories by land and sea throughout the whole empire of the Roman people'.³⁴ Also it is of particular significance as it is the only case in the *Res Gestae* where the term *imperium*, which in most of other cases is better translated as either 'rule' or 'command', has a unified territorial connotation, and thus can be conceived to some extent as equivalent with the modern concept of 'empire'.³⁵ He adds that 'before I was born, it had only been closed twice, whereas the senate had voted to close it three times while I was princeps'.³⁶ The phrase 'before I was born' seems to hint that a new age had come with the birth of Augustus, after which Rome had established universal rule and peace.³⁷ Other incidental references to 'peace' (*pax*) in the *Res Gestae* include the

³² Cic., *Pro Balbo* 6.16: *cuius res gestae omnis gentes cum clarissima victoria terra marique peragrassent*. Cf. Momigliano 1942: 63.

³³ *Res G.* 3.2: *externas gentes, quibus tuto ignosci potuit, conservare quam excidere malui*.

³⁴ *Res G.* 13: *Ianum Quirinum, quem claussum esse maiores nostri voluerunt cum per totum imperium populi Romani terra marique esset parta victoriis pax, cum priusquam nascerer, a condita urbe bis omnino clausum fuisse prodatur memoriae, ter me principe senatus claudendum esse consuit*.

³⁵ In fact, in *Res Gestae* 27.1 where Augustus claims that 'I added Egypt to the *imperium* of the Roman people', the term *imperium* could also be arguably understood as 'empire' than 'rule', only not so obvious as the case here in 13.

³⁶ In the Roman historical tradition, Janus had only been closed twice before Augustus: once by Numa Pompilius, the second king of Rome, and after the end of the First Punic War for only a brief period of time. It is disputed when the third closure under Augustus occurred, as apart from Suetonius, *Aug.* 22.1 we have no further firm and clear evidence about it. Cf. Cooley 2009: 158-60.

³⁷ This may allude to Augustus' horoscope and the messianic idea of the emergence of a ruler who will establish world peace. That Augustus' birthday inaugurated a new era of Roman dominance of the world was illustrated by ways of horoscope, see Barton 1995: 48-49.

Senate's decree of the altar of Augustan Peace (*ara Pacis Augustae*), while Roman campaigns under Augustus, both domestic and foreign, are described as 'pacification' (*paco*).³⁸

Augustus' main record of his conquests occurs in the last third of the *Res Gestae* at 26-33. The opening sentence 26.1 sets the tone: 'I extended the territory of all those provinces of the Roman people which had neighbouring peoples who were not subject to our rule.'³⁹ The new element here, compared to the earlier general claim of worldwide conquest, is the focus on Rome's provinces. Moreover, the last sentence of 27, where Augustus claims to have 'regained all provinces', forms a closed circular narrative structure together with 26.1.⁴⁰ The implication is that all the places enumerated between 26.1 and 27.3 are supposed to be parts of the provincial system. However, a closer reading of the texts reveals that only some of the lands can fairly be counted as Roman 'provinces', while some were actually not. Thus Augustus here subsumed under 'provinces' lands directly ruled by the Romans and some areas which had not yet come under full Roman control. We will see that the places enumerated in 26-27 are actually evocative of the claim of 'world empire' in previous chapters, within the narrative structure deliberately, if not disingenuously, homogenising the provinces and non-provinces. Thus the big question it raises here, to which I will return later, is whether this implies that Augustus and his contemporaries had a 'strong' concept of 'empire' which was limited to their provinces, or a 'weak' and more general concept of wider 'rule' (*imperium*).

I start with an analysis of what Augustus includes in these two chapters. The narrative in 26 starts from the north-west, including Gaul, Spain and Germany (26.2), plus the Alps in between (26.3), right up to the Ocean stream at Gades to the west and the mouth of the Elbe to the north (26.2, 26.4). He then turns to the south-east, including Ethiopia at the southern end 'as far as the town of Nabata', and Arabia 'as far as the territory of the Sabaei'(26.5). 27 continues by singling out the new acquisitions of Egypt and Armenia (27.1-2) and concludes with the eastern provinces regained from foreign kings and in the civil wars (27.3). Although the phrase 'the

³⁸ *Res G.* 12.2, 25.1, 26.2-3.

³⁹ *Res G.* 26.1: *omnium provinciarum populi Romani, quibus finitimae fuerunt gentes quae non parerent imperio nostro, fines auxi.*

⁴⁰ *Res G.* 27.3: *provincias omnis, quae trans Hadrianum mare vergunt ad orientem Cyrenasque, iam ex parte magna regibus ea possidentibus, et antea Siciliam et Sardiniam occupatas bello servili reciperavi.*

whole world' (*orbis terrarum*) is not used here, the verbal map drawn by Augustus is almost commensurate with it, as is marked by places traditionally conceived as being at the edges of the inhabited world.

The first important landmark is the *Oceanus* as the western limit of Roman rule. In 26.2, Augustus asserts that he has brought under control the whole area from southern Spain to Northern Germany 'where Ocean forms a boundary from Cadiz to the mouth of the river Elbe'.⁴¹ To the Greeks and Romans, Gades (Cadiz), the location of the Pillars of Hercules, stood at the threshold of the Ocean, that is the westernmost periphery of the world, and thus also that of Roman rule.⁴² The north-western point here designated as the mouth of the river Elbe, is mentioned again when Augustus claims to have reached 'to the region of the rising sun as far as the territory of the Cimbri', and emphasizes that it is an initiative under his command, as 'no Roman before this time has ever approached this area by either land or sea'.⁴³ Augustus then turns to the south, and asserts that Rome had arrived as 'far as the town of Nabata, which adjoins Meroe', both of which marked the supposed southernmost point of the inhabited world in Augustan times.⁴⁴ Following that is the suggestion of another southern limit in Arabia, 'as far as the territory of the Sabaei to the town of Mariba'.⁴⁵ It is thus clear that both the western and southern ends of Roman rule as presented in the *Res Gestae* 26 and 27 were meant to be almost coterminous with 'the whole inhabited world'.

In comparison, however, the north-eastern limits of the Roman rule are rather ambiguous. There is no mention of the eastern limits besides Armenia in 27.2, and a vague reference to 'all the provinces beyond the Adriatic Sea towards the east' in 27.3.⁴⁶ Even more obscure is the northern boundary. The mouth of the River Elbe is twice mentioned, which actually pushed

⁴¹ *Res G.* 26.2: *Gallias et Hispanias provincias, item Germaniam, qua includit Oceanus a Gadibus ad ostium Albis fluminis, pacavi.*

⁴² Cooley 2009: 222.

⁴³ *Res G.* 26.4: *usque ad fines Cimbrorum navigavit, quo neque terra neque mari quisquam Romanus ante id tempus adit.*

⁴⁴ *Res G.* 26.5: *in Aethiopiam usque ad oppidum Nabata perventum est, cui proxima est Meroe.* The area to further south was thought to be uninhabitable on account of the heat, see Strabo 2.5.7.

⁴⁵ *Res G.* 26.5: *in Arabiam usque in fines Sabaeorum processit exercitus ad oppidum Mariba.*

⁴⁶ *Res G.* 27.3: *provincias omnis, quae trans Hadrianum mare vergunt ad orientem Cyrenasque.*

the northern frontier beyond the Rhine, presumably to include the region of Germania from the Rhine to Elbe.⁴⁷ But in fact this statement is rather dubious, and the problem of whether Germany was ever under Augustus a proper ‘province’ like Gaul and Spain has always been a matter of dispute.⁴⁸ It is true that significant conquests in the territory between the Rhine and Elbe were achieved successively by Drusus, Tiberius and Domitius Ahenobarbus, and Velleius claimed that Germany had been reduced ‘almost to the status of a tributary province’.⁴⁹ But it was not until Varus that the first attempt to create a province in Germany was made, as he was appointed to ‘introduce peacetime administration’, and to set out the process of Romanization by making a real Roman ‘province’.⁵⁰ However, after the Varian disaster in AD 9, despite some face-saving operations on the right bank of Rhine, when Augustus died in AD 14, the Roman legions were actually all on the left bank of the Rhine.⁵¹ Given this outcome which was more a failure than achievement, it is thus clear that Augustus exaggerates in claiming that he had pacified ‘Germany’, as if the failure was only temporary and insignificant.

A closer look at these two chapters finds more exaggerations. If Germany could be said to have been briefly included in the imperial provincial system, some other places mentioned in this narrative had never been provinces at all. We have already seen that the town of Nabata in Aethiopia and the town of Mariba in Arabia are used to designate the southern end of the Roman rule, but in fact neither of these two areas were under Roman control by then, let alone within ‘provinces’. Unlike Germany, Augustus does not refer to either Aethiopia or Arabia as ‘pacified’, but only says that ‘substantial enemy forces of both peoples were slaughtered in battle and many towns captured’, as if these two campaigns were so successful that the Roman rule had been imposed.⁵² But in fact they were merely failed invasions.

⁴⁷ Just as the word *item* (‘similarly’) in 26.2 shows, Augustus implies that both Germania and Spain and Gaul are all alike under Roman rule.

⁴⁸ Rügner 1996: 517-528; cf. Flor. 2.30.29-30: *quippe Germani victi magis quam domiti erant, moresque nostros magis quam arma sub imperatore Druso suspiciebant*. In contrast Wells thinks that ‘Germany was organized as a province... the boundary of the province was now presumably the Elbe’. See Wells 1972: 156-157.

⁴⁹ Tac., *Ann.* 4.44.2; Vell. Pat. 2.97.4: *sic perdomuit eam, ut in formam paene stipendiariae redigeret provinciae*.

⁵⁰ Dio 55.6.2-3, 56.18.4.

⁵¹ Wells 1972: 241; cf. Flor. 11.30.39; Rügner 1996: 185.

⁵² *Res G.* 26.5: *magnaeque hostium gentis utriusque copiae caesae sunt in acie et complura oppida capta*.

The Romans under Petronius, the Prefect of Egypt, did advance to the area around Meroe, but it was soon reconquered by the Meroites probably up to Aswan.⁵³ In 20 BC envoys were sent from Meroe to Samos and made a treaty with Augustus, which included some sort of agreement about the Dodecaschoenos, which lay north of Meroe.⁵⁴ The result of the invasion of Arabia was also unsuccessful. After only six days' siege of Mariba the Roman troops under Aelius Gallus, the prefect of Egypt, were forced to retreat with almost nothing gained from the expedition.⁵⁵ It is thus clear that Augustus exaggerates in claiming that the Roman rule has been expanded southwards so far as to Nabata/Meroe and Mariba.

Augustus' exaggeration continues with his claim of having conquered Armenia in 27.2. As it is narrated between the capture of Egypt in 27.1 and the regaining of the eastern provinces in 27.3, a comparison between Armenia and these proper provinces is instructive. I note that although some scholars have had doubts, the more recent consensus is that Egypt became a proper province of the Roman people.⁵⁶ Although it is not explicitly called a province' in the *Res Gestae*, a comparison of the expression in 27.1 (*Aegyptum imperio populi Romani adieci*) with the account of Pannonia in 30.1 lends credence to this view, where Augustus claims that he had 'subjected them (the Pannonian people) to the rule of the Roman people, and extended the borders of Illyricum to the banks of the Danube'.⁵⁷ This clearly means that Pannonia was annexed to the province of Illyricum and thus became part of the lands directly ruled by Rome. It is, however, not the case with Armenia. Augustus claims that he 'could have made Greater Armenia a province', and this claim echoes some earlier coins with the legends of *Armenia capta* or *Armenia recepta*.⁵⁸ But in fact it was only a stand-off negotiated with Parthia in 20 BC, and even Augustus' attempt to make it an allied kingdom by appointing nominees from the Parthian royal family to the throne was very unstable.⁵⁹ A couple of new rulers had to be installed by Tiberius or Gaius during the lifetime of Augustus in order to

⁵³ Shinnie 1978: 258; Adams 1983: 100.

⁵⁴ Strabo 17.1.53-58.

⁵⁵ Strabo 16.4.23-24; cf. Ridley 2003: 203-204.

⁵⁶ Rathbone 2013: 77.

⁵⁷ *Res G.* 30.1: *imperio populi Romani subieci, protulique fines Illyrici ad ripam fluminis Danui.*

⁵⁸ *RIC I² Aug.* 514, *BMC* 671.

⁵⁹ Gruen 1990: 291.

maintain Rome's indirect dominance of Armenia as a 'client kingdom', but Armenia remained an issue through the first century AD.⁶⁰ As it is unlikely that Augustus did not realize the limits of Roman rule in Armenia when he wrote the *Res Gestae*, he exaggerates in his account, exploiting the Roman tradition of treating 'allied kingdoms' as part of Roman control.

Augustus' claims to universal rule also go beyond the list in *Res Gestae* 26-27 of territories supposedly under direct Roman rule. The next section will examine other references in the *Res Gestae* to Roman rule, especially in 29-33.

3. From Core To Periphery

From the discussion above, we can see that *Res Gestae* 26-27 essentially examine provinces but subsume some areas not, or not yet, under direct rule. This raises the question of whether Augustus regarded provinces as the only areas strictly *sub imperio populi Romani*. The following section therefore examines his statements elsewhere in the *Res Gestae* about the extent of Roman rule, especially in 29-33.

In *Res Gestae* 30.1, Augustus relates that,

'The Pannonian peoples had never had an army of the Roman people come near them before I became leader. I made them subject to the rule of the Roman people, once they were subdued through the agency of Tiberius Nero, who at that time was my stepson and deputy, and I advanced the boundary of Illyricum to the bank of the river Danube'.⁶¹

On one hand, this ignores the fact that there had already been some Roman incursions before Augustus.⁶² On the other hand, it simplifies the events in that Tiberius actually conducted two campaigns, the first in 12-9 BC, and a second in AD 6-9 in order to suppress the revolt which was, according to Suetonius, 'the most serious of all foreign wars since those with Carthage'.⁶³ By saying that the campaign occurred at the time Tiberius 'was my stepson',

⁶⁰ Gruen 1996: 158-162; Sullivan 1990: 291; Cooley 2009: 234. cf. Tac., *Ann.* II.4.3.

⁶¹ *Res G.* 30.1: *Pannoniorum gentes, quas ante me principem populi Romani exercitus nunquam adit, devictas per Tiberium Neronem, qui tum erat privignus et legatus meus, imperio populi Romani subieci, protulique fines Illyrici ad ripam fluminis Danui.*

⁶² Wilkes 1969: 56-59.

⁶³ Suetonius, *Tib.* 16.1.

Augustus specifies the one in 12-9 BC, as Tiberius was not adopted until after AD 4. Possibly Augustus had not updated this section after AD 6. But more likely, Augustus did not wish to acknowledge that the revolt had been a major threat to Roman rule south of the Danube, especially as Illyricum had been his first personal foreign conquest. However, given its significance, it seems odd that the extension of direct Roman rule to the Danube is not mentioned in the world survey in *Res Gestae* 26-27. This question will be discussed later.

Another reference to this area occurs in *Res Gestae* 30.2 where Augustus says, 'an army of Dacians which had crossed over onto this side of that river was conquered and overwhelmed under my auspices, and afterwards my army was led across the Danube and compelled the Dacian people to endure the commands of the Roman people'.⁶⁴ This presumably refers to the campaign led by Cn. Cornelius Lentulus and M. Vinicius in around 10 BC.⁶⁵ It is worth noticing that these campaigns are justified as a *bellum iustum*, because it is claimed that the Dacians had crossed the Danube first. Moreover, it is the only case in the *Res Gestae* where the phrase *imperium* is used in its plural form as *imperia*. Augustus is here playing with words to suggest, but not to actually say, that the Roman influence over the Dacians is similar to that over either Egypt or Pannonia, which are described as under the *imperium populi Romani* in *Res Gestae* 27.1 and 30.1 (discussed above). The essential difference is that while Egypt and Pannonia had been made into Roman provinces during his lifetime, the Dacians were not fully subdued until more than a hundred years later by Trajan. So Augustus claims that they were subject to the 'commands' (*imperia*), but not the 'rule' (*imperium*), of the Roman people.

Augustus' most striking claims about Roman power beyond provinces concern Parthia. There are various kinds of interaction mentioned in the *Res Gestae* in its accounts of Augustus' dealings with the Parthians. The standards, for example, lost to the Parthians by Marcus Crassus and Marcus Antonius were regained in 20 BC as 29.1 relates: 'I compelled the Parthians to give back to me spoils and standards of three Roman armies and humbly to request the friendship of the Roman people.'⁶⁶ Then Parthians kings

⁶⁴ *Res G.* 30.2: *citra quod Dacorum transgressus exercitus meis auspiciis victus profligatusque est, et postea trans Danuvium ductus exercitus meus Dacorum gentes imperia populi Romani perferre coegit.*

⁶⁵ Wilkes 1996: 552.

⁶⁶ *Res G.* 29.2: *Parthos trium exercitum Romanorum spolia et signa reddere mihi supplicesque amicitiam populi Romani petere coegi.*

including Tiridates II and Phraates V are said to have sought refuge with Augustus as suppliants (the former twice in 30/29 BC and 26/25 BC, the latter in AD 4), as 32.1 says: ‘Kings of the Parthians, namely Tiridates and later Phraates, son of King Phraates... fled for refuge to me as suppliants.’⁶⁷ Moreover, the Parthian king Phraates IV in 10 BC gave his four sons as hostages to Augustus to solicit ‘our friendship’, as it says in 32.2: ‘Phraates, son of Orodes, King of the Parthians, sent all his sons and grandsons into Italy to me, even though he had not been conquered in war, but asking for our friendship through pledging his children.’⁶⁸ And finally, ambassadors were sent from the Parthians and the Medes to seek kings from him, and received the Medes Ariobarzanes in 20 BC and the Parthian Venones in AD 4 who had been educated in the Roman way, as is noted in 33: ‘From me the Parthian and Median peoples received kings, whom they had requested through envoys drawn from their leaders: the Parthians received Vonones, son of King Phraates, grandson of King Orodes, the Medes Ariobarzanes.’⁶⁹

Among these events only the retrieval of standards involved some use of threat of force as implied in the word ‘I compelled’ (*coegi*). The sense of force is also emphasised by its juxtaposition with the narrative about the retrieval of standards from Spain, Gaul and Dalmatia, which are described as being ‘subdued’ (*divictis hostibus*) by the time the standards were reclaimed, and eventually became Roman provinces.⁷⁰

Apart from that, the other types of interactions all give us the impression that it was the Parthians who took the initiative for most of the time in seeking peace with Rome. And Parthia did not stand alone, as those who ‘fled to’ Rome as suppliants listed in 32.1 also include kings of the Medes, Adiabeni, Britains, Sugambri and Marcomanic Suebi.⁷¹ Furthermore *Res Gestae* 31.1-2 lists other requests for ‘friendship’ through embassies and

⁶⁷ *Res G.* 32.1: *ad me supplices confugerunt reges Parthorum Tiridates et postea Phrates, regis Phratis filius, Medorum Artavasdes, Adiabenorum Artaxares, Britannorum Dumnobellaunus et Tincomarus, Sugambrorum Maelo, Marcomanorum Sueborum ...rus.*

⁶⁸ *Res G.* 32.2: *ad me rex Parthorum Phrates, Orodis filius, filios suos nepotesque omnes misit in Italiam non bello superatus, sed amicitiam nostram per liberorum suorum pignora petens.*

⁶⁹ *Res G.* 33: *a me gentes Parthorum et Medorum per legatos principes earum gentium reges petitos acceperunt: Parthi Venonem, regis Phratis filium, regis Orodis nepotem, Medi Ariobarzanem, regis Artavazdis filium, regis Ariobarzani nepotem.*

⁷⁰ *Res G.* 29.1: *signa militaria complura per alios duces amissa devictis hostibus recipieravi ex Hispania et Gallia et a Dalmateis.*

⁷¹ See note 67 above.

envoys: 'Embassies from kings in India were frequently sent to me; never before had they been seen with any Roman commander. The Bastarnae, Scythians and the kings of the Sarmatians on either side of the river Don, and the kings of the Albanians and the Iberians and the Medes sent embassies to seek our friendship.'⁷² In these cases, there is no mention of military threat or political intervention. We can thus see that various ways of making 'friendship' between Rome and foreign states are mentioned in the *Res Gestae*, and in most cases the latter are presented as taking the initiative.

4. Conclusion

The heading of the *Res Gestae* claims that Augustus' main achievement was that 'he made the world subject to the rule of the Roman people'. Although probably not written by Augustus himself, it does echo passages in the main text, such as 'the whole world' (*orbis terrarum*) and 'by land and sea' (*terra et mari*). Together with the theme of 'world-wide peace', they all indicate a new era inaugurated by Augustus in which the world is now under Roman rule. Augustus' main account of Roman rule occurs in the last third of the *Res Gestae* at 26-27, in which he extends his claim of the territory subject to Roman rule as far as possible. It stretches west to the Pillars of Hercules, north up to the estuary of Elbe, south down to the Nubian and Arabian towns of Nabata and Mariba, so that, except for the Danubian and eastern edges which are left unclear, it borders with the Ocean for most of the part, and thus is almost equivalent to the whole inhabited world. While his narrative structure gives the impression that all the named areas formed part of the imperial provincial system, some were certainly not provinces at all. We cannot tell whether this is pure exaggeration or optimistic hope for what might before long become true. But in any case it seems to indicate, on one hand, that Augustus did have a 'strong' view of what Roman rule (*imperium populi Romani*) meant, which is the 'provinces', the territories under direct control and taxation.⁷³ While

⁷² *Res G.* 31.1-2: *ad me ex India regum legationes saepe missae sunt non visae ante id tempus apud quemquam Romanorum ducem. nostram amicitiam appetiverunt per legatos Bastarnae Scythaeque et Sarmatarum qui sunt citra flumen Tanaim et ultra reges, Albanorumque rex et Hiberorum et Medorum.*

⁷³ Richardson has already discussed sufficiently how 'provincia' worked as one of the key concepts in the comprehension of Roman rule from the late Republic to early imperial times. See Richardson 2008: 117-145.

on the other hand, it also means that he has to ‘pad out’ 26-27 with some non-provinces, which were also presented as part of Roman rule, as other cases in *Res Gestae* 29-33. Interestingly, it can be confirmed by what he claims in *Res Gestae* 13 that ‘peace had been achieved by victories on land and sea throughout the *imperium* of the Roman people’. As I have mentioned previously, it is the only case in the *Res Gestae* where the translation of ‘rule’ is inadequate for the term *imperium* as it has a clear geographical designation. While it is more fairly to be translated as ‘empire’ rather than ‘rule’, it obviously subsumes the lands both under direct Roman rule and those not or not yet, so long as ‘peace’ is achieved by victories, whether by conquest or by diplomacy.⁷⁴

This also explains why Augustus is deliberately vague about the Danubian and eastern edges of Roman rule in *Res Gestae* 26-27. In the case of the Danubian frontier, the river Danube does not reach the *Oceanus*, and does not fit the picture of world conquest. On the other hand, as Augustus continues in *Res Gestae* 30.1, the bank of the river Danube is regarded as the ‘boundary of Illyricum’ (*fines Illyrici*). He then claims to have extended *imperium populi Romani* across the Danube by defeating the Dacians. Thus the absence of the river Danube in *Res Gestae* 26-27 and the conquest of the Dacians both indicate that Augustus did believe that Roman rule does not end with the provincial limits, but lands beyond Roman provinces can also be subsumed under it. The tricky nuance between *imperium* and *imperia* suggests that Augustus is cautious of claiming Roman control of places which are not Roman provinces, while also attempting to attenuate the difference by using the same word.

As for the eastern frontier, the reason why it is obscured in the world map is mainly because of Parthia. Various forms of interaction are mentioned in the *Res Gestae*. Among them, what distinguishes Parthia

⁷⁴ cf. C. Nicolet who assumes that Augustus believed Rome’s conquests were complete and enclosed by fixed boundaries (*Space, Geography and Politics*, pp.15-24). We may compare Whittaker who argues that Augustus’s personal interest in the organization of space ‘did mark a change in intellectual perceptions of frontiers’, but that in the Principate there was no frontier system limiting the expansion of Roman rule. Whittaker further argues that the Romans in the early empire did not see their empire as restricted to the boundaries of civilized world under Roman administration, but as including the *externae gentes* who were subjects but not worth annexation. He therefore posits a Roman conceptual ambivalence ‘between an empire of administration and an empire of control’. See Whittaker 1994: 17-63.

from the other peripheral peoples are the retrieval of the standards by threat of force and the imposition of rulers, which is also the case with Armenia. The show of force and political intervention indicate that Parthia and Armenia are conceived of as a potential threat but still under control, so long as they are compelled to 'humbly request the friendship of the Roman people', although they were not provinces for the time being.

Besides, there are also other forms of relationship maintained by diplomacy, namely the reception of suppliants who had fled to Rome for refuge, taking hostages sent by the kings, and the reception of embassies. It is noticeable that places treated in these ways are presented in the *Res Gestae* as asking for Roman friendship on their own initiative. But 'friendship' might be made in various ways in different places. More distant lands such as India, for example, are said to maintain their friendship with Rome not through any royal refugees or hostages, but merely through embassies or envoys. This might indicate that there were various levels of Roman rule and influences over the foreign lands. In other words, it is not only from the core to the periphery that Roman rule gradually gets weaker, even among the peripheral lands, there were some under weaker Roman influence than the others. Like Armenia, Parthia and India, although all were in the periphery, Armenia was more firmly controlled by Rome than Parthia, and again Parthia was more frequently intervened than India. But in any case, they were all claimed by Augustus to be under Roman rule in the form ostensibly called 'friendship'.

Through the narrative of the Roman relationship with peripheral peoples in *Res Gestae* 29-33, we may, incidentally, notice that, although Augustus claims that it was the 'friendship or good faith of the Roman people' (*amicitia/fides populi Romani*), or 'our friendship' (*amicitia nostra*) that was requested, Augustus' own role is constantly emphasized. In *Res Gestae* 31 to 33, most of the sentences start with 'to me' or 'from me' (*ad me/a me*): embassies were sent 'to me', refugees fled 'to me', hostages were sent 'to me', and kings were requested 'from me'. At 29.2 the standards are said to be restored 'to me' (*mihi*), at 30.1 it is emphasised that Roman army had never approached Parthia 'before I became leader' (*ante me principem*), at 30.2 the Dacians were conquered 'under my auspices' (*meis auspiciis*). Most explicitly at 32.3, where he claims that 'and while I have been leader very many peoples have experienced the good faith of the Roman people; between them and the Roman people

previously no embassies or exchange of friendship had existed'.⁷⁵ On one hand, the term 'good faith of the Roman people' (*populi Romani fides*) and 'exchange of friendship...with Roman people' (*cum populo Romano...amicitiae commercium*) echo with *imperium/-a populi Romani* used previously in *Res Gestae*. On the other hand, it is underlined that the friendship between them and the Roman people was due to his own leadership (*me principe*) and did not exist before him (*quibus antea...nullum extiterat*). Furthermore, emphasis on his personal role is not exclusive to the cases of *amicitia*, but also occurs in cases of 'conquest'. In *Res Gestae* 13, for example, mentions of victories throughout the 'empire of the Roman people' (*per totum imperium populi Romani*) is closely followed by relating that the closure of Janus, signifying universal peace and victory, had happened only twice before him (*priusquam nascerer*), while three times during his Principate (*ter me principe*). *Res Gestae* 26 mentions that 'I extended the territory of all those provinces of the Roman people' (*provinciarum populi Romani... fines auxi*), 27.1 that 'I add Egypt to the rule of the Roman people' (*imprio pupuli Romani adieci*), and 30.1 that 'I made them (Pannonians) subject to the rule of the Roman people' (*imperio pupoli Romani subieci*).

In a word, from the *Res Gestae*, the autobiographical text written by Augustus himself, we can see that there is indeed such a concept similar as 'empire' coming into being in his time. It began to have some geographical denotation, as throughout the text, the theme of 'Roman rule over the whole world' is emphasised, while the last third part describes it in detail as how extended it is and how it is formed. The narrative structure indicates that it is conceived in the scheme of core-periphery, while in the core it is the Roman provinces under direct Roman control (*imperium*), and in the periphery it is maintained by threats and intervention, or more weakly by 'friendship' (*amicitia*) with foreign lands, which might be different in level in accordance with the ways the friendship was established. In both cases, either in the name of the 'rule' or 'friendship' of Roman people, it is Augustus' own authority that appears to matter the most, which indicates that the personal role of 'princeps' became increasingly important in the development of the Romans concept of their rule.

⁷⁵ *Res G.* 32.3: *plurimaeque aliae gentes expertae sunt populi Romani fidem me principe, quibus antea cum populo Romano nullum extiterat legationum et amicitiae commercium.*

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