Res Gestae Divi Augusti, chapters 19 - 21 [1]

See Augustus, *Res Gestae divi Augusti* (General Background) [2] **for the historical context of the** *Res Gestae.*

Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.): Eulogy / Panegyric / Elogium.
Original Location/Place: Rome, Ancyra, Antioch in Pisidia, Apollonia, Sardis.
Date: 14 CE
Language: Latin, Greek

Category: Roman

Commentary: Chapters 19-21 of the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* are concerned with Augustus's building projects in the city of Rome. The significance of his works in the city is indicated by the placement of this section of the text in the surviving Latin versions at Ancyra, where the Latin was arranged on either side of the *antae* (the walls framing the entrance porch of the building) with three columns of inscription on each side – the second half of the text starts at chapter 19. In Apollonia, the same chapters are found in the fourth column, in line with the centre of a base that held a statue of Augustus himself. Alison Cooley has suggested that this is in imitation of the arrangement of the same chapters in the inscription in Rome, which were prominently placed so to emphasise the message of the physical improvements that Augustus had made to the city (Cooley, *Res Gestae*, p. 182). The list of buildings is not organised chronologically nor topographically, but rather according to the kind of work enacted by Augustus. Chapter 19 introduces new buildings built on public land, which are indicated by the use of *feci* – "I made." *Refeci* – "I restored," or *perfeci* – "I completed" characterise the edifices listed in chapter 20, which Augustus restored, or completed according to plans already laid out by Julius Caesar. Chapter 21 concerns new buildings built on private land previously owned by Augustus or others, but given over to public use (*in privato solo…feci*) (Scheid, *Res Gestae*, p. 54). The exact nature of this list is not entirely correct, however, with certain structures (such as the Senate house, initiated by Julius Caesar) falling into categories to which they do not strictly belong (Cooley, *Res Gestae*, p. 182). Ronald Ridley noted that many of the buildings that Augustus claimed to have constructed in chapter 19 were actually restorations, reflecting the emperor's attempt to link his name with the inauguration of some of Rome's oldest structures and traditions (Ridley, *Emperor's Retrospect*, p. 120-4).

Chapter 19 begins with Augustus's claim to have built the senate house, in an endeavour to show that Rome had returned to constitutional propriety. The senate house had, in fact been rebuilt by Julius Caesar in 44 BCE following the previous building's destruction by fire during a riot some twelve years earlier. Its placement had been slightly altered by Caesar, who realigned its position so that it appeared almost as an annexe to the new Julian Forum (Sablayrolles, *Espace urbain et propaganda politique*, p. 62). In spite of Augustus's intention that its rebuilding be interpreted as a sign of the restoration of the Republic, the new senate house's position indicated the less powerful nature of its governing body.

The Temple of Apollo on the Palatine Hill is also listed in this first section of chapter 19; although vowed in 36 BCE following Agrippa's victory over the son of Pompey at the naval battle of Naulochus, it was not completed and dedicated until 28 BCE, by which time the victory at the Battle of Actium had overtaken in precedence (Cooley, *Res Gestae*, p. 183-4). A victory monument had also been dedicated by Augustus at the sanctuary of Apollo at Nicopolis, near Actium (see Dedication of Octavian's victory monument at Nicopolis [3]); Augustus had claimed a special relationship with the god, to whom he attributed his military success as a sign of his favour (for this relationship see Zanker, *Power of Images*, p. 48-53). In Rome the temple was not built in the traditional location reserved for those vowed in military victory, the *Campus Martius*, but rather on private land owned by Augustus on the Palatine Hill. The construction of the temple so close to Augustus's own property confirmed the link between the emperor and the god, and communicated his piety and beneficence.

The temple of the Divine Julius, the *lupercal* – the grotto at the base of the Palatine where Romulus and Remus were believed to have been suckled by the She-Wolf –, the portico of Octavius, the *pulvinar* at the Circus Maximus, the temples of Jupiter Feretrius, Quirinus, Juno, Minerva and the Magna Mater are all listed as 'new' buildings in chapter 19, in spite of their having existed in some form prior to Augustus's principate (for a full discussion of these structures and their dates, see Cooley, *Res Gestae*, p. 185-90). With the exception of the portico, which was probably rebuilt in order to promote the idea that Augustus's family had been linked to this respectable, Republican patrician clan, the other structures all contained some religious element or connotation, which was juxtaposed with their impressive visual qualities in order to highlight the dual nature of the emperor's gifts; the improvement to Rome under Augustus was both physical and moral. The dedication of the temple of Jupiter the "Thunderer" (*Iovis*

Tonantis) is also referred to in chapter 19; it had been built on the Capitoline Hill, near to one of the city's oldest cults (Jupiter Feretrius), in order to commemorate the good fortune with which Augustus had avoided being struck by lightning whilst on campaign in Cantabria in 26-25 BCE (Suetonius, *Augustus* XXIX.3). It was a new cult, specific to Augustus and his experiences, but its placement so close to the temple of Jupiter Feretrius legitimated its introduction and further emphasised the unique religious innovation and religiosity of the emperor (Sablayrolles, *Espace urbain et propaganda politique*, p. 68).

Chapter 20 deals with the buildings "restored" by Augustus. The chapter begins with the most important religious site in Rome, the temple of Jupiter Best and Greatest (*Iuppiter Optimus Maximus*), a site "central to Rome's identity" (Cooley, *Res Gestae*, p. 191). Although begun under the Etruscan kings, the temple had been dedicated in 509 BCE, the first year of the Republic, and as such was emblematic of Rome's political order (Tagliamonte, *Capitolium* p. 229). Augustus's restoration of it probably occurred in 9 BCE after it was damaged by a storm, in a further attempt at demonstrating the continued principles of the Republic under his governance.

The restoration of the theatre of Pompey is listed next in chapter 20, but the more interesting work comes in section 2, in which the restoration of aqueducts is indicated. The restorations here are presented as though the work of Augustus, as he fails to acknowledge the extent of Marcus Agrippa's contribution to the modification of the water supply of Rome. In 33 BCE, at the height of Octavian's struggle against Marc Antony, whilst holding the office of aedile Agrippa had dramatically improved the network of aqueducts that fed water into the capital city, thereby winning Octavian much popular support (Cooley, *Res Gestae*, p. 192). He had extended the *aqua Tepula* by the addition of the *aqua Iulia* onto it, and repaired three older aqueducts, the *aquae Appia, Marcia* and *Anio Vetus*. He also later built a new aqueduct, the *aqua Virgo*, with which to supply his new bathing complex in the city. Peter Brunt and John Moore have estimated that these works increased the supply of water to Rome by as much as 75%, improving the welfare of the city's inhabitants in an almost unprecedented way (Brunt and Moore, *Res Gestae*, p. 61). Agrippa also established a new way of administering the water supply, which Augustus inherited upon his death in 12 BCE, and which he made the subject of a senatorial decree (the *senatus consutum de rivis, specibus, fornicibus aquae Iuliae Marciae Appiae Tepulae Anienis reficiendis*) promising to maintain their upkeep and repairs at his own expense (Cooley, *Res Gestae*, p. 192-3).

The most significant statement of chapter 20 is Augustus's assertion that he rebuilt "eighty-two temples of the gods" in Rome. The political drama and warfare of the first century BCE had largely been interpreted as the result of the neglect of the traditional gods; the security of the Roman people and their prosperity depended on the favour accorded to them by the gods. The bloodshed and upheavals of the civil wars were blamed upon the failure of Roman society to maintain their relationship with the gods, and it was exactly this moral breakdown that Augustus claimed to cure (Beard, North and Price, *Religions of Rome* I, p. 118, 181-2; see also Horace, *Odes* III.6.1-20 [4]). To this end, much of his propaganda depended upon the presentation of his own religious behaviour and respect as a model to which all Romans should aim. The 'restoration' of religious buildings – which he refers to here – was just part of this 'model' behaviour, which also included the revival of old cults, rituals and religious offices, such as the Arval and Salian priesthoods (for further ceremonies and rituals revived by Augustus, see Beard, North and Price, *Religions of Rome* I, p. 192-206). These 'restorations' were key to one of the key tenets of Augustan ideology, that he was simultaneously the keeper of the founding principles of the city, following those set particularly by Romulus and Numa, but also the founder of a 'new' Rome, which was both traditional in its respect for custom and tradition, but which sought to maintain them through innovation and expansion (see Edwards, *Writing Rome*, p. 44-52).

The Temple of Mars the Avenger (*Mars Ultor*) and the forum of Augustus introduce chapter 21; although vowed in 42 BCE before the battle of Philippi, to avenge the assassination of Julius Caesar – the plunder from which is given here as the source of funding for the project (*ex manibiis*) – the temple was not completed until 2 BCE, when it was formally dedicated with a series of spectacular games (for arguments concerning which games and the dates on which they were held, see Simpson, *Mars Ultor*, p. 91-4). It was the first temple to Mars that had been built and dedicated within the sacred boundary of the city (*pomerium*), and, in spite of its martial origins, it took on a role more concerned with the general welfare of the city than military vengeance, partly through the transferral to it of some ceremonies traditionally held at the temple of Jupiter (Cooley, *Res Gestae*, p. 198). The temple formed part of the monumental complex of the forum of Augustus, which had been constructed on "private ground" (*in solo…privato*), previously owned or acquired by the emperor. The combination of temples, statuary and inscriptions dedicated to the "best men" (*summi viri*), mythological and historical, of Rome's past, with two enormous paintings of Alexander the Great, communicated an overall message of world conquest, which was emphasised by the 'catalogue' of marbles from around the Roman world that decorated the space (see Zanker, *Forum Augustum* for discussion of the architecture and iconography). Augustus therefore appeared as the crucial, connective figure in Roman history; he linked the past with the present, communicating between gods and men, and raising the status of the Julian clan above all other families that had come before them (Cooley, *Res Gestae*, p. 199; Zanker, *Power of Images*, p. 211-14).

The martial theme continues through chapter 21 – aside from the short exception of the building of the theatre of Marcellus at the end of section 1 – with a list of the temples to which Augustus made dedications from the spoils of war (*dona ex manibiis*). The most important 'spoil' given here, however, is the "crown-gold" (*auri coronarium*), referred to at the end of the chapter. This was an eastern tradition, through which subjects gave gold to their rulers as a sign of homage and respect, which was turned into crowns (for the origin of this practice, see Brunt and Moore, *Res Gestae*, p. 63). During the Late Republic it also became common practice amongst the victorious Roman generals in the east, who accepted the offerings of 'crown-gold' as a positive symbol of the relationship between Rome and the conquered provincials; although it was intended as 'freely' given, it is clear from some examples – such as the charges levied by Cicero against L. Calpurnius Piso in 55 BCE – that it was also regularly extorted from provincial communities (Cicero, *Piso* XXXVII.90; Cooley, *Res Gestae*, p. 201). In the *Res Gestae* Augustus focuses, however, on the communities of Italy, and the freedom with which they offered him 35,000 pounds of 'crown-gold' during the triple triumph of 29 BCE, and which he refused, in honour of the 'special' relationship he enjoyed with the colonies and municipalities. Although the Italian towns were excused the duty of paying this offering, it effectively became a tax on provincial communities; Augustus's statement of the generosity of the provinces in continuing to honour him in this way was not an accurate reflection of the situation, and created the insincere illusion of 'spontaneous' support (Gagé, *Res Gestae*, p. 117).

The focus on Augustus's building works in the city of Rome ends in chapter 21; the following two chapters instead turn to the *impensae* (expenses) incurred by Augustus for the people of the city in the forms of shows and games, indicating the importance of 'spectacle' in the Roman conscience. These chapters therefore present the well-rounded nature of Augustus's role as benefactor; his restoration of the Roman state was not limited to the physical structures of the city, but included the religious security on which prosperity rested and the maintenance of culture and entertainment for the popular benefit of the people. His impact on Rome was felt in both public and private capacities, which ensured the continued loyalty of his people.

Keywords in the original language:

- Augustus [5]
- Octavianus [6]
- curia [7]
- palatium [8]
- templum [9]
- aedes [10]
- divus Iulius [11]
- Capitolium [12]
- Iuppiter [13]
- Minerva [14]
- Quirinus [15]
- Iuno [16]
- Aventinus [17]
- lares [18]
- penates [19]
- Mater Magna [20]
- forum [21]
- basilica [22]
- Mars Ultor [23]
- auctoritas [24]
- corona [25]
- theatrum [26]
- municipium [27]
- colonia [28]
- Italia [29]
- triumphus [30]
- benignus [31]

Thematic keywords:

- [Augustus](#) [32]
- [Rome (city)](#) [33]
- [restoration](#) [34]
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- [temple](#) [36]
- [Roman piety](#) [37]
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- [euergetism](#) [43]
- [Roman triumph](#) [44]
- [Italy](#) [45]
- [colony](#) [46]
- [crown-gold](#) [47]

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