



## [Res Gestae Divi Augusti, chapters 30 and 32 \[1\]](#)

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 30 and 32 of the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* deal with Augustus's different approaches to foreign policy; conquest and diplomacy. Although seemingly belonging to different areas of administration, they are presented here as falling under the same ideological sphere: the power of the Roman people.

The military conquest of the Pannonian people is the subject of chapter 30. They occupied an important strategic area of the Balkan Danube region, which protected Rome as a 'buffering' zone between Italy and northern European peoples (Cooley, *Res gestae*, p. 246; see also Wilkes, "The Danubian and Balkan Provinces," p. 545-585). Augustus states – in a deliberately vague and non-specific manner – that the Pannonians had engaged with no Roman armies before he became leader (*Pannoniorum gentes, quas ante me principem populi Romani exercitus nunquam adit*), indicating that he considered his own campaigns in Dalmatia in 35-34 BCE (for which he celebrated a triumph, see Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, XLIX, 36.1-2) to be the first step in their subjugation (Scheid, *Res Gestae*, p. 78). This claim, however, ignores the efforts of earlier generals, such as L. Scipio, who led a series of successful incursions against the Scordisci in the late 80s BCE, and C. Curio, who was awarded a triumph for his successes against the Pannonians in 75 BCE (Eutropius, *Abridgement of Roman History*, 6.2.2). As Ronald Ridley has noted, this lack of acknowledgment was typical of Augustus, who also ignored previous successful military activity in this region of the Danube in his autobiography, presumably in order to emphasise the importance of his involvement in its eventual conquest (*Emperor's Retrospect*, p. 217).

Augustus does, however, recognise the role of Tiberius in the progression of Roman control in the Danube region. Tiberius campaigned against the Pannonians between 12-9 BCE and significantly advanced Rome's hold, particularly south of the Danube where he conquered the tribe of the Breuci, for which he received triumphal honours, an ovation and the title of *imperator* (Cooley, *Res gestae*, p. 246-7). Tiberius was also responsible for the suppression of a revolt in Dalmatia and Pannonia a few years later, in 6-9 CE, for which he was awarded a triumph. However, the victories that Augustus is referring to here are clearly those that took place in 12-9 BCE, due to his description of Tiberius as still his 'stepson' (*privignus*) when he won them. Tiberius was not adopted by Augustus until 4 CE, ruling out the later suppression of revolts as the successes listed here (for the adoption see Ridley, *Emperor's Retrospect*, p. 85-8). This is a deliberate move by Augustus; by referring to the earlier victories, he is able to claim that the first successful incursion against the Pannonians (i.e. his own) was the one that counted most in Rome's conquest of them. In spite of the personal nature of these victories, Augustus is clear in his ideological approach to them; although *he* subjugated the Pannonians (implicit in the first person singular of *subieci*), he made them subject 'to the rule of the Roman people (*imperio populi Romani*). The conquest was not made because he alone intended to rule them, but rather in the name of the people of Rome, to whom superior authority and command had been divinely ordained and prophesied. By the end of Augustus's reign, the word *imperium* contained these very connotations, but it was a harder idea to transmit outside of the Latin language. For this reason, the Greek version of the *Res Gestae* translated the idea of *imperium* here as one of 'political supremacy', through the use of the word *hègemonia* (????????), in order to convey the nature of this very Roman political expression (Vanotti, *Il testo greco delle 'Res Gestae Divi Augusti'*, p. 308). Originally *imperium* meant power or authority (hence *hègemonia*, a good translation) but progressively it came to designate the empire itself (in geographical terms), or the territory dominated by the Romans.

Chapter 30 ends with a reiteration that the Dacians were forced to submit not to Augustus, but to the commands of the Roman people (*Dacorum gentes imperia populi Romani perferre coegit*). This is a careful statement that does not claim outright conquest or direct rule over Dacia, but rather that Rome exerted certain control. This is



emphasised in the Greek version of the text, which here translates *imperium* as *prostagmata* rather than *h?gemonia*, indicating a less comprehensive subjection (Cooley, *Res gestae*, p. 248). There are conflicting accounts in the ancient sources as to the extent to which the Dacians were brought under Roman control (see Strabo, *Geography*, 7.3.13; Florus, *Epitome* 2.28; Suetonius, *Julius Caesar* 44.3; *Augustus* 8.2), and they were not fully conquered until Trajan's campaigns in the following century, but Augustus's intention here is clear; under his leadership and military prowess, the Roman people have extended their authority. The outright success of the conquest was less important than the extent of the spread of Roman power, however notional its hold may realistically have been.

Chapter 32 moves away from direct military conquest to consider the role of diplomacy in Rome's foreign policy and expansion. In contrast to chapter 30, it demonstrates the importance of peaceful accord and illustrates how Rome was able to wield powerful influence in areas that it did not actively rule, through the extension of 'friendship' and protection to loyal allies. A list of foreign kings who sought refuge from Rome opens the chapter; they encompass a wide range of geographic areas and exotic names, which emphasised the spread of Roman influence across the known world. Some of the names listed also reveal how Rome manipulated that influence; Tiridates laid claim to the Parthian throne when King Phraates IV was driven into exile in 30/29 BCE, begging refuge from Augustus when the king returned. The refuge created a seeming alliance between Rome and the pretender to the Parthian throne, with Tiridates minting coins in 27/26 BCE which described him as a 'friend of Rome' (?????????????; for the legends on these coins, see Sellwood, *Parthian Coins*, p. 292). Tiridates sought protection from Rome a second time in 26/25 BCE, but rather than receiving open support, he was maintained in Syria, where Augustus used him as an unspoken bargaining tool in his bid to reclaim the lost standards won by Parthia in 53 BCE (Cooley, *Res Gestae*, p. 252). Political use was also made of Artavasdes of Media; he had supported Marc Antony's forces against Parthia and in return Augustus made him a client king in Armenia, ensuring his future support in that region (Brunt and Moore, *Res Gestae*, p. 74). Little is known of King Artaxares of northern Mesopotamia (Adiabene), but the friendship between Augustus and the British chieftains, such as Dumnobellaunus, king of the Trinovantes, is documented here in the *Res Gestae*. Following Caesar's failure to conquer Britain in 54 BCE, Augustus rejected calls to invade himself on account of the expense and risk it might incur, and instead bolstered the trading relationship and alliance with the tribes of south-central England (Brunt, *Roman Imperial Themes*, p. 103-4). The British tribes used this friendship with Rome in order to enhance their own authority, which appeared to have been reinforced through association with the known power of Rome; King Tincomarus of the Atrebatas tribe even issued coinage that abandoned traditional, Iron-Age British themes in favour of Latin formulae and style of writing (Cooley, *Res Gestae*, p. 253).

As well as friendly alliances, section 2 of chapter 32 introduces the idea of Rome as the physical protectors of its friends, through the example of King Phraates IV of Parthia's decision to send his four legitimate sons to the capital in 10 BCE (Strabo, *Geography* 7.288; 16.748; Velleius Paterculus, *History of Rome*, 2.94.4; Tacitus, *Annals*, 2.1.1-2; Suetonius, *Augustus*, 43.4). This appears to be a statement about the generosity and security of Augustus's relationship with foreign powers, but the motivation for Phraates's decision to entrust them to Rome's custody was not based on simple protection; Phraates needed his legitimate heirs out of the way in order to consolidate his own hold on the throne (from which he had been exiled by his subjects in 30/29 BCE), and so that his bastard son, Phraataces, might succeed him (Brunt and Moore, *Res Gestae*, p. 74-5). The four sons in Rome also acted as insurance for Augustus, who could use them as a bargaining tools in the discussions between Rome and the Parthian court over control of Armenia (Cooley, *Res Gestae*, p. 254). Augustus made a visible point of using these hostages to his advantage too. In the text here he refers to them as 'pledges' (*pignora*), rather than 'hostages' (*obsides*), which carried negative connotations (Cooley, *Res Gestae*, p. 255). They were incorporated into the imperial household and educated alongside Augustus's own children and other foreign princes, and paraded at events such as games or spectacles in full view of the Roman public (Suetonius, *Augustus*, 43.4), thereby displaying his innate clemency and hospitality. As well as the benefits to foreign relations that this kind of custodial arrangement brought, it served an ideological use too, promoting the image of Augustus as the benevolent 'father,' generous in his treatment not only of those under his governance, but to all of Rome's friends across the globe. This point is reiterated in the final section of chapter 32, in which Augustus claims that 'very many other peoples' (*plurimaeque aliae gentes*) experienced the same friendship and generosity from Rome, including those who had previously no alliance with her. He may, as John Scheid has suggested, have been thinking of the Garamantes and Aethiopians here, who both sent embassies to him (Scheid, *Res gestae*, p. 82). Not only does this final statement again allude to the wide geographical expanse brought under Roman control by Augustus, but it also suggests that the quality of bestowing friendship was something innately held by the Roman people; as well as their superiority in war and government, they are characterised here by their capacity for friendly association and collaboration, led, as ever, by the example set for them by their leader Augustus.



Keywords in the original language:

- [princeps](#) [3]
- [populus romanus](#) [4]
- [Tiberius](#) [5]
- [Pannonia](#) [6]
- [devictus](#) [7]
- [legatus](#) [8]
- [imperium](#) [9]
- [subiectus](#) [10]
- [finis](#) [11]
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- [amicitia](#) [17]
- [Parthi](#) [18]
- [supplex](#) [19]
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Thematic keywords:

- [Augustus](#) [21]
- [conquest](#) [22]
- [Dacia](#) [23]
- [Danube](#) [24]
- [Roman power](#) [25]
- [Roman expansion](#) [26]
- [Roman fides](#) [27]
- [Roman people](#) [28]
- [foreign kings](#) [29]
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- [friendship](#) [31]
- [suppliant](#) [32]
- [hostage](#) [33]
- [war](#) [34]
- [Roman provinces](#) [35]

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