Augustus, Res Gestae Divi Augusti (General Background) **[1]**

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

Category: Roman

Commentary: The *Res Gestae divi Augusti* – the "achievements of the divine Augustus" – was named by Theodor Mommsen as the "Queen of inscriptions" on account of its remarkable length, preservation and quantity of detail (*Res Gestae*, p. 247). It is certainly one of the most significant texts for our understanding of the early principate, and offers 'invaluable insight into the political ideology of the Augustan era' (Cooley, *Res Gestae* p. 2). Upon the death of the emperor Augustus, on 19th August 14 CE, four documents were entrusted to the Vestal Virgins, which were later read aloud at the next meeting of the Senate. Suetonius (*Aug.* 101.4) lists them as Augustus's will, instructions for the funeral, a summary of the state of the empire (military and financial) and a 'catalogue of achievements' (*res gestae*), which was to be inscribed on bronze plaques and affixed to masonry or stone pillars which stood on either side of the southern entrance to the mausoleum in Rome (Scheid, *Res Gestae* p. ix; Coarelli *Rome and environs* p. 304). Although the bronze plaques from the mausoleum have long since disappeared, the text of the inscription is known from four versions of it, in both Latin and Greek, which were inscribed on monuments in the cities of Ancyra, Antioch (near Pisidia), Apollonia and Sardis, where they were "published" perhaps shortly after his death. The context of the inscription in each location shall be considered below, before a discussion of the original text's date, and the significance of its content for our understanding of Augustan 'propaganda' and the ideology it carried across the Roman world.

The *Res Gestae* in Rome

Augustus had begun building his mausoleum on the *Campus Martius* ('Field of Mars'; an area of public land used in the early Republic as an area for men to gather before military campaigns) even before his victory in the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE; Konrad Kraft has suggested that the decision to commence its construction in Rome was motivated in part by the negative public reaction to the will of Marc Antony, which Octavian had (illegally) released in 32 BCE, and which revealed that he wished to be buried in Alexandria, alongside Cleopatra (Kraft, "Der Sinn des Mausoleum of Augustus", p. 189-206; Zanker, *Power of Images* p. 72). This revelation had proved very unpopular with the Roman people, with the idea of their respective tombs playing a large part in the propaganda put forwards against Antony by Octavian before the battle of Actium in 31 CE. As Paul Zanker has stated, the building of Augustus's Mausoleum in Rome is best understood in 'the context of the crisis atmosphere just before [Actium], and the elation of victory just after' (*Power of Images*, p. 73). The enormous, tumulus style tomb dominated the *Campus Martius* area and was, as Alison Cooley has described, 'a powerful dynastic monument' (*Res Gestae*, p. 4); it demonstrated commitment and loyalty to the city of Rome, and communicated the sheer magnitude of Octavian's victory on a physical scale.

The form of the Mausoleum was similar to that of the Etruscan *tumuli* (tombs made from mounds of earth) in places like Cerveteri and Tarquinia, but its name referred to – and therefore inherently emulated - the great Mausoleum of Halicarnassos, built for King Mausollus of Karia and named by Vitruvius as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world (*De Arch.* II, 8.10-11). However, R. Ross Holloway saw parallels with the tombs of Asia Minor, and Paul Zanker has questioned whether or not the Mausoleum was intended to call to mind the burial mounds of the Trojan princes and their implicit link with the Julian family in Rome, rather than evoking the negative connotations of the Etruscan Kings (Holloway, "The Tomb of Augustus", p. 171-3; Zanker, *Power of Images*, p. 72-7). Both models are possible, yet the most reasonable suggestion comes from Amanda Claridge, who has proposed the tomb of Alexander the Great, which Octavian is known to have visited in 30 BCE, as the archetype for the mausoleum in Rome; although its precise shape is not known, it may have been 'an architecturally elaborate version of a *tumulus* in the tradition of the Macedonian kings (Claridge, *Rome*, p. 183). Once completed in 28 BCE, Augustus's Mausoleum was the largest tomb in the Roman world, comprising an enormous circular structure of concentric concrete walls that led to a central burial chamber, the walls of which contained rectangular niches for cinerary urns and funerary inscriptions. The exterior wall of the monument was faced with, now lost, white travertine limestone. The superstructure of the monument is also lost, but Strabo, who saw it in 7 BCE, describes it as a great mound on a tall, white (limestone) foundation, covered with trees and a bronze statue of Augustus at its summit (Strabo, *Geography* V.236. For the physical architecture of the Mausoleum, see Claridge, *Rome* p. 181-4 and Coarelli, *Rome* p. 302-4).

There was some precedent for this kind of inscription; following the death of Pompey an inscription documenting his achievements in Asia was placed at a shrine he dedicated to Minerva in the north-east of the Campus Martius. The inscription is now lost but its text, given by Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* 7.97), recorded the success of his campaigns in the east (Luke, *Ushering in a New Republic*, p. 177). A further influence may also have been the silver tablets deposited by Julius Caesar at the feet of Jupiter in his temple on the Capitoline, which gave a public list of the honours officially decreed to him by the Senate, and which culminated with Caesar's close association with the gods (Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, XLIV.7.1; Luke, *Ushering a New Republic* p. 178-84). Augustus's *Res Gestae* is probably based on both texts, and demonstrates some awareness of their contents and associated narratives, but it was also innovative in its own right. The choice of bronze tablets for the inscription, rather than marble or silver, was deliberate; bronze was the material of legal documents and official administrative statements, and carried with it a sense of authority and permanence. The achievements listed in the *Res Gestae* were therefore elevated to the status of law and sent a strong moral message that corresponded with Augustus's ambitions to act as a model and principled leader for the Roman people (Cooley, *Res gestae* p. 3). Alison Cooley has also noted that the achievements of Augustus were not the only ones recorded at the Mausoleum; alongside the *Res Gestae* were also inscriptions that documented the deeds of other members of the family, such as the senatorial decree awarded to Germanicus following his death in 19 CE which was commemorated on bronze pillars next to those which similarly recorded the honours passed for Gaius and Lucius, who had also died early (Cooley, *Res Gestae* p. 5). These decrees no longer survive, but one awarded to Gaius in Pisa may provide a model; it refers to his services to the Roman state in foreign expansion that is certainly reminiscent, in terms of emphasis, of the language of conquest found in the *Res Gestae* (Cooley, *Res Gestae* p. 6). It is clear that the *Res Gestae* of Augustus were not to be read in isolation, but rather as part of a more systematic message that included the achievements and actions of Augustus's family, and most importantly his potential heirs. The fact that they all found their burial place within the Mausoleum before him only served to emphasise the dynastic impression; the ashes of Marcellus, Octavia, Agrippa, Drusus (the Elder), Gaius and Lucius were all interred there before Augustus's death in 14 CE, a fact which, combined with the honorific decrees and funerary inscriptions also presented around the exterior of the tomb and in conjunction with the *Res Gestae*, communicated the strength of the Julian line and the exemplary characteristics of its members. Rather than recording the 'achievements of the divine Augustus,' the Mausoleum hosted what Alison Cooley has called the 'achievements of the Augustan family' in an epigraphic display that both stated their dynastic intent and justified their extremely powerful position in Roman society (Cooley, *Res Gestae*, p. 6).

The *Res Gestae* in Ancyra

As no physical trace of the bronze tablets in Rome has survived, we are reliant on the existence of three versions of the *Res Gestae* in a provincial context for the reconstruction of its text. The version in Ancyra, the provincial capital of Galatia, is inscribed in Greek and Latin, the 'queen' of inscriptions described by Mommsen.

Ancyra (modern Ankara) was a new city, founded by Augustus in *c.* 25 BCE on the site of an older stronghold in the same strategic geographical position (see Strabo, *Geography* XII.5.2) following the creation of the province after the bequeath of the king of Galatia, Amyntas. Although not part of its original design, the *Res Gestae* was inscribed on the Temple of Rome and Augustus, the headquarters of the provincial cult, the construction of which had begun during Augustus's own lifetime (Cooley, *Res Gestae*, p. 7-8). Krencker and Schede demonstrated that the inscription was a later addition, through the smoothing over of a large area of the masonry surface of the temple, after Augustus's death and perhaps as late as 19 CE (Krencker and Schede*, Der Tempel in Ankara*, p. 51). The Latin inscription was placed on either side of the walls of the entrance porch, and the Greek on outside face of the southern wall of the main chamber of the temple, the lettering of both texts painted in red, providing an impressive colour scheme against the golden background of the masonry blocks (Cooley, *Res Gestae* p. 10-12). Further inscriptions within the *pronaos*, or porch, of the temple recorded the annually appointed priests of the temple during the Julio-Claudian period, along with the details of benefactions that they awarded to the city, including such Roman spectacles as gladiatorial games and the distribution of grain (although other offerings were particularly Greek and Celtic by nature, such as donations of oil for use in the gymnasium and the giving of public feasts, which were particular popular amongst the Celtic nobility. See Mitchell, *Anatolia*, p. 109-110). Alison Cooley has proposed that these inscriptions were deliberately placed to invite a comparison between the gifts granted by Augustus to the people of Rome with the benefits given to the city by the Ancyrian elite, who held the priesthoods in the temple (Cooley*, Res Gestae*, p. 12-13). This thereby linked the worship of Augustus and Rome with the culture of euergetism and the benefits of the new social system established by the Augustan regime.

The *Res Gestae* at Antioch (near Pisidia)

In 1914 and then again in 1924, approximately 270 fragments of white limestone were excavated from the site of the Roman colony of Antioch, near Pisidia (Scheid, *Res Gestae*, p. xii). The city had originally been founded by the Seleucids in the third century BCE but was later named a colony by Augustus, where he resettled veterans from the fifth and seventh legions in 25 BCE, when Galatia was established as a new province (see Mitchell and

Waelkens, *Pisidian Antioch*, for a history of the colony). Although in a somewhat isolated geographical position, the veterans of the new colony attempted to maintain a close connection with Rome and the principate. Barbara Levick has shown that the names attested for the colonists in the Augustan period indicate Italian origins (Levick, *Roman Colonies* (p. 56-67); they formed the elite of the new city and were expected to consolidate the diverse population of veterans, native Anatolians, and those descended from the Seleucid settlement (Cooley, *Res Gestae*, p. 13). The connection with the capital city was maintained through imitation, using the names of Rome's neighbourhoods and even some monuments as a way of identifying the districts of the new colony (Levick, *Roman Colonies*, p. 76-8).

The *c.* 270 fragments of inscription, in Latin, were discovered in a wide area close to the steps of a three-arched gateway, which connected a colonnaded street with a large square leading to a temple that was most likely dedicated to Augustus; the fragmented state of the inscription has led to varying speculation regarding the original context of the inscription, but it appears to have been displayed on the inner walls of the monumental gateway, the imagery of which also commemorated themes of Roman conquest and Augustan Peace (Cooley, *Res Gestae* p. 14-15 and 47). Like the Temple of Augustus and Rome in Ancyra, the gateway was dedicated before the addition of the inscription, in 2/1 BCE, but its placement here only served to emphasise the imperial message of the complex (Mitchell and Waelkens, Titlep. 146-7). Unlike Ancyra and Apollonia, where Greek versions of the text were placed, the use of only Latin here again reinforced the theme of conquest and victory that was appropriate for its setting; the 'triumphalist tone' of the Latin inscription and the monumental complex within which it was placed entirely suited a new colony, inhabited by Roman (indeed, largely *Italian* veterans) in a brand new province of Augustus's Roman world.

The *Res Gestae* in Apollonia

The *Res Gestae* in Apollonia was inscribed only in Greek, on a large base built to support several statues of the imperial household of Augustus, dedicated between 14 and 19 CE (Scheid, *Res Gestae*, p. xiii). Little is known about the town itself; it appears to have been dedicated by Greek settlers in the third century BCE, and was added to the territory of Galatia by Amyntas, one of the client kings instituted by Rome following the defeat of Mithridates IV (see Strabo, *Geography* XII.3.1). Amyntas left Galatia to Rome in a bequest upon his death in 25 BCE, and Augustus settled some colonists there, but the majority of information for the town comes from epigraphic evidence that attests to the involvement of the local elite in emperor worship as a means of justifying their elevated societal positions (Cooley, *Res Gestae* p. 16-17).

The Greek version of the *Res Gestae* here was inscribed on a large statue base which probably held statues of Germanicus, Tiberius, Augustus, Julia Augusta (Livia) and Drusus, based on fragmentary inscribed names also discovered (Mitchell, *Anatolia*, p. 104). The text begins with a dedication to Apollonia and the imperial names, with the rest of the text of the *Res Gestae* given in seven columns beneath this monumental heading (Scheid, *Res Gestae* p. xiii). Alison Cooley has suggested that the base, statue and inscription were set up by members of the local elite in the spirit of competition with other local centres of emperor worship, such as Antioch (Cooley, *Res Gestae* p. 18). A road, the *via Sebaste*, built by Augustus, linked the two towns (see *Edict of the governor of Galatia*), yet a sense of disparity may have been felt in the fact that Antioch had been founded as a full, Roman colony, whereas only a number of veteran colonists were sent to Apollonia and added to the existing population (Mitchell, *Anatolia* p. 77). The inclusion of the *Res Gestae* on this monument dedicated to the imperial family could, therefore, be interpreted as a symbol of the rivalry that existed between the local elites of these towns, and their use of the imperial cult as a means of demonstrating both the strength of their loyalty and their enthusiasm for the imperial regime. One inscription from Apollonia records a certain Apollonios, who is described in an honorific decree issued by the council as a "friend of the emperor and friend of his fatherland," as a priest of *Dea Roma* and as having contributed three statues for the altar of the Augusti (*MAMA* IV, 142 in Cooley, *Res Gestae*, p. 16), meaning he may in fact have been in charge of the entire monument.

The presence of three 'versions' of the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* in a single province has resulted in much discussion as to why and how the text came there from Rome. Modern scholarship (Cooley and Scheid, for example) are wary of referring to the Greek and Latin editions of the text in Anatolia as 'copies', owing to the variations of content between the two languages. This interpretation has moved away from the traditional view put forward by previous editors of the text, which believed the Greek inscriptions to have been part of Augustus's publication 'plan' to reach those provincial communities in which Latin was not yet a useful language of communication (Brunt and Moore, *Res Gestae* p. 2). However, it is now more widely accepted that the presence of the inscriptions in three places within the same province is more likely to be the result of the initiative of individual provincial governors. Peter Thonemann has recently identified a fourth further fragment of the *Res Gestae* in Greek, from Sardis, indicating that at least one copy of the text was made in the neighbouring province of Asia (see Thonemann, "A Copy of Augustus' 'Res Gestae' at Sardis", p. 282-8). Although only a very small fragment of chapters 21-22, it reveals a slightly different translation of the Latin, which helps to answer the question of whether the Greek versions at Ancyra and Apollonia were based on an "official" translation; the similarity of the texts and

the heading that introduce them, could be indicative of their having been copied directly from the example in Rome (see Ramage, *Nature and Purpose*, p. 126-31). The assumption that their existence is the result of an instruction that came directly *from* Rome is more problematic (see Cooley, *Res Gestae* p. 18-22, *contra* Scheid, *Res Gestae* p. xvii and Eck, *The Age of Augustus*, p. 1-2). Previous editions of the text have suggested that much of the detail of the *Res Gestae* that is concerned with the provinces only as examples of imperial expansion and the singular focus on the city of Rome would not have been interesting to provincial communities (Brunt and Moore, *Res Gestae*, p. 4). Yet Alison Cooley's recent work has suggested that closer attention to the Greek versions of the text in fact demonstrates a very deliberate adaption of the work to satisfy an audience outside of Rome (Cooley, *Res Gestae*, p. 19). Much of this detail shall be elucidated in the associated commentaries on the text of the *Res Gestae*, but it is worth noting that these small adaptations were perhaps one mechanism by which the language of the state could be appropriated to suit the needs of a more specialised and local community, whilst still demonstrating loyalty to and enthusiasm for the imperial administration. Whether or not the decision to reproduce the text came from the Senate in Rome, or the version from which it was copied was in Greek or Latin, the fact that the *Res Gestae* was recreated in Ancyra, Antioch and Apollonia is surely indicative of the success and strength of the message of the Augustan regime; the presence of the inscriptions in Galatia is proof, perhaps, that the administration in Rome had been successful in its promotion of the virtue of the imperial family, and its encouragement of similar acts of 'virtuous behaviour' amongst the local elite of the Roman provinces.

Much has been made of the date and authorship of the *Res Gestae*. It is almost certain that Augustus did not write the entirety of the text himself but rather dictated the general form and style of the work to his secretaries, who selected the appropriate material accordingly (Scheid, *Res Gestae*, p. xxvi). Although John Scheid believes it is possible to discern more personal introductions in the text that may have come from the emperor himself, it is unlikely that much of what we read today was personally authored; it was a biographical, rather than auto-biographical, work that was engineered under Augustus's leadership and with his approval, and which was received as an official document of state, not as a work of literature (Scheid, *Res Gestae*, p. xxvii-xviii). The text ends with the statement that the work had been written in the last year of Augustus's life (*cum scripsi haec, annum agebam septuagensumum sextum* (35.2)), however this has largely been dismissed as inaccurate. Most scholarship prefers the view that the majority of the text was composed during Augustus's lifetime, then modified and completed following his death, under Tiberius, particularly given the very latest information provided regarding the state of the empire in 13-14 CE (e.g. Augustus holding tribunician power for the 37th time in June 14 CE; see Cooley, *Res Gestae*, p. 42). However, Cooley has deduced from Suetonius's description of how and when the four documents were deposited with the Vestal Virgins, that the *Res Gestae* was most likely written during the last years of Augustus's life and represent a 'personal, final summing-up statement…of what he thought he had achieved, presented in accordance with his vision both of his own role as *princeps* and of Rome's place within the world' (Cooley, *Res Gestae*, p. 43).

The *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* is clearly a political document; it is not an accurate or objective rendering of the career of Augustus, and should not be treated as such. Its intent was inherently complex; it attempted to make sense of and represent the seismic change of order that the Roman world had undergone during the course of his principate. As Alison Cooley has said (*Res Gestae*, p. 34), the text does not imitate a single model, but is composed *sui generis*, according to its own rules, thereby permitting Augustus the freedom with which to define and interpret his role in politics, history and society. It reflected the emergence of a new kind of Roman state, characterised by its own visual language, expressions and forms which although initiated by him, were not officially propagated by the emperor himself; this new "language" was enthusiastically adopted and disseminated by a multitude of social groups, from senators to slaves, across Italy and, as demonstrated by the various versions of the *Res Gestae*, the provinces, without whose support and loyalty the Augustan regime could not have succeeded.

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