

The *Rēs Gestae* of Augustus:

A Student Text with Notes and Commentary



Augustus ("Prima Porta" type), 20 BCE
http://www.evl.ku.dk/hold/2002e/114/prima_porta.jpg

By Amy Neilson

The *Rēs Gestae* of Augustus

Augustus, the first Roman emperor and Julius Caesar's heir, was born in 63 BCE and died in 14 CE, but not before entrusting four significant documents to the safekeeping of the Vestal Virgins. Suetonius, in his *Life of Augustus*, tells us that these documents were his will, instructions/arrangements for his funeral, a summary of Rome's financial and military state of affairs, and perhaps most importantly, an autobiographical catalogue of his achievements, which he desired to be copied and inscribed on bronze tablets placed before his tomb and in prominent cities of the Empire. The most complete of these tablets, from which nearly all the text is derived, is known as the *Monumentum Ancyranum*, found in modern day Ankara (Ancyra in ancient Galatia) at the site of the temple of Rome and Augustus. This catalogue, known commonly as the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, lists in thirty-five short chapters addressed to the Roman citizenry the details of Augustus' rise to power and his military exploits; a summary of the titles and honors bestowed upon him and either accepted or refused by him; his expenditures on civic building projects, public shows, and religious festivals; and his acquisition, consolidation, legislation, and diplomatic dealings with provinces and colonies.

The significance of this document can not be understated, as it includes details not found in other sources on Augustus' life such as Suetonius, Tacitus, Livy, Plutarch, and Cassius Dio. On the other hand, the reader must realize that the document, penned by the man himself and designed for the public, is an extreme form of propaganda. It selectively omits, or includes, historical events to suit Augustus' desires.

Chapters 21-23 included in this unit are of particular interest, as they enumerate some of Augustus' most famous building projects, the lavish expense and giving of games in particular, and an account of the rare and especially costly event of a staged sea-battle. Augustus employs a style which is straightforward, rather than florid, often written in parallel clauses, relying heavily on the perfect tense, active voice, and the simple indicative mood. Augustus obviously favored clarity, as he includes a number of otherwise redundant conjunctions and unnecessary directional prepositions. The entire document is written as a first person narrative, not uncommon in Roman texts of this kind. *Nota bene*: The successful translator will have a good command of the vocabulary

of numerals, the indeclinable adverbs, common ablative case uses, including the ablative absolute, and the perfect system tenses in both active and passive.



Augustus as Pontifex Maximus, after 12 BCE

*In chapter 10 of the RG Augustus describes his initial refusal and later acceptance of the title of
Chief Priest*

<http://www.the-romans.co.uk/gallery2/full/03.augustus.jpg>

Notes Chapter 21

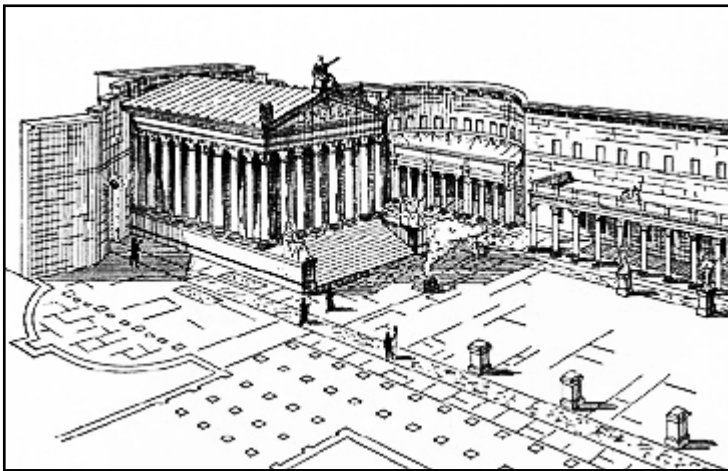
- 1 **solum, -ī n.**, *ground; soil*.
Mārs, Mārtis m., *Mars, god of war*.
Ultor, Ultōris m., *Avenger*. Augustus vowed this temple in 42 BCE in honor of the successful exacting of punishment over Julius Caesar's assassins, Brutus and Cassius. It was located in the Forum of Augustus. Apollo was also associated with assisting Augustus' victory over Antony at Actium in 31 BCE.
- 2 **manibium, -ī n.**, *spoils*. These are the spoils by which Augustus was able to finance his civic projects.
aedes, aedis f., *temple*
Apollō, -inis m., *Apollo*.
ad aedem: *near the temple*.
- 3 **magnā ex pāte**, *idiom, from/in large part*.
ēmtō: agrees with **sōlō**; it is a perfect passive participle
M. Marcellī: Marcus Claudius Marcellus was the intended heir of Augustus, the son of his sister Octavia by her first marriage and the first husband of his daughter Julia. He died at the age of 19 in 23 BCE.
- 4 **gener, -ī m.**, *son-in law*.
esset: imperfect subjunctive used in a proviso clause.
quod . . . esset: *provided that. . . it was*.
Capitōlium, -ī, n., *Capitol*. This is likely a reference the Capitoline temple of Jupiter
divus, -a, -um, *deified; divine*.
Iūli . . . Mārtis: All temples listed have special significance to Augustus. The Deified Iulius refers to the posthumous deification of Julius Caesar, his adoptive father. Vesta is likely a reference to the Palatine temple and Augustus' assumption of the title of Chief Priest, 12 BCE. For Mars Ultor, cf. note on line 1.
- 5 **cōnsācrō (1)**, *to dedicate, give*.
cōstituō, cōstituere, cōstituī, cōstitūtus, *to put, place, set; to cost*.
circiter, *adv. approximately; about*.
HS: an abbreviation for the Latin **sēstertius, -ī m.**, *a sesterce*.
milliēns, *adv., a thousand times*
- 6 **aurum corōnārium:** *literally, gold for crowns*. This is a reference to the common practice of subjects paying monetary tribute to their ruler.
pondus, -ī m., *weight*. **pondō:** *abl. of price*.
trīginta, *cardinal number, three hundred*.
municipium, -ī n., *free town*. The citizens of **municipia** were counted as Roman and these towns were governed by their own laws and magistrates.
- 7 **colōnia, -ae f.**, *colony*. These were Italian towns which enjoyed honorable status since they were settled with citizens by the Roman state. Take as dative plural, though we might have expected *colōniīs*.
cōnferentibus: agrees with **municipiīs** and **colōnīs**; both are dat. with the compound **remīsī (9)**.
triumphus, -ī m., *triumph; victory parade/procession*.
quīntum, *adv., for the fifth time*.
- 8 **quōtiēnsque,** *adv., as many times as*
imperātōr, imperātōris m., *general, commander-in-chief*.
- 10 **dēcernō, dēcernere, dēcrēvī, dēcrētus,** *to judge; to decide*. Here, translate as *to vote*.
aequē, *adv., equally*.
- 11 **benignē,** *adv., kindly, favorably*.
adque antea, *adverbial phrase., as before*.

"Should we not mention among our truly noble buildings...the Forum of Augustus...buildings the most beautiful the world has ever seen?"

Pliny, Natural History (36.102)

Chapter 21

1 In prīvatō sōlō Mārtis Ultōris templum forumque Augustum
2 ex manibīis fēcī. Theātrum ad aedem Apollinis in sōlō magnā
3 ex pāte ā prīvatōs ēmptō fēcī, quod sub nōmine M. Marcellī
4 generī meī esset. Dōna ex mānibīis in Capitōliō et in aede dīvī
5 Iūlī et in aede Apollinis et in aede Vestae et in templō Mārtis
6 Ultōris cōnsācrāvī, quae mihi cōstituērunt HS circiter mīlliēns.
7 Aurī corōnārī pondō trīginta et quīnque mīllia mūnicipiīs et
8 colōnīs Itāliae cōferentibus ad triumphōs meōs quīntum cōsul
9 remīsī, et postea, quōtiēnsque imperātōr āpellātus sum, aurum
10 corōnārium nōn accēpī dēcērentibus mūnicipiīs et colōnīs aequē
11 benīgnē adque antea dēcrēvērāt.



A cut-away view of the Forum of Augustus with the Temple of Mars Ultor, which is mentioned in line 1.
<http://www.geocities.com/calivs/vr/forumaugustum/augustus.forum.cutaway.jpg>

Quaestiōnēs:

1. What specifically were Augustus' sources of property for building his forum and the Theater of Marcellus? Why do you think he makes the special effort to clarify this point in his enumeration of the various building projects?
2. In lines 7-11 we learn of Augustus' response to the continual efforts of towns and municipalities to pay him monetary tribute. What sort of relationship was Augustus trying to cultivate among local governments and why would this be to his advantage?

Notes Chapter 22

- 12 **ter**, adv., *three times*
mūnus, munēris n., *public gift, show.*
quīnquiēns, adv., *five times*
- 13 **nepos, nepōtis** m., *grandson.*
filiōrum . . . nepōtum: Augustus adopted as his sons Gaius and Lucius Caesar in 17 BCE, and later in 4 BCE Agrippa Posthumus. All were the sons of his daughter Julia and Agrippa. Also in 4 CE he adopted Tiberius Claudius Nero the son of his wife Livia by her first marriage. His grandsons, Drusus and Germanicus, were the sons of Tiberius and his brother Drusus the Elder, respectively. Both Gaius and Lucius Caesar died leaving Tiberius Claudius Nero as the only son and heir. Tiberius would become emperor after Augustus' death in 14 CE.
hominum: gen. of the whole.
bīs, adv., *twice.*
āthlēta, -ae m., *athlete, wrestler.* **āthlētārum**: genitive of the whole.
accīo, accīre, accīvī, accītus, to call, summon.
- 14 **praebeō, praebēre, praebuī, praebitum** + dat., *to offer, bestow.*
tertium, adv., *three times.*
- 15 **quater**, adv., *four times*
magistrātus, -ūs m., *magistrates, government officials.*
- 16 **vīcem**, adv., *in place of.*
vīciēns, adv., *twenty times.*
conlēgium, -ī n., *association, college*
XV virōrum: take literally as **quīndecimvirī**: the college of 15 priests in charge of the Sibylline books.
- 17 **collēga, -ae** m., *colleague, associate.*
collēgā M. Agrippā: abl. of accompaniment, supply **cum**. Marcus Agrippa, at that time Augustus' son-in-law, was associated with the Sibylline priests and therefore the Saecular Games with Augustus presiding over them. Agrippa was Augustus' closest friend and advisor from their youth.
- lūdōs saeculārēs**: The Secular Games of 17 BCE, given by Augustus to celebrate the end of a generation, and his lifetime (**saeculum**) of achievement, namely: diplomatic victory over Parthia 20 BCE, the establishment of general peace and growing posterity after civil wars, the institution of Augustan moral legislation, and the revival of old Roman religion. The games were prescribed by the Sibylline oracle, hence the involvement of the College of Quindecimviri. The famous poet Horace wrote the **Carmen Saeculare** to be sung by a chorus of girls and boys in honor of the occasion.
- C. Furnio . . . cos.:** Romans customarily designated the year's date by the names of the consuls, in this case Gaius Furnius and Gaius Silanus.
- 18 **lūdōs Mārtiālēs**: A new institution, Augustus gave the games of Mars in 2 BCE, yet another attempt to earn the people's favor with lavish shows, which were no doubt job producing as well as propagandistic, along with grain doles and civic building programs.
- XIII**: the Roman numeral 13, used here to suggest the year of Augustus' 13th consulship.
- 19 **deinceps**, adv., *thereafter.*
s.c. et lēge: abl. of means
s.c.: abbreviated for **senātūs cōnsultū**, *by a decree of the senate.*
vēnātiō, vēnātiōnis f., *beast hunt.*
- 22 **in circō . . . amphiteatrīs**: Prior to the building of the Colosseum, animal games were given in any number of large public spaces such as the forum, the race track, and smaller amphitheaters like those at Pompeii and Puteoli.
- 23 **sexiēns**, adv., *six times.*
confecta sunt: here, translate **cōnficere** as *to kill.*
- 24 **quīngentae**, cardinal number., *500.*

“He surpassed all his predecessors in the frequency, variety, and magnificence of his public shows.”

Suetonius, Life of Augustus (6.43.1-3)

Chapter 22

12 Ter mūnus gladiātōrium dēdī meō nōmine et quīnquiēns filiōrum
13 meōrum aut nepōtum nōmine, quibus mūneribus dēpugnāvērunt
14 hominum circiter decem mīllia. Bis āthlētārum undique accītōrum
15 spectāculum populō praeuī meō nōmine et tertium nepōtis meī
16 nōmine. Lūdōs fēcī meō nōmine quater, aliōrum autem magistrātuum
17 vīcem ter et vīciēns. Prō conlēgiō XV virōrum magister conlēgiī
18 collēgā M. Agrippā lūdōs saeculārēs C. Furniō C. Silānō cos. fēcī.
19 Cōsul XIII lūdōs Mārtiālēs prīmus fēcī quōs post id tempus
20 deinceps īnsequentibus annīs s.c.et lēge fēcērunt cōsulēs. Vēnātiōnēs
21 bēstiārum Āfricānārum meō nōmine aut filiōrum meōrum et
22 nepōtum in circō aut in fōrō aut in amphitheātrīs populō dedī
23 sexiēns et vīciēns, quibus cōnfecta sunt bēstiārum circiter trīa mīllia
24 et quīngentae.



A gladiator mosaic from the Roman province of Africa, 2nd century CE.

This passage focuses on the types and frequency of gladiatorial combat (line 12) and African beast hunts (lines 20-21) given to the public by Augustus. <http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/romans/games/pictures/mosaic.gif>

Quaestiōnēs:

1. How many total instances of public games were given in Augustus' name, or in the name of his family members, and what types of games were they? Identify and list as many types as you can from the text.
2. Based on the Roman system of annual dating you learned earlier this term, what would be the equivalent date for 17 BCE in years *A.U.C.*? Give your answer in both Arabic and Roman numerals.

Notes Chapter 23

- 25 **nāvālis, -e.,** adj., *naval*.
proelium, -ī n., *battle*. This staged sea-battle was given to the people in 2 BCE at huge expense. It was a special kind of gladiatorial show known as a *naumachia*. Previous *naumachia* had been given by Caesar, and later by Claudius. Although this battle was staged in a ditch flooded by the Tiber, archaeologists have explored the possibility that later *naumachia* were given in the Colosseum when flooded.
spectāculum: a syncopation of the usual form **spectāculum**.
Tiber, Tiberis m., *Tiber river*. **Tiberim:** the acc. singular of **Tiber**.
- 26 **nemus, nemoris** n., *grove*.
cavātus, -a, -um, adj., *hollow*.
- 27 **octingentī,** cardinal number., *800*.
mille et octingentōs pedēs: acc. of extent of space.
ducentī, cardinal number., *200*.
- 28 **rōstrātus, -a, -um,** adj., *beaked, hooked*. Here, referring to the ships' prominent prows reinforced for battle. See illustration under chapter 23, page 9.
trirēmīs, -e, adj., *with three banks of oars*.
birēmīs, -e, adj., *with two banks of oars*.
- 29 **cōnfigō, cōnfigere, cōnfixī, cōnfixus,** *to join together/engage, to pierce*. This can be interpreted in a number of ways, as naval battle certainly involved the engagement of ships, but the strategy was more literally to pierce enemy ships, like "bumper-boats".
classis, -is f., *fleet*.
- 30 **praeter** + acc., *besides*
hominum: genitive of the whole.

“I undertook many civil and foreign wars by land and sea throughout the world, and as victor I spared the lives of all citizens who asked for mercy . . . I captured six hundred ships not counting those smaller than triremes.”

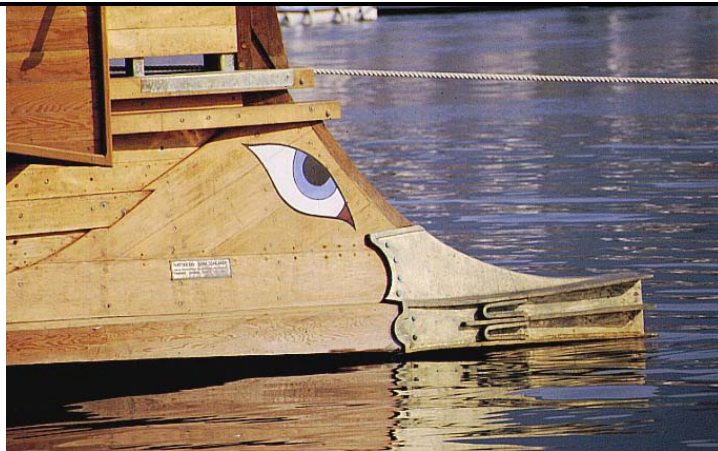
Augustus, Res Gestae (3.1-9)

Chapter 23

25 Nāvālis proelī spectāclum populō dedī trāns Tiberim in quō locō
26 nunc nemus est Caesārum cavātō sōlō in longitūdinem mīlle
27 et octingentōs pedēs, in lātitudinem mīlle et ducentī, in quō
28 trīginta rōstrātae nāvēs trirēmēs aut birēmēs, plūrēs autem
29 minōrēs inter sē cōnfixērunt; quibus in classibus pugnāvērunt
30 praeter rēmigēs mīllia hominum tria circiter.

Quaestiōnēs:

1. What exactly are the dimensions of the trench in which Augustus staged a naval battle for the public?
 2. Where was that trench located? According to Augustus, what is situated there now?
 3. Give the case and reason of **pōpulō** in line 25.
 4. Give the positive and superlative equivalents of **plūrēs**.
 5. Give the positive and superlative equivalents of **minōrēs**.
 6. Find the reflexive pronoun. Identify its antecedent, case, and reason.
 7. Give the case and reason of **hominum** in line 30.
 8. Identify the tense, person, number, voice, and mood of **pugnāvērunt**.
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A modern reconstruction of the reinforced prow of a trireme

The formidable rostrum (beak) would be used to pierce enemy ships in naval battle or mock battles such as the naumachia described in chapter 23. www.abc.se/~m10354/bld/img/olymptram.jpg