

RES GESTAE DIVI AUGUSTI



Figure 1:- Statue of Augustus (also known as the Prima Porta)

A funerary inscription commissioned by Augustus himself to detail his life and reign, the *Res Gestae* was supposedly created just before his death in AD 14. After his death, it was inscribed upon various pillars and artefacts around the Roman Empire, including outside of Augustus' mausoleum in the Campus Martius. Many of these structures have since been destroyed, however, and as such our main example of the text has been found in modern day Turkey. None of the inscriptions survive in full, but considering the extensive measures that followed Augustus' death, it can be pieced together. Referring to the excavations at Antioch Harrer states that "This new text of the *Res Gestae* is of considerable importance; for one reason because it helps to fill in some of the gaps in the Ancryan copy." (Harrer, 1926). This indicates that separately they cant entirely be relied upon to show the entire text.



Figure 2:- Bust of Augustus

“AT THE AGE OF NINETEEN, ON MY OWN INITIATIVE AND AT MY OWN EXPENSE, I RAISED AN ARMY BY MEANS OF WHICH I RESTORED LIBERTY TO THE REPUBLIC...”

(The starting paragraph of Augustus' *Res Gestae*) Note the many attempts to emphasize his own “initiative” and his own “expense”. Whilst the *Res Gestae* is incredibly important, it is also extremely biased, so that it emphasizes his own talents, and abilities. Its account cannot therefore be trusted in terms of historical accuracy, particularly for battles.

Figure 3:- Wall with the *Res Gestae* inscribed upon it



One of the many reasons why it is suspected that Augustus created the *Res Gestae* is because it is one of the few examples that clearly expresses Augustus' views and opinions on the events that happened during his life and reign. Unlike historians like Tacitus or Suetonius, who frequently criticize the ruler, and often even dabble in the gossip surrounding him, he shows the reader a view of himself that is idyllic and often a lie. Throughout the text Augustus repeatedly writes about a victory, in war, social circles or against the senate, and in doing so, gives himself the vast majority of the credit. This is clear in the repeatedly used phrases like “I raised...I restored...”, in which the personal pronouns definitively show that he is the hero and saviour. This of course means that the narrative is extremely biased and as such is not necessarily an accurate view of the events of his reign.

Bibliography

Harrer, G. (1996). *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*. The University of North Carolina Press, vol. 23(no. 3), p.387.