

UNIT 6 TASK BOOKLET – *PAX ROMANA* AND POETIC VISIONS



Denarius depicting Octavian as Neptune, with his foot on a globe.

Mint of Rome, 31-29 BCE – Katalog Niggeler, 2. Teil, Nr. 1010.

For this online task you will examine literary depictions of the *orbis terrarum* or οἰκουμένη (“The [inhabited] World”) during the Augustan period, with a particular focus on how India features into notions of *imperium sine fine* (“Empire without limits”). A series of passages from Augustan poets and other authors are given below. You should read the passages set out on the following pages, as well as the chapter by Daniela Dueck (2003). “The Augustan Concept of ‘An Empire without Limits’”, in *Creating and Representing Sacred Spaces*. M. Dickhardt and V. Dorofeeva-Lichtmann (eds.). Göttinger Beiträge zur Asienforschung, 2/3 [see Moodle for the PDF]. While reading this material, consider the following questions set out below.

Questions:

- 1) How does India fit into Roman notions of the *orbis terrarum* and various (ideological) expressions of Imperial power? Does it sometimes appear distinctive, or does it just get subsumed within a totalising view of the East?
- 2) What do you make of India as a place seemingly conquered and yet also to be conquered in Augustan era poetry?
- 3) What constituted Imperial power? And are the edges of the earth indistinguishable from the edges of Empire?
- 4) How impactful do you think this expanded conception of the world was on the wider public in Rome (and, perhaps, more broadly within its territories)?

Please post any thoughts you have to the unit forum

Augustan era allusions to India and the East

Virgil *Aeneid* 6.79 ff. – transl. from A. S. Kline 2002 [Aeneas is visiting the underworld and seeing a litany of future Romans, good and bad – at this point he sees Augustus]

This is the man, this is him, whom you so often hear
promised you, **Augustus Caesar, son of the Deified,**
who will make a Golden Age again in the fields
where Saturn once reigned, and extend the empire beyond
the Libyans and the Indians (to a land that lies outside the zodiac's belt,
beyond the sun's ecliptic and the year's, where sky-carrying Atlas
turns the sphere, inset with gleaming stars, on his shoulders):

Even now the Caspian realms, and Maeotian earth,
tremble at divine prophecies of his coming, and
the restless mouths of the seven-branched Nile are troubled.

Truly, Hercules never crossed so much of the earth,
though he shot the bronze-footed Arcadian deer, brought peace
to the woods of Erymanthus, made Lerna tremble at his bow:
nor did Bacchus, who steers his chariot, in triumph, with reins
made of vines, guiding his tigers down from Nysa's high peak.
Do we really hesitate still to extend our power by our actions,
and does fear prevent us settling the Italian lands?

Virgil *Aeneid* 8.675 ff. – transl. from A. S. Kline 2002. [Description of shield of Aeneas]

In the centre bronze ships could be seen, the Battle of Actium,
and you could make out all Leucate in feverish
preparation for war, the waves gleaming with gold.
On one side Augustus Caesar stands on the high stern,
leading the Italians to the conflict, with him the Senate,
the People, the household gods, the great gods, his happy brow

shoots out twin flames, and his father's star is shown on his head.

Elsewhere Agrippa, favoured by the winds and the gods

leads his towering column of ships, his brow shines

with the beaks of the naval crown, his proud battle distinction.

**On the other side Antony, with barbarous wealth and strange weapons,
conqueror of eastern peoples and the Indian shores, bringing Egypt,
and the might of the Orient, with him, and furthest Bactria:**

and his Egyptian consort follows him (the shame).

All press forward together, and the whole sea foams,

churned by the sweeping oars and the trident rams.

They seek deep water: you'd think the Cycladic islands were uprooted

and afloat on the flood, or high mountains clashed with mountains,

so huge the mass with which the men attack the towering sterns.

Blazing tow and missiles of winged steel shower from their hands,

Neptune's fields grow red with fresh slaughter.

The queen in the centre signals to her columns with the native

sistrum, not yet turning to look at the twin snakes at her back.

Barking Anubis, and monstrous gods of every kind

brandish weapons against Neptune, Venus,

and Minerva. Mars rages in the centre of the contest,

engraved in steel, and the grim Furies in the sky,

and Discord in a torn robe strides joyously, while

Bellona follows with her blood-drenched whip.

**Apollo of Actium sees from above and bends his bow: at this
all Egypt, and India, all the Arabs and Sabaeans turn and flee.**

Propertius *Elegies* 2.9 – transl. from A. S. Kline 2002.

That which he is, I was, often: but perhaps one day he'll be thrown away, and another dearer
to you [Cynthia].

Penelope was able to live un-touched for twenty years, a woman worthy of so many suitors.
She evaded marriage by her cunning weaving...

...

So it was that Greece, then, was happy in its true daughters: then honour was respected even
in the camps. But you, you, impious girl, can't stay free a single night, or remain alone a
single day! Why, you both drink from the cup, laughing away: and perhaps there are wicked
words about me. You even chase after him, who left you once before. The gods grant you
may enjoy being slave to that man!

....

**What if I was a soldier, detained in far-off India, or my ship was stationed on the
Ocean?** But it's easy for you to weave lies and deceptions: that's one art that women have always
learned. ...

Propertius *Elegies* 2.10 – transl. from A. S. Kline 2002.

Now it's time to circle Helicon to other metres; time to give the Thessalian horse its run of
the field. Now I want to talk about squadrons brave in fight, and mention my leader's Roman
camp. ...

Let first youth sing of Love, the end of life of tumult: I sing war now my girl is done. Now, I
want to set out with more serious aspect: now my Muse teaches me on a different lute. Surge,
mind: vigour now, away from these low songs, Muses: now this work will be large-voiced,
thus:

'Euphrates now rejects Parthian cavalry protection, and mourns that he reduced Crassus's
presence. **Even India, Augustus, bows its neck to your triumph, and Arabia's virgin
house trembles at you; and if any country removes itself to the furthest ends of the
earth, let it feel your hand later, once it's captive.'**

I'm a follower of camps like this: I'll be a great poet singing of your camp: let the fates
oversee that day!

When we can't reach the head of some tall statue, and the garland is set before its lowly feet,
so now, helpless to embark on a song of praise, I offer cheap incense from a poor man's rites.

My verses as yet know not Hesiod's founts of Ascræ: Love has only washed them in
Permessus, Apollo's stream.

Propertius *Elegies* 3.1.15-16 – transl. from G. Parker 2008.

Many, Rome, will add your praises to their annals,
singing one day of Bactra [a city in Bactria] as the boundary of your rule.

Propertius *Elegies* 3.4 – transl. from A. S. Kline 2002 [minor adaptations].

Caesar [i.e., Augustus], **our god, plots war against rich India, cutting the straits, in his fleet, across the gem-bearing ocean.** Citizens, the rewards are great: far lands prepare triumphs: Tiber and Euphrates will flow to your tune. Too late, but that province will come under Ausonian wands, Parthia's trophies will get to know Latin Jupiter. Go, get going, prows expert in battle: set sail: and armoured horses do your accustomed duty! I sing you auspicious omens. And avenge that disaster of Crassus! Go and take care of Roman history!

Father Mars, and fatal lights of sacred Vesta, I pray that the day will come before I die, when I see Caesar's axles burdened with booty, and his horses stopping often for vulgar cheers, and then I'll begin to look, pressing my dear girl's breast, and scan the names of captured cities, the shafts from fleeing horsemen, the bows of trousered soldiers, and the captive leaders sitting beneath their weapons!

May Venus herself protect your children: let it be eternal, this head that survives from Aeneas' line. Let the prize go to those who earn it by their efforts: it's enough for me I can cheer them on their Sacred Way.

Propertius *Elegies* 4.3.7-10 – transl. from D. Dueck 2003 [the poem imitating a wife's letter to her husband who is away at war]

Now you were seen by Bactra amid drawn bows,
now by the Persian foe mounted on his mailed charger,
by the northern Getans, by Britain with its painted chariots
and **the swarthy Indians pounded by orient waves.**

Horace *Songs of the Century (Carmen Saeculare)* 4.5.25-28 – transl. from D. Dueck 2003.

Already the Parthian fears the hosts mighty on land and sea,
and fears the Alban axes.

Already the Indians and Scythians, but recently disdainful, are asking for our answer.

Horace *Songs of the Century (Carmen Saeculare)* 4.14.41-52 – transl. from D. Dueck 2003.

At thee marvels the Cantabrian [an Iberian tribe in northern Spain] never before subdued,

at thee the Mede and Indian, at thee the roving Scythian,

thou mighty guardian of Italy and imperial Rome.

To thee the Nile gives ear, the Nile that hides the sources of its springs;

To thee the Danube, the swirling Tigris,
the Ocean teeming with monsters, that roars around the distant Britons;
to thee the land of Gaul that reckes not death, and stubborn Iberia.
Before thee stand in awe the slaughter-loving Sygambri [Sicambri, a German tribe], with
weapons laid to rest.

Horace *Odes* 1.12.53-57 – transl. from G. Parker 2008 (minor adaptation).

May [Augustus] defeat the Parthians who threaten Latium,
**Or else the Seres [Silk People] and Indians situated alongside the eastern border,
subduing them in a deserving triumph.**

Horace *Odes* 4.14.41-52 – transl. from G. Parker 2008.

At you the previously invincible Cantabrian marvels, the Mede marvels, **and so do the
Indian and the fleeing Scythian,**
O propitious keeper of Italy and of mistress Rome.
You the Nile, which conceals the sources of its streams, heeds, and so does the Hister, and the
speedy Tigris, and the monster-bearing Ocean that bellows at the distant Britons;
You the land of Gaul, fearless before death, and of hardy Hiberia, you the Sygambri, who
rejoice in slaughter, worship, having put aside their weapons.

***Res Gestae Divi Augusti* 26, 31** – transl. from F.W. Shipley 1924 (minor modifications).

**On my order and under my auspices two armies were led, at almost the same time, into
Aethiopia** [the kingdom of Meroë, roughly modern Sudan] **and into Arabia which has the
title "Happy,"** and very large forces of the enemy of both peoples were cut to pieces in battle
and many towns were captured. Aethiopia was penetrated as far as the town of Napata, which
is next to Meroë [also the name of this kingdom's chief city]. In Arabia the army advanced into
the territories of the Sabaei to the town of Mariba [capital of the Saba' kingdom, in modern
Yemen].

...

**Embassies were often sent to me from the kings of India, a thing never seen before in the
camp of any general of the Romans.** Our friendship was sought, through ambassadors, by the
Bastarnae and Scythians, and by the kings of the Sarmatians who live on either side of the river
Tanais, and by the king of the Albani and of the Hiberi and of the Medes.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities* 1.3.3 – transl. from D. Dueck 2003

Rome rules every country that is not inaccessible or uninhabited, and she is mistress of every sea, not only of that which lies inside the Pillars of Hercules, but also of the Ocean, except that part of it which is not navigable; she is the first and **the only state recorded in all time that ever made the risings and the settings of the sun the boundaries of her dominion**. Nor has her supremacy been of short duration, but more lasting than that of any other polis or kingdom...

Strabo *Geography* 17.3.24 – transl. from H. L. Jones 1932.

This, then, is the lay of the different parts of our inhabited world; but since the Romans occupy the best and the best-known portions of it, having surpassed all former rulers of whom we have record, it is worthwhile, even though briefly, to add the following account of them. Now I have already stated that, setting out with only one city, Rome, the Romans acquired the whole of Italy through warfare and statesmanlike ruler-ship, and that, after Italy, by exercising the same superior qualities, they also acquired the regions round about Italy. **And of the continents, being three in number, they hold almost the whole of Europe, except that part of it which lies outside the Ister River [Danube] and the parts along the ocean which lie between the Rhenus and the Tanaïs Rivers [Rhine and Don]. Of Libya, the whole of the coast on Our Sea is subject to them; and the rest of the country is uninhabited or else inhabited only in a wretched or nomadic fashion. In like manner, of Asia also, the whole of the coast on our Sea is subject to them,** unless one takes into account the regions of the Achaei and the Zygi and the Heniochi, who live a piratical and nomadic life in narrow and sterile districts; and of the interior and the country deep inland, **one part is held by the Romans themselves and another by the Parthians and the barbarians beyond them; and on the east and north live Indians and Bactrians and Scythians, and then Arabians and Aethiopians; the some further portion is constantly being taken from these peoples and added to the possessions of the Romans.** Of this whole country that is subject to the Romans, some parts are indeed ruled by kings, but the Romans retain others themselves, calling them Provinces, and send to them praefects and collectors of tribute. But there are also some free cities, of which some came over to the Romans at the outset as friends, whereas others were set free by the Romans themselves as a mark of honour. There are also some potentates and phylarchs and priests subject to them. Now these live in accordance with certain ancestral laws.

Velleius Paterculus *Roman History* 2.39.2 – transl. from F. W. Shipley 1924 [writing a compendium of Roman history from mythic times down to his own during the reign of Tiberius]

[Julius] Caesar also made Numidia a province, from which Metellus had long before won by his valour the cognomen of Numidicus. Isauricus conquered Cilicia, and Vulso Manlius Gallograecia [Galatia] after the war with Antiochus. Bithynia, as has been already said, was bequeathed to the Romans by the will of Nicomedes. **Besides Spain and other countries**

whose names adorn his Forum, Augustus made Egypt tributary, thereby contributing nearly as much revenue to the treasury as his father had brought to it from the Gauls.

Pliny *Natural History* 3.2.17 – transl. from J. Bostock and H. T. Riley 1855 [Pliny is writing in the mid-first century CE, but here he is alluding to the “map of Agrippa”, Augustus “second in command”]

At the present day the length of Baetica [southern Spain], from the town of Castulo, on its frontier, to Gades is 250 miles, and from Murci, which lies on the sea-coast, twenty-five miles more. The breadth, measured from the coast of Carteia, is 234 miles. Who is there that can entertain the belief that **Agrippa, a man of such extraordinary diligence, and one who bestowed so much care on his subject, when he proposed to place before the eyes of the world a survey of that world, could be guilty of such a mistake as this**, and that too when seconded by the late emperor the divine Augustus? **For it was that emperor who completed the Portico which had been begun by his [Agrippa’s] sister, and in which the survey was to be kept, in conformity with the plan and descriptions of M. Agrippa.**