

The Augustan Concept of 'An Empire without Limits'¹

Daniela Dueck

The political ascendancy of Octavian, later given the honorific title of “Augustus”, and his position as *princeps*, first citizen among the Romans, in 27 BC, marked a new beginning for Rome. After more than a century of internal political and social feuds, which at their worst were full-fledged civil wars, and after Rome’s enemies, particularly on the northern and eastern frontier, had been dealt with, an age began of political stability and peaceful frontiers.² As far as we can assess it, the facts comply with this general image of a period of internal and external tranquility. Moreover, the sense of unprecedented achievement, especially in terms of the extended space ruled by the Romans under Augustus, was understood by contemporaries in a way that created in their minds a somewhat mystical and super-natural geographical essence, and in this sense an almost sacred notion of the geographical extension of the Roman empire. How did physical geography become super-natural for the Romans?

The expansion of the state resulted from involvement in regional conflicts which developed into a series of wars with powerful rivals around the Mediterranean. Carthage was the first significant opponent of Rome outside the Italian peninsula. Then came the Hellenistic kingdoms in the East and particularly Macedonia. The outcome of these clashes was eventually annexation of various lands as provinces ruled by Roman governors. Thus, most of Sicily became a province under direct Roman rule in 241 BC after the first Punic war against Carthage, and the entire island in 211 BC. Sardinia was seized from Carthage in 238 BC and organized as a province in 227 BC. Parts of Spain were annexed beginning in 205 BC during the second Punic war and formed as two separate provinces in 197 BC. Then followed Africa and Macedonia in 146 BC after the third Punic and the ‘Achaean’ wars and the struggle with Macedonia; and later all the other provinces.³

The new conquests and the growth of the Roman state were as a rule associated with the generals who contributed to these impressive results. Their reputation was assured not only by success in battle and victories over often powerful enemies, but also particularly by the geographical significance of their achievements, often reflected

¹ I wish to thank Margalit Finkelberg and Joseph Geiger for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

² For a classic survey and analysis of events, cf. Syme 1939.

³ Cf. Mommsen 1968; Badian 1968; Lintott 1993; Kallet-Marx 1995.

in their acquired surnames. Our information concerning these events and persons depends, as always with the ancient world, on what sources are available. Thus, geography in a political context seems more prominent in the literature and art of the first century BC as compared with previous periods. This becomes even more apparent at the time of Augustus, which combined unprecedented achievements and a state of internal and external peace with a relative abundance of surviving poetry, prose and visual art.⁴

Already in the second century BC, the Greek historian Polybius wished to understand “by what means and under what system of polity the Romans in less than fifty-three years have succeeded in subjecting nearly the whole inhabited world (*oikoumene*) to their sole government – a thing unique in history” (1.1.5).⁵ His curiosity grew still stronger in view of the destiny of other nations, such as the Persians and Macedonians, who tried and even succeeded to rule over extensive areas; “but”, he says, “though their empire was regarded as the greatest geographically and politically that had ever existed, they left the larger part of the inhabited world as yet outside it” (1.2.5), “but the Romans have subjected to their rule not portions, but nearly the whole of the world and possess an empire which is not only immeasurably greater than any which preceded it, but need not fear rivalry in the future” (1.2.7). To understand this unusual historical process, Polybius located the turning point in Rome’s history, which is also the beginning of his first book, in Rome’s involvement in Sicily at the time of the first war against Carthage. This marked for him “the first occasion on which the Romans crossed the sea from Italy” (1.5.1).

Note the use of the term *ge oikoumene*, “inhabited land”, which is significant in the context of conquest. It stands for an idea deeper than its literal meaning, for it is not mere “inhabited land” in the geographical sense, that is oceans and continents, but, specifically, populated land. It symbolizes the entire globe, so to speak, and mankind in its entirety.⁶ References to the *oikoumene* in this context thus give the conquest a special weight and an aura of fame together with a sense of great accomplishment in the domination of extensive territories and large populations.

The Roman historian Sallust expressed similar impressions in his depiction of the background to L. Sergius Catilina’s plot to destroy the Roman state. Employing his predilection for antitheses, Sallust attempted to draw a picture of extreme dichotomy between the state of affairs before the rebellion and the situation while it lasted. He

⁴ Surveys of the political and cultural situation at the time of Augustus are, e.g. Nicolet 1991; Gruen 1996: 147-97.

⁵ All translations of ancient authors are those of the Loeb Classical Library with some minor alterations, unless otherwise specified.

⁶ Cf. Gisinger 1894-1980. Cf. Strabo’s definition in his *Geography* 1.4.6, C 65.

therefore describes Rome's position in the sixties BC thus: "The whole world, from the rising of the sun to its setting, subdued by her arms, rendered obedience to her" (*Cat.* 36.4). The point here is the sense of a large empire in the spatial sense, since it encompasses the entire world from one end to another, and also in the political sense, for the conquered people recognize Rome's superiority by their obedience.

Pompey impressed his contemporaries with a series of martial successes against Rome's enemies, starting in his 20s, a relatively young age. This began with his destruction of King Iarbas in Africa, which won him a triumph in 81 BC and an official nickname *Magnus*, "the Great", thus calling to mind Alexander the Great, who set an example for many Roman generals as well as for other men throughout history.⁷ Then Pompey fought in Spain, suppressed the pirates in the Mediterranean (67 BC), based himself in the Asiatic provinces of Bithynia and Pontus and defeated Mithridates VI king of Pontus, and finally annexed Syria as a new Roman province. Thus, in 61 BC Pompey celebrated a third triumph over a third continent. According to custom, the victorious general was carried in a golden chariot accompanied by prisoners of war, while in front of him were held portraits of conquered cities and nations. The prestige of the victor grew greater as the conquered parts were wider, newer and lesser known and the prisoners more impressive. The extent of the conquests and their novelty were manifested by means of the various and unusual looking prisoners as well as the spoils of war and glorifying inscriptions. This particular event is described in detail in Plutarch's biography of Pompey:

Inscriptions borne in advance of the procession indicated the nations over which he triumphed. These were: Pontus, Armenia, Cappadocia, Paphlagonia, Media, Colchis, Iberia [in Asia Minor], Albania, Syria, Cilicia, Mesopotamia, Phoenicia and Palestine, Judaea, Arabia, and all the power of the pirates by sea and land which have been overthrown. Among these peoples no less than a thousand strongholds had been captured, according to the inscriptions, and cities not much under nine hundred in number, besides eight hundred piratical ships, while thirty-nine cities had been founded [...] The captives led in triumph, besides the chief pirates, were the son of Tigranes the Armenian with his wife and daughter; Zosime, a wife of king Tigranes himself; Aristobulus, king of the Jews; a sister and five children of Mithridates; Scythian women, and hostages given by the Albanians, by the Iberians [of Asia Minor], and by the king of Commagene [...] But that which most enhanced his glory and had never been the lot of any Roman before, was that he celebrated his third triumph over the third continent. For others before him had celebrated three triumphs; but he celebrated his first over Libya, his second over Europe, and his last over Asia, so that he seemed in a way to have included the whole world in his three triumphs. (*Pomp.* 45)

The exceptional geographical achievement is thus manifested in several ways: names of countries and regions, numbers of conquered places, and a large variety of

⁷ On the phenomenon of *Imitatio Alexandri* among Roman generals, cf. Weippert 1972.

prisoners. It is further enhanced by the reference to the relationship between the extent of the conquest and the size of the world, for Pompey won victories on three continents. This is reminiscent of the connection made by Polybius between the size of the *oikoumene* and the Roman achievement, a theme also emphasized in other sources.

Julius Caesar, whose attainments also had great geographical significance, was active mainly in Western Europe, beginning with his involvement in a major war in Gaul (58-51 BC), initiated by a migration of the Helvetii and resulting in the conquest and annexation of Gaul. During these years Caesar also waged campaigns in Germany and Britain and later aspired to conquests in the East. The details of his western campaigns are given in his own records in the *Gallic War*. The entire description, which involves many geographical and ethnographic details, certainly aroused excitement among the Romans as new horizons opened before them. Thus, Caesar's account of the landing on the shores of Britain and of the nature of the land and its inhabitants at the beginning of the fifth book of the *Gallic War* (5.12-14), would have presented him as a great conqueror who had reached unknown regions and met strange and exotic people.⁸

We come now to the age of Augustus. As the struggle between Antony and Octavian came to an end, and the Principate was established, Augustus became the ruler of a huge dominion which included most of the lands around the Mediterranean. But several war zones still required intervention. The motives for Rome's involvement in the different regions might differ. Among them were security considerations, for instance in Iberia, or exploitation of profitable resources, as in Arabia. Augustus gained victories on several fronts and established a rule based on various kinds of relationships: friendly alliances, client kingdoms and of course provinces under direct rule by Roman governors.

At this same time, the Greek historian and geographer Strabo of Amasia, who lived in Rome,⁹ could present at the end of the 17th book of his geographical treatise the layout of the Roman provinces in the world:

Since the Romans occupy the best and the best known portions of the *oikoumene*, having surpassed all former rulers of whom we have record, it is worth while, even though briefly, to add the following account of them [...] of the continents, being three in number, they hold almost the whole of Europe [...] 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 [...] of Asia also, the whole of the coast on our sea is subject to them [...] some further portion is constantly being taken from these peoples and added to the possessions of the Romans. (17.3.24, C 839)

⁸ Cf. Adcock 1956: 38-9; 98-9.

⁹ On Strabo's world and political orientation, cf. Dueck 2000.

Strabo describes here the extent of the Roman presence in wide parts of the *oikoumene*, but he does not ignore the existence of other political and ethnographic entities on the boundaries of the empire. Moreover, since the status of the various regions in relation to Rome could be anything between friendly alliance and direct imperial rule, it would be inaccurate to picture the entire empire as one homogeneous political entity, whose exact limits it would anyway be difficult to define clearly and accurately. In addition, the military situation was not always and everywhere stable, especially in some border regions such as Spain, Germany, the Alps, Armenia and Arabia, where the Romans, even in Augustus' time, suffered painful defeats and military failures.

But what was occasionally troublesome and even disastrous, such as Aelius Gallus' campaign in Arabia, or the constant struggles with various German tribes, as well as policies determined spontaneously according to various considerations, was presented in the official image of the *princeps* as an assertive and consistent policy and as a series of unprecedented military and political successes.¹⁰ Aspects of reality influenced the official display of Augustus as a great conqueror and served as elements in nurturing a sense of superiority and of the image of Rome as a great and powerful empire. Poets and other writers often used geographical and ethnographic themes at this time, and usually in the context of the exaltation of the *princeps*.

Virgil's Augustan epic, the *Aeneid*, describes the long and laborious journeys of Aeneas, a refugee from Troy, from his vanquished city to Italy. Aeneas, distressed by the Greeks' sack of his city, and by his loss of his wife and many of his friends, leaves Troy with his old father and infant son, on his way to a vague though pre-determined destination: he is to become the father of the Romans. But the goddess Juno, who hates the Trojans since their prince, Paris, did not choose her as the most beautiful of the goddesses, swears to make the road to this future as hard and painful as she can. When early in the first book, Venus, Aeneas' mother, calls on Jupiter to elucidate and strengthen the promise, he foretells the magnificent future of her descendants, and its high point in the foundation of Rome which is destined to flourish and grow into "an empire without limits", no limits of space, no end in time: "*imperium sine fine*" (*Aen.* 1. 278).

In the literal context this phrase is meant to convey to Venus the awe and extent of the unprecedented situation of Rome, and it should be understood as a poetic expression in an epic world where accurate definitions, limits of logic and geographical borders do not obtain. Here Virgil resembles his fellow poets of the Augustan age who also used geographical elements to express similar ideas of expansion and power. Virgil himself uses a geographical and ethnographic vocabulary in order to praise Au-

¹⁰ Cf. Gruen 1996: 149-50; 182-3; 194-7.

gustus:

[...] Augustus Caesar [...] shall spread his empire past Garamant and Indian, to a land that lies beyond the stars, beyond the paths of the year and the sun, where heaven-bearing Atlas turns on his shoulders the sphere [...] Against his coming even now the Caspian realms and Maeotian land shudder at Heaven's oracles, and the mouths of sevenfold Nile are in tumult of terror. Nor, in truth, did Alkides range over such space of earth [...] nor he who guides his car with vine-leaf reins, triumphant Liber [...] (*Aen.* 6.792-805)

Even those who could not place each geographical reference in its exact position in the *oikoumene* – and they were in all likelihood the great majority – understood that it meant a great expanse: Indians, who according to Greek literary tradition always dwell on the eastern edge of the *oikoumene*; Garamantes, a Tripolitan tribe which here represents Africa; the Caspians, an extreme northern point; Maeotis, situated near the sea of Azov; and the Nile in the south, signifying the third continent after Europe and Asia. In this context, Atlas, who, standing on the western edge of Africa, supports the sky, also serves as a boundary marker for the westernmost point in the *oikoumene*. The reference to Alkides/Herakles and Liber/Dionysus likewise shows that Augustus has crossed many countries, even more numerous than those two, who here supply a precedent of extensive if mythological journeys. This also brings to mind the conscious and declared aspiration of Alexander the Great to compete with the characters of Dionysus and Hercules in terms of geographical distances.¹¹

Virgil presents a similar picture in describing the especially wonderful triumphal procession depicted on Aeneas' shield. This shield, made by the god Vulcan, presents to the constantly anxious Aeneas the future of his Roman descendants who are engaged in war; the central part contains a triumphal procession of Augustus:

The conquered people move in long array, as diverse in fashion of dress and arms as in tongues. Here Mulciber had portrayed the Nomad race and the ungirt Africans, here the Leleges and Carians and quivered Gelonians. Euphrates moved now with humbler waves, and the Morini were there, furthest of mankind and the Rhine of double horn, the untamed Dahae, and Araxes chafing at his bridge. (*Aen.* 8.722-8)

Many nations, varied in their names, clothes and weapons, march before Augustus. The prisoners represent strange and remote peoples who dwell in remote regions, some having a legendary and exotic air: the Nomads in northern Africa; the Leleges and Carians in Asia Minor; the Gelones, a Scythian tribe, in the far north; the Morini in the Belgian region; and the Dahae east of the Caspian sea. Virgil includes in the procession three rivers which represent boundary lines – the Euphrates, the Rhine and the Araxes (in Armenia). These demonstrate the extent of the conquests and also reflect

¹¹ Cf. esp. Arr. *An.* 5.2.1; 5.26.5; 5.28.2; 7.201; *Ind.* 5.8-13; 9.10-11.

the Roman custom of carrying statues of river gods in triumphal processions as representations of conquered areas. The poet thus creates an image of a great conqueror who has reached the edges of the world.

Horace, another Augustan poet, also exploited geographical and ethnographic names in order to glorify the *princeps*. In the *Carmen Saeculare*, written on Augustus' initiative to celebrate the *Ludi Saeculares* in 17 BC, Horace comments:

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. (*Carm.Saec.* 53-6)

It is not by accident that the nations who seek Rome's favor are the Parthians, the Scythians and the Indians, all peoples who dwell at the edges of the *oikoumene*,¹² all surrounding the Roman empire.

In other poems devoted to Augustus on the occasion of his various victories, particularly in Germany and in Gaul in the second decade BC, Horace similarly celebrates Augustus' glory:

Who would fear the Parthian, who the icy Scythian, who the hordes rough Germany doth breed, while Caesar lives unharmed? Who would mind the war in wild Iberia? (*Carm.* 4.5.25-8)

At thee marvels the Cantabrian 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, with weapons laid to rest. (*Carm.* 4.14.41-52)

Here the geographical range is wide and impressive: Cantabrians, Parthians, Indians, Scythians, Britons, Sygambrians, Nile, Danube, Euphrates, Gaul and Spain.

In view of these achievements Horace declares that Augustus published the fame and the glory of all Romans, using an expression similar to one by Sallust:

[...] the Latin name and might of Italy waxed great, and the fame and majesty of our dominion were spread from the sun's western bed to his arising". (*Carm.* 4.15.13-16)

Propertius, who also belonged to the circle of the Augustan poets, addressed the emperor with the following exclamation:

The most distant of lands is preparing *triumphus* for you; Tigris and Euphrates will flow under your dominion; late though it be, it shall pass as a province beneath the rule of Italy [...] (3.4.2-5)

¹² On the traditional position of typical nations, cf. Heidel 1976; Romm 1992.

The use of distances and geographical details to reflect political power and strategic accomplishments appears in a poem by Propertius in the form of a wife's letter to her husband at the wars:

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. (4.3.7-10)

What seems most interesting is the notion that not only does geography express conquest, but also the other way around: conquests bring geography to the awareness of a commoner such as the same soldier's wife:

I learn where flows the Araxes that you are to conquer, how many miles a Parthian horse can cover without water; and I am constrained to find out from a map the countries painted on it and the manner of this arrangement by the wise creator, what lands are sluggish with frost, what crumbling with heat, what wind will bring sails back to Italy. (4.3.35-40)¹³

Even Ovid, who was sent into exile by Augustus, expresses the geographical greatness associated with Julius Caesar and the *princeps*:

Is it indeed a greater thing to have subdued the sea-girt Britons, to have led his victorious fleet up the seven-mouthed stream of the papyrus-bearing Nile, to have added the rebellious Numidians, Libyan Juba, and Pontus, swelling with threats of the mighty name of Mithridates, to the sway of the people of Quirinus, to have celebrated some triumphs and to have earned many more – than to have begotten so great a man? (*Met.* 15.752-8)

And specifically on Augustus:

But why should I recall barbaric lands to you and nations lying on either ocean shore? Nay, what soever habitable land the earth contains shall be his, and the sea also shall come beneath his sway! (*Met.* 15.829-31)

The association of geographical terms with the political flourishing of Rome at the time of Augustus is apparent also in the writings of Greek poets who lived in Rome and were part of an intellectual circle that included the Roman social and political elite.¹⁴ All authors exploit particularly remote sites or such that are situated on the far edges of the *oikoumene* in order to express the extent of contemporary achievements. Antipater of Thessalonike, for instance, refers to the victory of the young Gaius Caesar, Augustus' grandson and prospective heir, over the Parthians:

Be on your way to the Euphrates, son of Zeus; to you already the Parthians in the

¹³ This reference suggests what sort of details were shown on maps at that time: river courses, distances, names and shapes of countries, climate and winds. On the cartographic ideas and concepts of the Romans, cf. Brodersen 1995.

¹⁴ On this intellectual circle, cf. Dueck 2000: 130-44. My present citations from Roman poets are only a few of many possible ones. For additional relevant references, cf. Gruen 1996: 191-2 and notes there.

East are deserting apace. Be on your way, my prince; you shall find their bows unstrung through terror, Caesar. Rule in accord with your father's precepts, and be yourself the first to certify to the rising sun that Rome is bounded by the ocean on all sides. (47)¹⁵

In one of his epigrams Crinagoras of Mytilene praises Germanicus' victory over the Celts:

Pyrenaean mountains and deep-valleyed Alps that face the Rhine's flood near-by, you bear witness to the rays that Germanicus made to dawn with lightnings of mighty battle against the Celts. They in their masses crashed to earth, and Enyo said to Ares "To such hands as these our services are due". (26)

The geography and the topography are personified, the Pyrenaeans and the Alps being made to serve as witnesses to the subjugation of the Celts by Germanicus. In another epigram Crinagoras addresses the glory of Nero's, that is Tiberius', conquests in Armenia and Germany:

Sunrise and sunset mark the world's limits, and the deeds of Nero have passed through both boundaries of the earth. The sun at its rising has seen Armenia subdued under his hands, and Germany at its going down. Let us sing his twofold victory in war; it is known to the Araxes and the Rhine, now drunk by people enslaved. (28)

In this poem east and west, for Armenia and Germany, are represented by the rising and setting of the sun, and by the rivers Araxes and Rhine.

Augustus is also praised in the following epigram by Crinagoras:

Though Caesar the Most August (*polysebastos*) should journey to the depths of Hercynia's forest or outermost Soloeis and the fringe of the Libyan Hesperides, glory shall go with him everywhere. The waters of the Pyrenees are witness: in them not even the neighbouring wood-cutters washed, yet now they shall be baths for both continents. (29)

The Hyrcynian forest, which lies east of the Rhine and north of the Danube, and Soloeis, representing the most extreme western point in Africa which is also the border of the Libyan Hesperides, are geographical expressions specifically intended to illustrate astonishing distance and space.

Were all these mere fantasies whose poetic nature undermines their credibility? It is fairly clear that they present a mixture of reality and exaggeration based on poetic freedom. But the toponyms and the ethnonyms are certainly no invention and they reflect a geographical and political reality. Moreover, similar messages appear also in the prose writings of other Augustan authors.

¹⁵ The texts and translations of Antipater and Crinagoras appear in Gow and Page 1968: 40-41; 214-17.

A typical expression of the importance of geographical detail in relation to the position and power of the empire appears in the writings of Augustus himself, and particularly in the description of his attainments, the *Res Gestae*, which was posted after his death on bronze tablets in front of his Mausoleum.¹⁶ In this summary of his life Augustus surveys his own achievements, using no less than fifty-five names of regions, kingdoms, tribes, cities, seas and rivers. He mentions conquered lands but also recognition by remote kingdoms of his superiority, through embassies and gifts. Thus he proudly announces:

Wars, both civil and foreign, I undertook throughout the world (*orbis terrarum / oikoumene*), on sea and land (3); 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 [...] and by the king of the Albani, and of the Hiberi [of Asia Minor] and of the Medes. (31)

The latter third of the document is devoted to the vast conquests and to the fame of Augustus which reached remote regions and unknown nations.

Nicolaus of Damascus, a Greek who composed a biography of Augustus, describes the extent of the *princeps*' rule in the world as an unprecedented phenomenon: the inhabitants of islands, continents, cities and nations around the world honor him with sacrifices and temples and recite the praise of his kindness. At first they did not even know his name, but soon they became his subjects, first in surrender to his power but then willingly, for Augustus brought security to the world and "made the boundaries of the Roman state longer than ever before that and the nations of the Hellenes and the Barbarians – more calm and secure" (*FGrH* 90 F 125).

Dionysius of Halicarnassus, in his work *Roman Antiquities*, realized that the power and size of Rome were unprecedented in terms of space and duration (1.2.1). He expresses his admiration of Rome already in the introductory remarks:

[...] 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 [...]. (1.3.3)

Likewise, the pretext and very justification for Strabo of Amasia's geographical work were the new Roman achievements. Strabo, who decided to describe the entire inhabited world as it was known in his time, the first century CE, connects the limits of the *oikoumene* with political developments:

¹⁶ Cf. Gagé 1950; Yavetz 1984: 1-36; Nicolet 1991: 15-27.

[...] the spread of the empires of the Romans and of the Parthians has presented to geographers of today a considerable addition to our empirical knowledge of geography, just as did the campaign of Alexander to geographers of earlier times [...]. (1.2.1, C 14)

The Roman conquests increased the knowledge of remote lands, and beyond the conquered regions nothing is known. For instance in referring to Germany and the Germans Strabo says:

These tribes have become known through their wars with the Romans [...] and they would have been better known if Augustus had allowed his generals to cross the Albis in pursuit of those who emigrated there. (7.1.4, C 291)

[...] those parts of the country beyond the Albis that are near the ocean are wholly unknown to us. For of the men of earlier times I know of no one who has made this voyage along the coast to the eastern parts that extend as far as the mouth of the Caspian Sea; and the Romans have not yet advanced into the parts that are beyond the Albis; and likewise no one has made the journey by land either. (7.2.4, C 294)

Therefore, if conquests determine knowledge of new regions, the limits of the empire are those of the *oikoumene*, that is the inhabited world is in fact the same as the conquered world.

Strabo stresses the Roman presence in extensive parts of the world throughout his survey. To complete the picture, he shows that kingdoms and regions which are not defined as Roman provinces and are not under any form of Roman dominance, still recognize Rome's and Augustus' superiority: the Parthians of their own initiative send hostages, the Indians send gift-bearing embassies and even the Ethiopians learn to know Augustus through envoys. All these are nations who occupy the regions on the periphery of the *oikoumene* beyond the Roman empire, i.e., they share with the Romans the dominion of the world. The fact that they, too, recognize Roman strength completes the picture of Rome as a world power.

Strabo himself is aware of the possibility of re-writing geographical details for propagandistic purposes: Alexander's historians 'moved' the borders of the *oikoumene* in order to glorify the king's name:

The stories that have been spread far and wide with a view to glorifying Alexander are not accepted by all; and their fabricators were men who cared for flattery rather than truth. For instance, they transferred the Caucasus into the region of the Indian mountains [...] which is more than thirty thousand stadia distant from India [...] for these were the farthestmost mountains towards the east that were known to writers of that time [...] it was a more glorious thing for Alexander to subdue Asia as far as the Indian mountains than merely [...] to the Caucasus, yet the glory of the mountain, and its name [...] led writers to suppose that they would be doing the king a favour if they transferred the name Caucasus to India. (11.5.5, C 505-6)

Nevertheless, the effect of Strabo's *Geography* is similar to the messages of Alex-

ander's historians: Rome led by Augustus is depicted as an impressive force which was the first to reach unknown regions and whose fame was known to the entire human race. Both images are based on realistic foundations; Alexander was indeed the first to reach unknown regions, especially in the east, which until then were known to the Greek world only by hearsay, and the Roman armies too marched far to meet nations and tribes who until then had been disconnected from Mediterranean culture.

The new political and geographical situation with its super-natural effect was expressed also in a series of monuments inside and outside Rome indicating toponyms and ethnonyms visually and epigraphically.¹⁷

In 55 BC, a few years after Pompey's victory over Asia and the triumph which celebrated it, a 10.000-seat theatre was built to commemorate the event, decorated with sculptured personifications of conquered nations which were probably accompanied by inscriptions with their names.¹⁸ This was done not only to document the appearance of the prisoners and preserve the inscriptions carried in the procession but also to use the depictions of the conquered people to promote the fame of Pompey the conqueror and to safeguard his achievements for posterity.

Similarly, at the center of Augustan Rome two monuments presented conquered nations, one in the Forum of Augustus, with a series of inscriptions, and another in a building named "*Porticus ad nationes*", with an elaborate sculptural complex of a sequence of portraits (*simulacra*) of all the tribes subdued by Augustus.¹⁹ The enumeration of the names of these tribes and nations added to the conqueror's fame, and their visual depiction showed their number and variety.

In the third book of his *Natural Histories*, Pliny alludes to some geographical initiative of Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, Augustus' right-hand man:

Agrippa was a very painstaking man and also a very careful geographer; who therefore could believe that when intending to set before the eyes of Rome a survey of the world he made a mistake and with him the late lamented Augustus? For he [Augustus] completed the portico that had been begun by his [Agrippa's] sister in accordance with the design (*destinatio*) and memoranda (*commentarii*) of Marcus Agrippa. (Plin. *NH* 3.17)

We may conclude from this that Agrippa in some way described the world so that Rome could see it; that this description was meant to be put in a certain portico; that this project included some notes; and that Augustus completed it. The exact nature of this presentation is unknown. Until recently it was common to think of a map accom-

¹⁷ Brief surveys are included in Smith: 1988: 50-77; Zanker 1990: esp. 297-334; Nicolet 1991: 38-47.

¹⁸ Suet. *Nero* 46.1; Plin. *HN* 36.41.

¹⁹ The Forum Augusti: Vell. 2.39.2; The *Porticus ad Nationes*: Plin. *HN* 36.39; Servius ad Aen. 8.721; cf. Smith 1988: 70-76; Zanker 1990: 112-4; 194-5; 210-15; Nicolet 1991: 41-3.

panied by a list of place-names. Accordingly, the map depicted the entire known world and was drawn according to the text which gave the names of the sites and the distances between them. Recently it has been proposed to drop the idea of a graphic map, and to see Agrippa's project as a monumental public inscription which contained lists of sites, rivers, countries, cities, tribes and distances, and thus presented the inhabited world to Rome.²⁰ Whether map or inscription, this project deliberately used known and new geographical names in order to announce the size of the conquests which were an integral part of the *princeps*' glory.²¹

Similar visual expressions of Augustus' geographical accomplishments figure on monuments outside Rome as well. Naturally, the existence throughout the empire of such glorifying constructions accentuates their propagandistic role.

Strabo describes a temple devoted to Augustus near Lugdunum (Lyons) in Gaul, erected on the initiative of all the Gauls together:

[...] in it is a noteworthy altar, bearing an inscription of the names of the tribes, sixty in number; and also images (*eikones*) from these tribes, one from each tribe [...]. (4.3.2, C 192)

The altar was erected as part of a whole complex dedicated to Augustus. It combined visual depictions of sixty tribes – sculptured, in relief or painted – with inscriptions bearing their names. Another, bigger, portrait was probably a statue of Augustus, symbolizing his dominance. The number sixty is impressive in itself, but its elaboration in the form of visual representations and the list of their names would certainly create an image of power and respectful homage.

Augustus was glorified through his political and geographical achievements also at his funeral. Tacitus says:

The question of the last honours was then debated. The two regarded as the most striking were due to Asinius Gallus and Lucius Arruntius – the former proposing that the funeral train should pass under a triumphal gateway; the latter, that the dead should be preceded by the titles of all laws which he had carried and the names of all peoples who he had subdued. (Tac. *Ann.* 1.8.4)

Dio Cassius adds:

An image of Pompey the Great was also seen, and all the nations he had acquired, each represented by a likeness which bore some local characteristic, appeared in the procession. (Dio Cass. 56.34.3)

One of the most striking testimonies to the use of ethnic visual images is the so-

²⁰ Brodersen 1995: 268-85.

²¹ Key studies on Agrippa's map are: Tierney 1963: 151-66; Sallmann 1971; Roddaz 1984; Nicolet 1991: esp. pp. 98-114.

called *Sebasteion* dedicated to the Julio-Claudian emperors in Aphrodisias, Asia Minor. It had a series of personified peoples (*ethne*) and provinces in reliefs, the remains of which can still be seen.²²

The names of conquered nations appeared also in inscriptions designed to announce the emperor's victories. By enumerating tribal names in the form of lists, the inscription demonstrated the extent of the achievement. To this type belongs the inscription on a triumphal monument initiated by Augustus after his victory in the Alps in 15 BC. This monument was built on the road to Gaul above the sea in La Turbie and enumerated forty-five names of tribes subdued by Augustus.²³ An inscription from a triumphal arch in Segusio dedicated to Augustus included the names of fourteen tribes who set up the monument.²⁴ And some milestones in Spain used geographical terminology to display the extent of the conquests by indicating that Augustus had gone "ad Oceanum", implying the uttermost boundary of the *oikoumene*.²⁵

We have seen that Augustan literature – Roman and Greek, poetry and prose – abounds with geographical expressions based on geographical reality. Nevertheless, there are also several literary concepts which emphasize the extent of the achievement not necessarily by scientific and accurate means. Thus poets, but also historians, used literary 'markers' to express extreme boundaries: nations who dwell at the edges of the inhabited world; the rising and setting of the sun which in fact means the entire width of the world; Atlas who stands at the extreme western point of Africa; the Hesperides; the Ocean which surrounds the enormous island, that is the *oikoumene*; the characters of Herakles, Dionysus and also Alexander, who in this context is almost a mythological person.

The super-natural element in the phenomenon of the exaltation of the Romans was also manifested in their notion that political and geographical accomplishments depend on religious devotion. Thus, a prevailing idea was that Rome reached its position in the world not only because of its excellent constitution and efficient army (as Polybius argued in his sixth book), but also on account of its devout adherence to the gods, unlike other nations. Cicero, among others, presented this idea explicitly:

Who, once convinced that divinity does exist, can fail [...] to be convinced that it is by its power that this great empire has been created, extended, and sustained? [...] We have excelled neither Spain in population, nor Gaul in vigour, nor Carthage in versatility, nor Greece in art [...] but in piety, in devotion to religion, and in the [...] recognition [...] that the world is swayed and directed by divine disposal, we have excelled every race and every nation. (*Har.* 19)

²² Cf. Smith 1988.

²³ Plin. *Nat.* 3.136; *CIL* V 7817, cf. King 1990: 57-8.

²⁴ *CIL* V 7231.

²⁵ *CIL* II 4701; 4703; 4712; 4715-16.

And again:

Our empire was won by those commanders who obeyed the dictates of religion [...] while in all other respects we are only the equals or even the inferiors of others, yet in the sense of religion, that is, in reverence for the gods, we are far superior. (ND 2.8)²⁶

The promise of Jupiter to Venus in the *Aeneid* implied "an empire without limits" in both the spatial sense and the temporal aspect, that is with no limits of duration. This chronological aspect is also apparent in Polybius' comparison of Roman dominion with that of previous kingdoms and empires. While others had eventually fallen and declined, Rome was still at its full strength in his time. This impressive situation had a still more powerful impact at the time of Augustus. His contemporaries enjoyed a sense of tranquility and unprecedented accomplishment regarding three aspects of the contemporary situation which corresponded to past, present and future respectively: lands annexed more than two centuries earlier were still under Roman rule; expansion was still in process with Augustus' own campaigns; and Augustus successfully pacified previously troublesome regions and brought the Roman state to its maximal size, thus giving a feeling of stability in terms of duration in future generations.

Thus, the geographical reality in the form of new regions reached for the first time by the Romans, was deliberately reflected in Augustan literature in a way which created a sense of an empire with no limits, spatial or chronological, whose geographical identity is always connected with the limits of another entity, i.e., the *oikoumene*, the inhabited world. The average Roman who read or even merely heard a certain strange and unknown geographical name, did not have to know its exact position on the globe in order to get the feeling of an exciting and exotic achievement. It is very likely that in most cases people indeed did not know the layout of the continents and the various countries, rivers, mountains and tribes. The new horizons were not, of course, extended as a result of pure scientific curiosity. The expansion was politically and strategically significant. Thus, lists of strange names and images of strange ethnic figures, encountered especially at the time of Augustus, nurtured feelings of relief and excitement about the superiority of Roman power and probably also connected these with a specific victorious personality. This sensation created in the minds of contemporaries the notion of a sacred space not in the religious sense of holiness, but as a super-natural, metaphysical, mystic and mythic idea.

²⁶ Cf. also Liv. 44.1.11-12; Dion. Hal. 2.18.1-2.

Bibliography

- ADCOCK, Frank E. (1956): *Caesar as Man of Letter*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- BADIAN, Ernst (1968): *Roman Imperialism in the Late Republic*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- BRODERSEN, Kai (1995): *Terra Cognita. Studien zur römischen Raumerfassung*. Hildesheim: G. Olms.
- DUECK, Daniela (2000): *Strabo of Amasia. A Greek Man of Letters in Augustan Rome*. London: Routledge.
- GAGE, Jean (1950): *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.
- GISINGER, Friedrich (1894-1980): "Oikoumene" in *Real-Encyclopaedie der klassischen Altertums-wissenschaft*, ed. by August Friedrich von Pauly and Georg Wissowa. Stuttgart: Metzler, Vol. 45, pp. 2123-74.
- GOW, Andrew S.P. and Denys L. Page (1968): *The Greek Anthology. The Garland of Philip and Some Contemporary Epigrams*. Vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- GRUEN, Erich, S. (1996): "The Expansion of the Empire under Augustus." In *Cambridge Ancient History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Vol. 10, pp. 147-97.
- HEIDEL William A. (1976): *The Frame of the Ancient Greek Maps*. New York: Arno Press.
- KALLET-MARX, Robert M. (1995): *Hegemony to Empire. The Development of the Roman Imperium in the East from 148 to 62 BC*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- KING, Anthony (1990): *Roman Gaul and German*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press.
- LINTOTT, Andrew W. (1993): *Imperium Romanum, Politics and Administration*. London: Routledge.
- MOMMSEN, Theodor (1968): *The Provinces of the Roman Empire. The European Provinces*. Edited by Thomas R.S. Broughton with an introduction. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- NICOLET, Claude (1991): *Space, Geography and Politics in the Early Roman Empire*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- RODDAZ, Jean-Michel (1984): *Marcus Agrippa*. Rome: Ecole française de Rome.
- ROMM, James S. (1992): *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- SALLMANN, Klaus G. (1971): *Die Geographie des Älteren Plinius in ihrem Verhältnis zu Varro. Versuch einer Quellenanalyse*. Berlin: W. de Gruyter.
- SMITH, R.R.R. (1988): "Simulacra gentium: the Ethne from Sebasteion in Aphrodisias." *Journal of Roman Studies* 78: 50-77.
- SYME, Ronald (1939): *The Roman Revolution*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- TIERNEY, J.J. (1963): "The Map of Agrippa." *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 63: 151-66.
- WEIPPERT, Otto (1972): *Alexander-Imitatio und römische Politik in republikanischer Zeit*. Augsburg (Diss., Würzburg University, 1970).
- YAVETZ, Zvi (1984): "The Res Gestae and Augustus' Public Image." In *Caesar Augustus, Seven Aspects*, ed. by Fergus Millar and Erich Segal. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- ZANKER, Paul (1990): *Augustus und die Macht der Bilder*. Munich: C.H. Beck.