

CONTINUITY AND INNOVATION IN IMPERIAL INSCRIPTIONS¹⁷³

Augustus' *Res Gestae* and the Stelae of the Qin First Emperor Compared

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Having defeated his political rivals in the civil wars which plagued the Late Republic (44-31 BC) and expanded the rule of Rome enormously, Augustus introduced the era known as the Roman *Principate* (i.e. what we call the Roman 'Empire'). The *Res Gestae* is the final account by Augustus of his own achievements, and was one of the documents that was entrusted to the Vestal Virgins before his death.¹⁷⁴ The content of *RG* might have been revised and updated in Augustus' final years, presumably presenting us with a conclusive view of how Augustus perceived the 'empire' of Rome.¹⁷⁵ According to Suetonius, Augustus requested in his own will that his text should be inscribed on two bronze pillars and set up in either side of the entrance of his

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There have been some comparative studies between Augustan Rome and China in Qin/Han Dynasty in the past few decades. *Conceiving the Empire China and Rome Compared* (2008, F.Mutschler and A. Mittag (eds.)), the proceedings of the conference "'Empire' and 'World'" in 2005 at Essen, explores and compares the idea of 'empire' with regard to the Roman and Chinese empires. Martin Kern's 'Announcements from the mountains', mainly introducing the Qin stelae, is especially relevant to this article and is referred to when needed. Christian Witschel's 'The *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* and the Roman Empire' discusses the text of *Res Gestae*, which is also very inspiring. However, since these are two distinct articles, they do not deal with both inscriptions simultaneously. Alexander Jakobson's 'The first emperors: image and memory' in Pines 2014 tries to compare the images of these two emperors, but mainly discusses Augustus rather than the Qin emperor. Zhao Dan Qing's MA thesis 'Foreigners and Propaganda: war and peace in the imperial images of Augustus and Qin Shi Huangdi' compares certain points in both *RG* and the Qin Stelae, mainly to explore how the two emperors in their propaganda were justified as superior rulers over foreigners by portraying themselves as peace-bringers with moral superiority and divine support. Wang Zhongxiao's PhD thesis 'World views and military policies in the early Roman and Western Han empires' also contains a section about the Qin stelae inscriptions, which mainly discusses about the specific world view of Tianxia in the stelae, and how it is possible to be compared in general with the Roman idea of *orbis terrarum* in the *RG*. The focus of this article, however, is different from all the studies mentioned above. By covering some of the details in these texts, it will, on the basis of previous studies, discuss how the idea of 'empire' is conceived and represented by the time of Augustus and Qin emperor.

In this article, I use the edition of *Res Gestae* of Cooley, A. E. (2009), *Res Gestae Divi Augusti: Text, Translation, and Commentary*. Cambridge. For the translation of the Qin stelae, I refer to Kern, M. (2000), *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-Huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation*. New Haven.

¹⁷⁴ There are four documents listed by Suetonius, *Aug.* 101.4: his will, directions for his funeral, an account of what he had accomplished and a summary of the condition of the whole empire.

¹⁷⁵ Ramage, 1987, p.13; Cooley, 2009, p.42; Gagé, 1935, p.22-3; Brunt and Moore, 1967, p.6; Witschel, 2008, p.242.

Mausoleum, which was completed in 28 BC in the Campus Martius.¹⁷⁶ Unfortunately, these bronze pillars might have been melted down afterwards and thus do not survive. For the text of *RG* we can only rely on the three published sources from the province of Galatia in Asia minor, respectively from Ancyra, Pisidian Antioch and Apollonia.¹⁷⁷

In the east, before 221 BC, China had been ruled by the Zhou Dynasty, under which the relationship of the emperor to the regional lords had been more like one of *primus inter pares* (literally ‘the first among equals’) than of supreme ruler.¹⁷⁸ As the centralized power of the Zhou decreased throughout the Spring and Autumn period (770-403 BC) and the Warring States period (402-221 BC), the Qin State, previously only marginal on the western fringes of the Zhou realm, through a series of innovations and reforms, began to consolidate its power and expand its rule eastwards.¹⁷⁹ Finally, after generations of strife, in 221 BC, having conquered all the other Warring States, King Zheng of Qin unified all of China once again under his own rule. Solidifying the new unity with strict legal reforms, he invented and adopted the imperial title of ‘Huangdi’, literally meaning ‘August Thearch’, which continued to be borne by the later rulers for the next two millennia.¹⁸⁰ Two years after the establishment of his rule, he began to tour the newly conquered regions with his court scholars. For ten years, from 219 to 210 BC, he visited numerous mountain ranges in the east and south, on the top of which he erected a series of stele inscriptions, all of which are panegyrics of the Qin unification.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶ Suetonius, *Aug.* 101.4. It is curious that although Strabo (5.3.8) gives a detailed description of the monument, he does not mention the text itself. For the text inscribed on bronze at Rome, see Güven, 1998, pp.31-2; Cooley, 2009, pp.3-4; Brunt and Moore, 1967, p.2.

¹⁷⁷ All three sources are inscriptions. At Ancyra it was upon the temple of Rome and Augustus. The exact place of the inscription at Antioch is not clear, probably on a monumental gateway leading to a temple to Augustus. And the *RG* at Apollonia was inscribed upon a large base supporting five statues of imperial family members. See Cooley, 2009, 6-18. For the Sardis fragment identified in 1929, see Thonemann, 2012, pp.287-8. As it has not been properly published, this version will not be referred to in this study.

¹⁷⁸ From around 770 BC, the rule of the Zhou, also known as the East Zhou, began to wane. The feudal states only paid nominal loyalty to the crown but were virtually individual nation-states that kept their own courts. For further discussion on how to define this period see Bodde, 1986, pp.22-30.

¹⁷⁹ Qin, long lying on the fringes of the civilized central China and inevitably influenced by the barbarian tribes such as Jung and Ti nearby, was also regarded by the contemporaries more as barbarians than as civilized communities, see Bodde, 1986, p.31. One of the most important sources on the rise of the Qin empire is the *Shi Ji*, or *Records of the Grand Historian/Historical Records*, covering the legendary period of Chinese history to around 100 BC, compiled on the basis of texts by Sima Qian (145-89 BC), an official historian of the Han imperial court. In this study, I refer to the English translation of Burton Watson’s ‘The basic annals of the First Emperor of the Qin’ in the *Records*. Translation of this chapter can be seen in Watson, 1993, pp.35-85.

¹⁸⁰ There is a discussion in the *Records* on the adoption of a proper name to the First Emperor (Watson, 1993, p.43). Although the chancellors suggested the title of the Great August, the most exalted one, that had been used by previous rulers, to the emperor, it was the emperor’s own decision to adopt his own title, namely Huangdi, to distinguish himself from his predecessors. The English translation of this title is debated. Watson and Bodde translate it as ‘August Emperor’, Kern as ‘August Thearch’, while some studies about the title keep its Chinese pronunciation as Huang-ti/Huangdi, such as Wechsler, 1985, p.86. In my study, I follow the translation of Kern as ‘August Thearch’.

¹⁸¹ The inscriptions of the stelae, except that of Mt. Yishan, are preserved in the *Records*. Now only part of the Stele of Mt. Tai and Langyai still survives. For a short introduction of the preservation of the texts in later copies, see Li, 1985, pp.247-8. For the translation of the texts, see Kern, 2000, pp.10-49, Bodde, 1989, pp.45-63.

219 BC Stele of Mt. Yishan 峯山, Tai 泰山and Langya 琅琊山

218 BC Stele of Mt. Zhifu 之罘, Dongguan ('Eastern Vista') 东观

215 BC Stele of 'Gate' of Jieshi 碣石

210 BC Stele of Mt. Kuaiji 会稽

To begin with, the authorship and location of the inscriptions are of great significance. The *Res Gestae*, as mentioned already, was composed by Augustus in his final years, as an expansion of the form of the funerary inscriptions commonly inscribed on tombstones at Rome which served to enumerate and honour the achievements of the deceased.¹⁸² The seven stelae inscriptions, on the other hand, were not composed by the Qin emperor himself, but by the imperial scholars whom the Qin had inherited from the old eastern regions of traditional scholarship serving the Zhou dynasty.¹⁸³ Although they also eulogized the exploits of the emperor as Augustus did in the *Res Gestae*, these inscriptions were not narrative reports of the specific achievements of the emperor, but rather adhered to formulaic expressions, most likely drawn from the archival records of the previous dynasty.¹⁸⁴ Thus, given the fact that all these inscriptions were probably based on one standardized proto-text with repetitions and variations, my discussion will not focus on one specific inscription but consider them as a whole. Their differences in terms of authorship reveals the fact that the legitimacy of the Qin dynasty still relied heavily on the influence of prior dynasties.

Although *Res Gestae* was originally erected in Rome, the only copies we have today are all from Galatia in Asia Minor on the eastern frontier of Rome at that time. After the death of King Amyntas in 25 BC, Galatia was subjected to Roman rule, and became a border province next to the allied kingdoms of Pontus and Cappadocia.¹⁸⁵ This is exactly the place where the most complete copy of the *RG*, known as the *Monumentum Ancyranum* (Temple of Roma and Augustus in Ancyra) survives.¹⁸⁶ The temple has both the Latin text inscribed in two parts (six

¹⁸² Brunt and Moore, 1967, pp.2-3; Cooley 2009, p.30, Witschel, 2008, p.243.

¹⁸³ Kern, 2008, pp.220-1.

¹⁸⁴ Kern, 2000, pp.119-139.

¹⁸⁵ Strabo, 12.5.1, 12.6.3. See also Magie, 1950, pp.453-4, Mitchell, 1993, p.61.

¹⁸⁶ This is perhaps the most complete copy of the *Res Gestae*, inscribed on the marble walls of the Temple of Roma and Augustus at Ancyra. Parts of another Greek copy were discovered at Apollonia (the *Monumentum Apolloniense*), and about 270 small fragments of

columns) inside the temple on either side, and a Greek version carved on the external wall, extending over nineteen columns. Despite the lack of firm ancient corroborations, we can on the analogy of practice with other important imperial texts, be fairly confident that the text was disseminated by the Senate to the governors of each province, probably on the proposal of Tiberius, but that it was left to the individual cities to decide how and where to publicize it.¹⁸⁷ Although the main target audience of Augustus must have been the citizens at Rome, the possibility cannot be entirely excluded that he may also have given some thought to the audience beyond Italy and have intended the text to be sent to the provinces, one of which, obviously, was Galatia.¹⁸⁸

On the other hand, all the seven Qin stelae were erected on mountains which were located also in the newly conquered eastern territories of the empire, at the outermost points away from the then capital Hsien-yang which lies in the west.

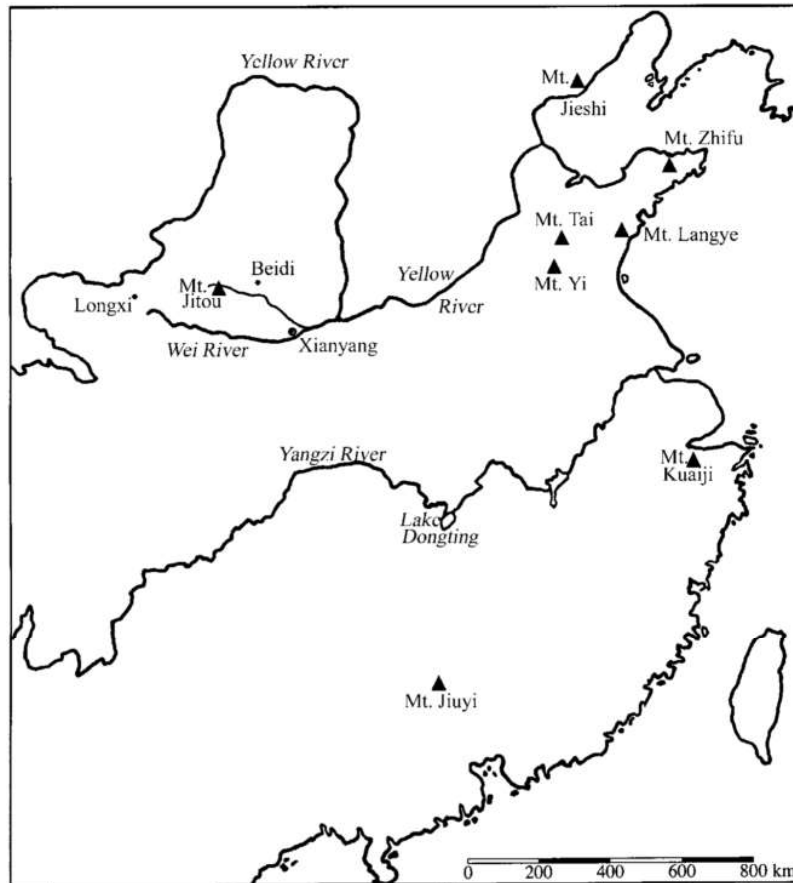


**Map showing the location of Ancyra in the Augustan Rome.
(AWMC: Map 8.2 Expansion of the Empire in the Age of Augustus)**

the Latin version have been found at Antioch (the Monumentum Antiochenum), which are important for completing some of the lacunae in the Latin version from Ancyra.

¹⁸⁷ Cooley, 2009, pp.18-21, Witschel, 2008, pp.255-6.

¹⁸⁸ Cooley, 2009, p.39, Witschel, 2008, pp.244-6.



Map showing the location of the seven inscribed stelae. (Source: Kern, 2008, p.220)

Although the emperor also toured the west, no stone inscriptions have been found there. The seven stelae might thus be taken as a threatening imperial proclamation to the conquered people in the east of its dominion.¹⁸⁹ Not surprisingly, this also reveals the essential logic behind the new imperial geography: the previously discrete spots scattered under the Zhou dynasty are now recognized as *topoi* of specific significance within the order of the now unified empire.¹⁹⁰ It therefore seems that both the Chinese and Roman imperial texts eulogizing the achievements of the newly established emperors were displayed in the distant zones presumably to serve a similar purpose of measuring out the extent of the new empire and of demonstrating its sovereignty over these outermost regions.

¹⁸⁹ Kern, 2000, pp.106-7, Lewis, 1999, p.339.

¹⁹⁰ Kern, 2000, p.125.

All of these texts emphasize the concept of world-wide rule. In the case of *Res Gestae*, Augustus claims that his conquests had made the ‘whole world’ (*orbis terrarum*) subject to ‘the rule of Roman people’ (*RG* 3.1). Similar expressions can be found in the Qin inscriptions where it says that the August Thearch owns the land ‘all under heaven’, or ‘all within the universe’ and ‘within the six combined directions’, which include the four cardinal directions, heaven above and earth below.¹⁹¹ Apart from these formulaic expressions, both the *RG* and the Qin inscriptions also try to present their respective rules as extending to the four extremities of the world. In Augustus’ main record of his conquests in *RG* 26, for example, Roman rule covers the vast land extending to the west end at the Pillars of Hercules, north up to the estuary of Elbe, south down to the Nubian and Arabian towns, bordering with the Ocean for most of the part, almost equivalent to the *orbis terrarum*. Similarly in the inscription of Mt. Langyai, there is a description of the Qin realm referring to the four extremities, as ‘to the west it ranges to the flowing sands, to the south it completely takes in where the doors face north, to the east it enfolds the eastern sea, to the north, it goes beyond Ta-hsia, wherever human traces reach, there is none who does not declare himself subject’.¹⁹²

In contrast to the places enumerated by Augustus in the *RG* which he claims to have conquered, the four extremities listed here in the Qin inscriptions were taken from the stock formula of political language of the traditional classic *Shang-shu*, or the *Book of Documents*, a collection of rhetorical prose attributed to ancient figures.¹⁹³ The chapter ‘Tribute of Yu’ of the ‘Book of Xia’ in *Shang-shu*, probably composed in the fifth to fourth century BC, is a geographical description of the nine regions that were united into a single state by the sage King Yu.¹⁹⁴ The stele inscription about the realm of Qin resembles the description of the realm of King Yu in the Tribute, that can be seen as a precedent for the Qin inscription: while the *Tribute of Yu* says,

‘On the east, reaching to the sea;
on the west, extending to the flowing sands;
to the utmost limits of the north and south;
his fame and influence filled up (all within) the four seas.’

¹⁹¹ Cosmology is one of the key factors in understanding the formation of China’s early empire; as Wang says that ‘cosmology and the unified empire have been seen as the two most enduring structures of Chinese civilization’. According to Wang, while the Four Directions define the political centre, the parallel idea of ‘high-low’ connections is used to ‘indicate the meeting point of Heaven and Earth in this layered universe’. See Wang, 2000, pp.1-22, 46-7.

¹⁹² According to Wang’s theory, the idea of Sifang, or the Four Directions, means more than the extensiveness of the new reign, but rather has a ritual significance. As the Four Directions have the capacity to connect the humans to the divines, they point to the centre, where the ruling power was rooted and monopolized the access to the divine world and knowledge. See Wang, 2000, pp.26-37.

¹⁹³ As one of the earliest historical documents in China, *Shang-shu* covers a wide range of topics and it is generally agreed by the scholars that they were composed in the Western Zhou period.

¹⁹⁴ The chapter ‘Tribute of Yu’, or Yu Gong, is among the New Text documents of *Shang-shu*, which refer to predynastic rulers, or mythical sage-kings. ‘Tribute of Yu’ thus relates the stories of the sage-King Yu (c. 20th BC), the legendary founder of the Xia dynasty.

It is said on the Mt. Langya inscription that:

‘Within the six combined [directions],
This is the land of the August Thearch.
To the west it ranges to the flowing sands,
To the south it completely takes in where the doors face north.
To the east it enfolds the eastern sea,
To the north, it goes beyond Ta-hsia’.¹⁹⁵

Another mythical king Shun, the predecessor of King Yu, is also behind this universal claim. According to *Shang Shu*, Shun had long been venerated as a cosmic ruler who had also measured out the extent of his rule by mounting the mountains in four directions and performing rites on each peaks.¹⁹⁶ Interestingly, this story actually comes from the redacted version of *Shang-shu* in the Qin imperial times, meaning that the alleged ‘traditional’ ritual action of the mythical king was more likely to be an ‘invented tradition’.¹⁹⁷ It might be argued that the Qin inscription is more exaggerated in terms of claiming universal rule by purposely exploiting the traditional language of denoting world-wide power of previous rulers. However, the landmarks used by Augustus to present the extent of his realm, is also inherited from traditional language. Many of the places were traditionally conceived as being at the edges of the inhabited world, such as the Ocean/*Oceanus*, and actually had not been entirely conquered by Rome by the time of Augustus, thus also indicating a touch of exaggeration.¹⁹⁸ Of course, ‘invented tradition’ might not be unfamiliar to Augustus as well, if we consider his religious reform, which was dubiously claimed to be a ‘return to the tradition’.

¹⁹⁵ I do not agree with Wang, 2015 here who argues that the unbounded and open world view in the Tribute of Yu changed in the time of Qin to a different world view of Tianxia representing a ‘relatively closed geopolitical entity’. From the quotation above it is obvious that Qin still inherited (, if not invented, see below) the pre-Qin ideology of universal dominion. See Wang, 2015, pp.44-52.

¹⁹⁶ It is recorded in the ‘Canon of Shun’, that after the King Shun succeeded King Yao, he ‘in the second month of the year he made a tour of inspection eastwards, as far as Dai-zong, where he presented a burnt-offering to Heaven... in the fifth month he made a similar tour southwards, as far as the mountain of the south, where he observed the same ceremonies as at Dai. In the eighth month he made a tour westwards, as far as the mountain of the west, where he did as before. In the eleventh month he made a tour northwards, as far as the mountain of the north, where he observed the same ceremonies as in the west.’

¹⁹⁷ Kern, 2000, p.111.

¹⁹⁸ For example, Augustus claims Nabata, ‘which adjoins Meroe’, to be the southernmost point of the Roman rule (26.5). These two places are traditionally regarded as the edge of the world. According to Strabo 2.5.7, further south was thought to be uninhabitable on account of heat. However, this region was never fully conquered by Rome by the reign of Augustus. Under the Prefect of Egypt, Petronius, the Roman army did advance to the area around Meroe, but it was soon reconquered by the Meroites probably up to Aswan (Shinnie, 1978, p.258). In 20 BC envoys were sent from Meroe to Samos and made a treaty with Augustus, which included some sort of agreement about the Dodecaschoenos, which lay north of Meroe (Strabo, 17.1.53-8).

So, even here we can make a comparison. Neither of these exaggerations are to be taken as mere hyperbolic self-glorification. Traditional language presenting the rule of ancestral or even mythical kings was used both by Augustus and Qin emperor, presumably showing their concerns of legitimacy derived from political lineage, at times even at the expense of creating some ‘traditions’ that were actually without any precedents;¹⁹⁹ on the other hand, the exaggerations also show that they began to see the lands under their rule not merely as separate towns or individual states, but rather as a whole block that corresponds to the whole known world. Relative to this is how they both, as ‘true’ unifiers, claim to have ended the chaos by bringing universal and eternal *pax* to the world which, in turn, justify and legitimize the military conquest by presenting it not as aggressive but defensive and punitive expeditions for the purpose of restoring social order.²⁰⁰ It is fairly certain that neither Augustus nor the Qin First Emperor was the first to claim world-wide rule in their respective historical contexts: for example, before Augustus Pompey was also recognized as world-conquerors, and before the Qin there was the Zhou dynasty which expressed its rule as extending to ‘all under heaven’.²⁰¹ More importantly, however, it was from Augustus and the Qin emperor that new views of their universal rule began to take shape which characterized their regimes more as what is now called ‘empire’, each with their own agendas, but not without similarities.

In the case of *Res Gestae*, the sections which best exemplify Augustus’ attitude towards Roman rule are 26-33. The opening sentence of 26.1 says: ‘I extended the territory of all those provinces of the Roman people which had neighbouring peoples who were not subject to our rule’.²⁰² We can notice here a new focus slightly different from the previous general claim of universal rule: the provinces. Having combined the last sentence of 27, where Augustus claims to have ‘regained all provinces’, we would find a closed circular narrative structure from 26.1 to 27.3. It gives us the impression that all the areas listed in between are within the provincial system. This, however, is only an exaggeration.²⁰³ Augustus here incorporated under ‘provinces’ areas which had not yet come under full Roman control, such as areas between the rivers Rhine and Elbe, Aethiopia and

¹⁹⁹ On the traditional narratives and images of previous kings, such as Romulus, used by Augustus and Augustan authors, see, for example, Scott, 1925, pp.89-91, Starr, 2009, pp.367-9, on a more general discussion, see Galinsky, 1996, pp.93-106; on those by Qin emperor, see discussion above, n.22-4.

²⁰⁰ Aug., *RG* 3.2, 12.2, 13, 25.1, 26.2-3; Mt. Yi: ‘He unified all under heaven under one lineage, warfare will not rise again...the black-haired people live in peace and stability, benefits and blessings are lasting and enduring’, Mt. Tai: ‘after having pacified all under heaven, he has not been remiss in rulership’, Mt. Langyai: ‘the black-haired people are peaceful and tranquil, and do not use weapons and armor’, Dongguan: ‘forever halted were clashes of arms’, Mt. Kuaiji: ‘calm and peaceful, honest and hard-working, there is none who does not obey orders’. Pines also mentions how the theme of universal peace permeates the inscriptions, see Pines, 2014, pp.265-7. About how the idea of ‘peace’ works in the imperial context, see Cornwell, 2017, pp.1-9.

²⁰¹ About the world conquest of Pompey, see Cic. *Pro Lege Manilia*, 11.31, 17.53, 19.57, *Pro Balbo* 6.16, Vell.Pat., 2.31.1, 2.31.3, 2.32.4, 2.53.3, 2.55.3. About the discussion of the development of the idea of ‘All under Heaven’/Tianxia and relative terms used before Qin, see Pines, 2002, 101-116, Wang, 2015, pp. 28-46.

²⁰² Aug., *RG* 26.1: omnium provinciarum populi Romani, quibus finitimae fuerunt gentes quae non parerent imperio nostro, fines auxi.

²⁰³ Cooley, 2009, 219-220.

Arabia.²⁰⁴ Moreover, Augustus' claims to universal rule even go beyond the list in 26-27 of territories supposedly under direct Roman rule and continue at 29-33 by including some 'periphery' areas that were definitely not ruled, or even fully conquered by Rome, such as Armenia, Parthia and India.²⁰⁵ It is noticeable that these places are presented as being under Roman rule either by military threat, or by Roman friendship appealed for by their own initiative. Therefore, Augustus' exaggeration thus seems to indicate that, if there was a 'strong' view of what Roman rule meant, that would be the Roman provinces.²⁰⁶ There is also a relatively 'weak' view of Roman rule, which includes the periphery maintained by threats and intervention, or even more weakly by 'friendship', indicating various levels of Roman rule and influence over the remote lands.²⁰⁷ It can thus be viewed as a concentric circle; that is, that from the core of the 'provinces' to the periphery of 'friendly states', Roman rule gradually gets weaker.

²⁰⁴ For example, Augustus claims in 26.5 that his army marched so far in Arabia as reaching 'the territory of the Sabaei to the town of Mariba' (supposedly the southern end of Roman rule and that of the earth), but according to Strabo, this was merely a failed expedition. The siege of Mariba lasted for only six days that Aelius Gallus, the prefect of Egypt, was forced to retreated probably because of a lack of water. See Strabo, 16.4.23-4.

²⁰⁵ Augustus' claims about Roman power over Parthia is especially striking. There are various kinds of interaction mentioned in the *RG* between Augustus and Parthia, the latter of which is mostly presented as taking the initiative in seeking peace and 'friendship' with Rome through envoys, with almost no mention of military force or political intervention. See Aug., *RG* 29.1, 32.1, 32.2, 33.

²⁰⁶ About how the idea of 'provinciae' worked as the central element in the understanding of Roman empire for the Augustan authors, see Richardson, 2008, pp.117-145.

²⁰⁷ There have been sufficient discussions among scholars about (the claim of) Roman rule or influence over the peripheral and remote areas in the form of indirect control such as taking hostages and establishing 'friendship'. See, for example, Sherwin-White, 1984, pp.322-8, Campbell, 1993, pp.213-40, Rose 2005, pp.21-67 dealing with Roman contact with Parthia and Armenia; Thorley, 1969, pp.219-23, Sidebotham, 1986, p.601 that with India and Arabia. About general discussions of Roman policy towards client kingdoms, see Badian, 1958, Millar, 1982, 1988, Braund, 1984, Mattern, 1999, Sidebottom, 2007. About Roman diplomatic success maintained specifically by 'friendship', see Burton, 2011, by taking hostages, see Allen, 2006.

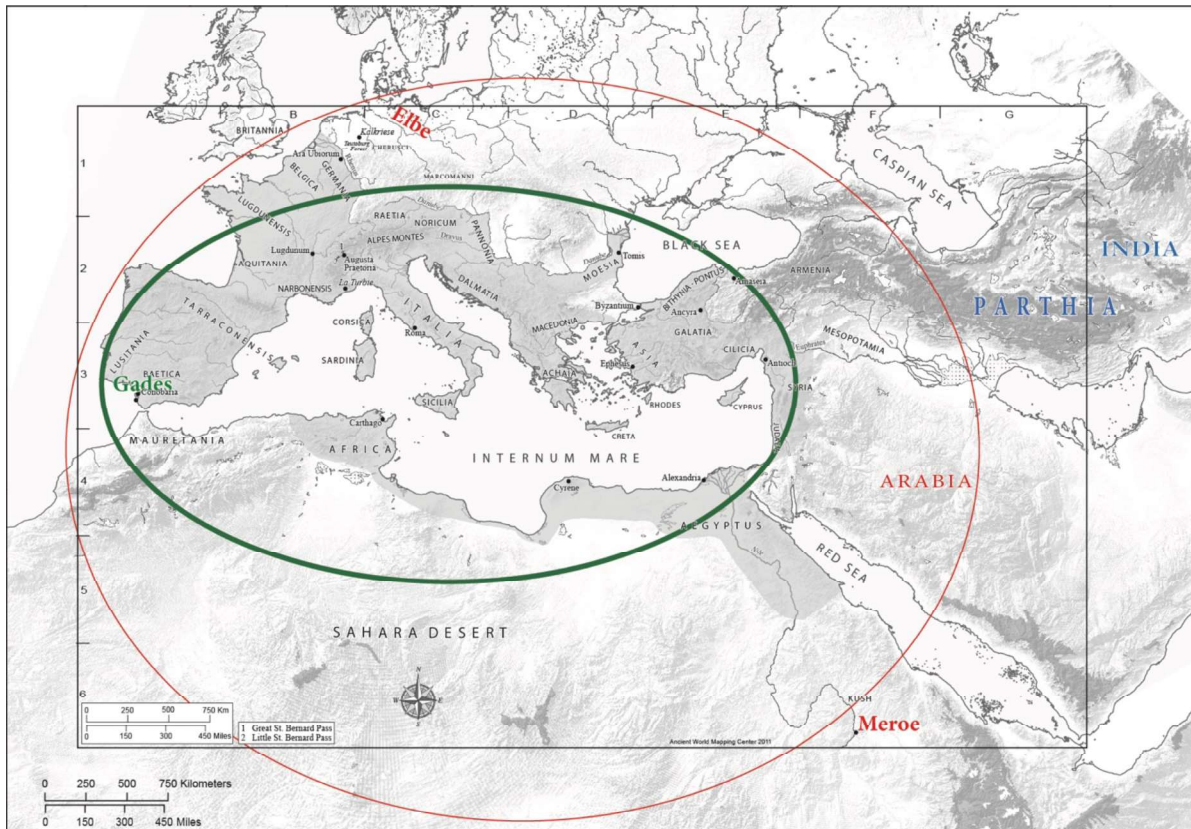


Diagram showing the concentric-circle rule of Augustan Rome
(AWMC: Map 8.2 Expansion of the Empire in the Age of Augustus, circles are drawn by the author)

In the case of the Qin empire, the idea of organizing the rule of ‘all-under-heaven’ in the manner of a concentric circle is more traditional than innovative.²⁰⁸ In the ‘Tribute of Yu’, the realm of King Yu had already been described as being divided into ‘five concentric domains’ as belonging to one coherent rule. From the royal capital to the wild there are five concentric domains of five hundred li (miles) each, including the Royal Domain in the centre, then Domain of the nobles, Peace-securing domain, Domain of Restraint, and Barren Domain which are mostly occupied by barbarian tribes. Curiously, however, although neither the ideas of ‘all under heaven’ nor concentric rule were new to the Qin, the inscription puts more emphasis on the supreme power of the emperor, whose influence is more or less equally cast on people ‘both near and remote’, instead of presenting concentric rule. It might reveal that the rule of the Qin was not only ‘restoring’ the previous world order, but rather ‘starting’ a new era that can be more fairly claimed to be a unified universal rule, for which the key factors are the new role of the emperor, or August

²⁰⁸ About the general introduction on the idea of concentric-circle identity in Chinese culture, see Guo and Chen, 2009, pp.1-16.

Thearch, as well as the new uniform system of administration established with the emperor as its centre.²⁰⁹ It claims that:

‘His precepts and principles reach all around, the distant and near are completely well-ordered, and all receive his sage will’ [Mt. Tai]

‘Distant and near, down to regions remote and obscure, they are single-minded in their efforts, reverential and respectful’ [Mt. Langyai]

‘The black-haired people are transformed and civilized, distant and near share unified measures’ [Dongguan].

Therefore, we can see that what is more underlined in justifying the unification of the universal rule is not the ruling system as in *RG*, but rather the personal power of the Qin emperor, to whose will people from the core to the remote regions are all claimed to be ‘single-mindedly’ submissive.

To conclude, we can see that the *Res Gestae* of Augustus and the Qin inscriptions do have many elements in common, especially in terms of their claims of universal rule. Although both ‘empires’ are recognised as unprecedented and influential in the west and east respectively, the texts reveal that they might have very different ideas on the essence of what is called by us an ‘empire’.²¹⁰ On one hand, the *RG* reveals that in Augustan Rome, a new vision of perceiving Roman influence in a concentric-circle scheme was beginning to take shape, making it a more coherent political entity than earlier periods of the Roman Republic which is the main feature of the new ‘empire’; while on the other hand, the Qin inscriptions imply that it is the role of emperor, or August Thearch, that defines the innovative nature of the new rule and justifies it as what is now called an ‘empire’. What we can see from these texts, however, is how they present and prioritize their concerns about the essentially new features of their rules, which is helpful to understand the ancient equivalent ideas of ‘empire’, however different they might be in the west and east.

²⁰⁹ The significance of the First Emperor’s view of rulership and his self-presentation is sufficiently discussed by Pines, who argues that ‘the notion of emperorship established by the First Emperor, and particularly the concept of the ruler as a reigning sage, became his major legacy for the Han and subsequent dynasties’. See Pines, 2014, pp.236-8, as well as pp.258-279.

²¹⁰ Mutschler and Mittag, 2008, p.xiv. To be more specific, Augustus was ‘princeps’ in ancient Rome rather than ‘emperor’, but in the context of comparing him with Qin emperor, Augustus is often called the ‘the first Roman emperor’. See, for example, Witschel, 2008, p.241. On the other hand, Qin emperor, although called ‘August Thearch’ in this paper, is more frequently referred to as ‘Qin First Emperor’. See Kern, 2008, p.217.

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