THE GREEK TRANSLATION OF AUGUSTUS’
RES GESTAE

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Augustus liked to view the political institution with which he replaced the old Roman Republic as in fact a restoration of that Republic, and in writing his Res Gestae he stressed this republican view of the nature of his government. Everywhere in it he insisted on the forms and distinctions of the old Republic. Further, he emphasized the fact that it was the Republic and people of Rome that profited by his deeds, and he failed to mention any service to the provinces of the Empire. In the words of one recent scholar: “Jamais oeuvre ne fut de destination plus romaine . . . qu’est-ce qu’un provincial y pouvait bien lire qui le touchât directement? Lorsqu’Auguste y parle des provinces, c’est seulement pour se vanter de les avoir conquises, pacifiées, ou recouvrées, c’est-à-dire, ajoutées ou rendues à l’empire du peuple romain.” The Roman emperor kept the distinction clearly defined between the Roman Republic on the one hand, and the empire, the possession of the Republic on the other; and he wished to appear only as the champion of the former.

In the years after the death of the divine Augustus, however, a different concept and a different practice—the concept partly molding and partly molded by the practice, and the practice partly molding and partly molded by the concept—developed in the Roman world, finding its fullest expression in the teachings of the Stoic and Cynic philosophers, and its concrete manifestation in the persons and rule of the “good emperors” of the second century. Many factors, of course, economic, political, religious, psychological, and physical, were involved in this change. Many of these factors were beyond the knowledge or power of the men

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2 Gagé, op. cit., 23–24.

3 See Michael Grant, The Augustan ‘Constitution’ in “Greece and Rome” XVIII (October, 1949), 97–112, especially 102 seq. for discussion and some explanation of the importance attached to his championship of the Republic by Augustus and his contemporaries.

4 See note 17.

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involved, and so beyond their control, but in some small part, at least, the new concept and practice evolved as they did through the conscious effort of Roman officials. In the Greek translation of the *Res Gestae*, inscribed together with the Latin on the walls of the Augustan temple at Ancyra in Galatia, and probably in many other places throughout the eastern empire, there is evidence of the existence of such conscious effort, and some illustration of the manner and direction it took. For in the translation there is apparent, although hitherto not noted, an imperial attitude or point of view that is quite out of keeping with the republicanism of the original. The translator ignored or slurred over the Republican and Roman emphasis of Augustus, and stressed, on the contrary, the imperial aspects of his deeds. This attitude is apparent in the generalization of references to particular historical events and their results, and in the vocabulary and phraseology of the Greek.

The superscription of the Latin text reads as follows: "Rerum gestarum divi Augusti, quibus orbem terrarum imperio populi Romani subiecit, et impensarum quas in rem publicam populumque Romanum fecit, incisorum in duabus aheneis pilis, quae sunt Romae positae, exemplar subiectum." The Greek reads simply: Μεθηρμηνευμέναι ὑπεγράφησαν πράξεις τὲ καὶ δωρεὰς Σεβαστοῦ θεοῦ ἀσ ἀπέλευθεν ἐπὶ Ῥώμης ἐνκεχαραγμέναι χαλκαῖς στῆλαι δυοῖν. The two qualifying clauses in the Latin text, "by which he subjected the whole world to the empire of the Roman people" and, "which he expended on the people and Republic of Rome," bring out the fact that the deeds and expenditures of Augustus were to the advantage of the people and Republic of Rome. These two clauses are entirely omitted in the translation. The effect of this omission is twofold. The services described in the Latin as of value to Roman and the Romans are represented in the Greek as general services, and the distinction made in the Latin between a ruling Romen and the Romans are represented in the Greek as general Greek. Thus at the outset there is a clear example of the difference in spirit between the two copies.

In paragraph 1, Augustus begins the account of his deeds with mention of his action as a youth of nineteen in raising an army and forcing Antony to leave Rome (November 44 B.C.), thereby giving a measure of freedom to the Senate which had been dominated by Antony and his party since the assassination of Caesar. The Latin reads: "... exercitum privato consilio et privata impensa comparavi, per quem rem publicam a dominatione fac-

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6 All quotations from the *Res Gestae* follow the text of Gagé, *op. cit.*, and the references are to that text by paragraph and sentence.
tionis oppressam in libertatem vindicavi." It is the second clause here is not translated very precisely in Greek. Instead we have the words, "Τα κουνα πράγματα αυτοπλη των συνομοσαμενων δισμα σε ελευθεροπολη." Τα κουνα πράγματα although it might pass as a translation of the Latin "res publica" has a much more generalized connotation than the Latin phrase. A more accurate translation would have been the phrase τα δεμοσια πράγματα, which is used by the translator twice in other sentences of this same paragraph, or δημοκρατία, used by Appian and other Greek writers, both of which have the republican connotations of the Latin res publica.

Then the Greek words των συνομοσαμενων are no translation of the Latin factio. The latter was used to denote a political clique, and in this instance refers to the clique headed by Antony, the power of which was broken by Augustus. The ordinary Greek translation of this word was στάσις. The words used here των συνομοσαμενων, meant "the conspirators." They were used in Greek to refer to the party of the assassins who murdered Caesar. They are so used for example, by Cassius Dio in his discussion of these events. This is probably their meaning here. Thus,

6 See Weber, op. cit., 140-142; Gage, op. cit., 73. In the next line of this same paragraph (Res Gestae 1, 2) Augustus says that imperium and other honors were granted to him by the Senate in return for this restoration of the Republic to liberty. It was Cicero in his fifth Philippic, delivered before the Senate on January 1, 43 B.C. (some days after Antony's departure), who proposed to that body that imperium be awarded to Augustus. In making the proposal (which was passed by the Senate immediately—see the Fasti of Augustus, Gage, op. cit., 163) he stated specifically that it was as a reward for Augustus' services against Antony in the previous two months that imperium was to be granted. Philippics V, 16, 42-45; "nullum est consilium publicum, nulla libertas ... hic (Augustus) ex Antonii amicis, sed amicorum libertatis, contra Antonium confectum exercitum; ... huius praesidio Antonii dominatus oppressus est. Demus igitur imperium Caesaris !" Cf. Philippics, III 4-10; "qua peste (Antony) privato consilio rem publicam ... Caesar liberavit ..." Velleius, II, 60-61; "Torpebat oppressa dominatione Antonii civitas; ... cum C. Caesar XVIII annum ingressus ... privato consilio malorem senatu pro re publica animum habuit ..." mois cum Antonius occurrisset exercitul ... eum (Augustus) senatus honoratum ..."

7 For the exact meaning of factio, see Lily Ross Taylor, "Party Politics in the Age of Caesar" (Berkley, Calif., 1949), 9 seg.

8 Dio, 46, 47, 3: των ου κατερρημων Καλαρος γενομενων και εν ευνοημενοι πολεμοιοι ... " Cf. also Appian's phrase in reporting the words of one of the assassins who at the time of Caesar's murder exhorted the people to remember (B.C. II, 17, 119): "και Βροευς του παλαι και του τοσο ευνοημουσων." Cf. further for the meaning of the word, Plutarch, Sertorius, 27, 4: "των ου κατερρημων ευνοημοποιων." It has been argued by Von Premerstein (Abhandlungen Bayerischen Akademie, No. 15 for 1917, pp. 26 seg.—"Wenden und Wesen des Prinzipat") that the words των ευνοημοποιων were meant by the translator to refer to the factio of Antony. Von Premerstein based this on passages in Appian (B.C. III, 46 and 51) and in Cassius Dio (XLV 13, 5) describing how many of the Roman senators joined with the army in taking the official oath of allegiance to Antony as head of the state in 44 B.C. This interpretation of ευνοημοποιων is not possible for two reasons: 1. The factio of Antony was the small group of politicians closely allied with him to control the state (see note 7 above) and not the great mass of thousands of Romans who owed and swore allegiance to him as an officer of the Roman Republic. Would we speak of Americans who had taken an oath of allegiance to the President of the United States as "conspirators"? 2. The senators who had taken this oath of allegiance were the very ones who were freed from the domination of Antony and his factio, as is clear
where Augustus wrote, “I brought freedom to the republic, which had been oppressed by the domination of a political clique” (meaning Antony and his followers), the translator wrote, “I freed society from the slavery of the conspirators” (meaning the assassins of Caesar and their followers).

Why? The answer, I think, is this. The action of the young Augustus in expelling Antony from Rome and the resultant freedom of the Senate and Republic of Rome from his control could be and were interpreted as services of value to Romans and to the Roman Republic. That appears clearly in the works of Cicero and Velleius, who speaks of it in almost the same words that Augustus used here. On the other hand, even if known to the ordinary provincial of Asia Minor at the time of Augustus’ death, this deed would not have appeared to him as a very great service. For some time before the battle of Philippi, however, Brutus and Cassius, leaders of the party of assassins, had overrun Asia Minor, besieged cities there, exacted large sums of money from the whole province. Accordingly the victory of Augustus over the conspirators in that battle might well appear to the provincials as liberation and a service worthy of record. Thus the Latin copy notes a service of particular benefit to Rome and the Republic, whereas the Greek records instead a service to the empire.

In paragraph 25 Augustus wrote: “Mare pacavi a praedonibus. Eo bello servorum qui fugerant a dominis suis et arma contra rem publicam ceperant, triginta fere millia capta dominis ad supplicium sumendum tradidi.” The Greek version of this reads: Θάλασσαν πειρατευομένην ὑπὸ ἀποστατῶν δοῦλων εἰρήνευσα εἰς δὲ τρεῖς τῶν μυμφιάδων τοῖς δεσπόταις εἰς κόλασιν παρέδωκα. The Latin sentences refer, as the editors point out, to the war carried on by Augustus against Sextus Pompey (39–36 B.C.), who had established himself in Sicily and was preying on Roman commerce with a force of escaped slaves and pirates. In the Latin copy Augustus brings out the fact that a particular war (eo bello) is referred to, and one which was fought against men who had taken up arms against the Roman Republic. “Er gibt diesem Krieg seinen eigenen Sinn . . . Die Befriedung des Meers von der Seeraüberplage, die Rettung Roms, Italians, der res publica aus ihren Nötten, die Wahrung der Gesetze, der sozialen Ordnun-

from the second passage of Appian (B.C. III, 58) cited above. They were precisely the representatives of the constitutional Republic to whom Augustus restored independence from Antony. In other words they were not the factio but the victims of the factio.

10 See citations in note 6 above.
11 See Appian, IV, 8, 62; 8, 64; 9, 73; 9, 74; 10, 80–81. Laodicea, Tarsus, Rhodes, Xanthus and Peters were captured and forced to pay great sums of money. Besides this, ten years tribute was exacted from the whole province.
gen Roms, die Widerherstellung seiner Ruhe, sind notwendig, erweisen den Krieg als gerecht, den Sieger als den legitimen Hüter des *populus Romanus* . . .”

The Greek copy, however, by omitting all specific references to a war and to the Republic, records, instead of a victory which was specifically to the advantage of Rome and the Romans, only the general act which was of service to the whole empire, clearing the sea of pirates. Here again, then, as in the superscription and in paragraph 1, the Greek version neglects the Augustan emphasis on the fact that his deeds were services to the Republic and people of Rome, and records them instead as services of general imperial value.

The Greek translation of the Latin phrase *res publica* are further evidence of the difference in attitude between Augustus and the translator. This phrase occurs eight times in the Latin copy. It is only precisely and definitely translated into Greek three times. Two of these instances occur in paragraph 1 and have to do with Augustus’ official appointment as dictator and triumvir, the third is in paragraph 7 and likewise deals with Augustus’ triumvirate. In each of these three cases *res publica* is well translated by δημόσια πράγματα. In a fourth instance in paragraph 1, which deals with the action of Augustus in liberating the Republic from the domination of Antony, the phrase is translated by τὰ κοινὰ πράγματα. The generalizing significance of this translation has already been noted (p. 221). The fifth occurrence of the words is in paragraph 2, which refers to the war waged by the conspirators against the Republic. The Latin reads: “Et postea bellum inferentis rei publicae vici bis acie.” The Greek reads: “καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα αὐτῶν πόλεμον ἐπιφέροντα τῇ πατρίδι διὰ ἐνέκησα παρατάξει.” The Greek substitutes the “fatherland” for the “republic” and thus, while not changing the facts of the case, changes the point of view. Augustus makes the point here, as he did in recording his war with Sextus Pompey, that the attack of his opponents was directed against the Roman Republic. He thus paints himself as her champion, her guardian against aggression, the picture of himself which would be important in the eyes of Romans. The Greek text, on the other hand, brings out the point that the conspirators were attacking not the Republic, but their fatherland and thus represents Augustus as the victorious opponent of traitors, a role which would enhance his prestige throughout the empire. In the superscription, in paragraph 25, referring to the war with Sextus Pompey, and in paragraph 34, the words *res publica* are omitted entirely. The omission in each case has the same effect, i.e., to represent an action of Augustus

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as affecting the empire in general, instead of the Roman Republic alone.

Other evidence of the translator's general imperial point of view as contrasted with the strictly Roman attitude of Augustus is found in his treatment of the Latin words, externas and universum. In paragraph 3, Augustus wrote, "Externas gentes ... conservare quam excidere malui." The translator generalized the clause by rendering it, "Τὰ ἔθνη ... ἐσωτερικῶς μᾶλλον ἡ ἔκκοψα," omitting the word for foreign in Greek although he had just used it, ἔκκοψα, a few lines above to describe wars which would have been foreign from the point of view of the empire as well as of Rome.

In paragraph 5, Augustus, discussing a food crisis in Rome, writes of freeing "populum universum" the whole people, from fear and danger by his administration of the grain supply. Of course Augustus' words are true of the populum Romanum, but from the viewpoint of the provincial, the use of universum here is nonsense, and the translator omits it. In paragraph 34 also, where Augustus writes of the mass personal oath of allegiance to himself sworn by the citizen population of Italy and the West, he uses the phrase "per consensus universorum." Again "universorum" might be permissible exaggeration here if one were thinking only in terms of Romans, but would be very untrue as viewed by the provincial of Asia Minor. The translator renders the phrase "κατὰ τὰς εὐχὰς τῶν ἐμῶν πολεμῶν," leaving out any reference to "universorum."

Other traces of this difference in attitude may be noted in the phraseology and vocabulary of the Greek translation. In his writing Augustus, "soucieux du mot précis et volontiers technique, surtout quand il s'agit du vocabulaire politique," was particularly careful to observe the political distinctions of the Roman Republic. The translator was not so careful. In paragraph 1, Augustus emphasized that he had raised the army with which he freed the Republic privato consilio et privata impensa, i.e., as a private citizen without magisterial imperium. The translator ignored the words privato ... privata and rendered the phrase simply ἐμὴ γνώμη καὶ ἐμοῖς ἀναλώματι, although as appears in paragraph 21, he did know the Greek word ἰδιωτικός which would have translated privatus.

Again, he translated municipium, which had a technical meaning in Latin, by the unqualified Greek word πόλις, instead of

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13 Gagé, op. cit., 38.
14 Weber, op. cit., 144, notes this change from the legal to the personal sphere. He says, "Das zweimalige 'privato'-'privata' überführt er aus der Rechtssphäre in die persönliche (μη-μη)."
using the Greek μουνίκατων, which was the technical equivalent of the Latin word,\(^{15}\) and in so doing puts municipia on the same level as the other communities of the Empire. Also the three Latin terms, populus (Romanus), plebs (Romana), and civitas (Romana), each of which has a distinct and different political meaning in the Latin copy are all consistently translated by the same Greek expression, ὁ δήμος τῶν Ῥωμαιῶν, without qualification.\(^{16}\) In this case, where Augustus distinguished between different divisions of the republic, the translator puts them all in the same category as “the state,” the δήμος. That he did this intentionally, and that his failure to distinguish between them was not due to the paucity of his vocabulary or to ignorance of the technical distinctions in the Latin words is shown by the fact that he did know a different and more exact Greek word for each of the Latin words. This appears in his use of ὀχλοῦ to translate plebs urbana in paragraph 15 where he wishes to distinguish plebs urbana from the plebs Romana as a whole, and in his use of πόλις as a translation of civitas in paragraph 24, where it is not a question of the Roman civitas.

Again, to his translation of the phrase corona civica (par. 34) the translator added the qualifying phrase ὁ διδύμων ἐπὶ σωτηρία τῶν πολεοτῶν, in Greek to bring out the technical connotation of the Latin, where the connotation puts Augustus in a flattering light even from the imperial point of view. Also his use of θυμι instead of δήμος to translate populi in paragraph 26, where it is a question of non-Roman and semi-civilized peoples, shows that he appreciated the technical connotations of words and could make distinctions in Greek when he wanted to do so. Thus, often where Augustus preserved republican forms and distinctions in his language the translator seems intentionally to have ignored them.

Further evidence of a similar nature is found in the translations of the Latin phrase imperium populi Romani, the empire of the Roman people. This phrase occurs six times in the Latin text. The first time it occurs in the superscription and is completely omitted in the Greek version as noted above (p. 220). The second occurrence of the words is in paragraph 13: “... cum per totum imperium populi Romani terra marique esset parta victoriis pax ...” The Greek simplifies this as follows:

“... εἰρήνευμένης τῆς ἀπὸ Ῥωμαιὸς πάσης γῆς τε καὶ βαλάσσης ...” Note that the Greek again omits the phrase imperium populi Romani, sub-

\(^{15}\) Res Gestae, 3, 3; 16, 1; 16, 2; 21, 3. Cf. πόλις for oppidum—26, 5.

\(^{16}\) Populus—Res Gestae, 5, 1; 14, 1; passim. Plebs—15, 1; 15, 4; App. I. Civitas—5, 2.
stituting ἰπδὸ Ρωμαίους, and also omits reference to the victories by which peace had been gained. The omission here as in the superscription has a double effect. The contrast between the ruling Roman Republic and the subject empire is considerably softened, and again a republican form preserved by Augustus has been ignored by the translator. The same effect is noted in other translations of this phrase in paragraphs 26, 27, 30 where imperium is translated in each case by the Greek word ἰγεμονία, a weak term for imperium and one which suggests the leadership of Rome, not the imperial possession of Rome. The Greek word κυρια, which was in the translator’s vocabulary (see par. 34) would have been a more accurate translation.

At this point it is possible to trace a pattern in the work of the translator. Where Augustus was careful to point up the value of his services to the Roman Republic, or where he preserved republican forms and precise distinctions in his language, the translator either changed, neglected or obscured the Augustan emphasis, giving a general and imperial application to what Augustus had given a parochial, Roman and republican stress. By these changes he produced a new and non-Augustan picture of the emperor and the empire. By his failure to translate the Latin phrase res publica and certain other phrases in the superscription and in paragraphs 1 and 25, the translator pictured Augustus as the benefactor of the whole empire, not of the Roman Republic alone. By his refusal to use the word universum of Romans alone, or the word externas of non-Roman peoples within the empire, or to translate the technical meaning of municipium, and by his translations of imperium as leadership, he represented the Empire as a group of communities and peoples without distinction under the leadership of Rome. This picture of a universal state of similar communities under Roman hegemony rather than a diverse group of Roman republican units on the one hand, and subject peoples on the other, is strengthened by his failure to convey in Greek the political distinctions involved in the Latin words populus, plebs, civitas, and privatus.

These divergences noted in the Greek are all the more remarkable in view of the high fidelity of the Greek to the Latin text in general throughout the document. Weber (op. cit. 224) concludes his comprehensive comparison of the two copies thus, “Oft genug wurde beobachtet, dass dieser Mann (the translator) mit seltener, fast peinlicher Treue dem Werk des Agustus, seinen Teilen wie dem Ganzen, sich hingegeben hat.” Accordingly one must conclude that the examples cited are not the result of care-
lessness or negligence but show a definite intentional difference in the viewpoint of Augustus and the translator. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind when considering the question fully that for the ordinary Greek-speaking provincial the Greek copy of the Res Gestae was the only copy. The picture of Augustus and Augustan deeds in it is the one he would take away with him. Quite obviously, then, the translator wanted to convey to the provincials a different picture from the one Augustus had painted of himself. Augustus wanted to appear as the champion of the Roman Republic, to impress Romans. It was their good opinion he sought, not that of the provincials. The translator was evidently more concerned to impress the provincials; it was their good opinion he considered important.

This desire for the emotional loyalty and support of the non-Roman inhabitants of the Empire is significant of a change in the attitude of Roman rulers which was more and more to be reflected in their administration of imperial affairs. It is also significant of the actual political conditions that now prevailed in the Roman state. The Republic was dead. The technical distinctions of its political vocabulary could be ignored by the translator of the Res Gestae because they were practically speaking meaningless. The institutions for which they stood no longer had any real validity, and were being replaced by others. From the evidence of the Greek translation it appears that after Augustus' death Roman officialdom recognized the death of the Republic, in a way he had not, and considered it important to gain the allegiance and moral support of the whole empire, to weld its inhabitants together around the figure of the emperor as the benefactor of all alike. The Princeps was no longer to be the chief citizen and benefactor of a Roman Republic ruling a diverse group of foreign conquered states, as Augustus had pictured himself, but the chief citizen and benefactor of a universal state, as he is pictured by the translator.

The chief elements in this latter picture bring it close to the later Stoic-Cynic concept of the empire and the emperor.17 For the philosophers, the Roman Empire is one universal state (μία πόλις πᾶσα ἡ οἰκουμένη); in this state there are no "foreigners"; and at its head is a leader (γεμόων) and benefactor (εὐεργέτης) of all. Compare with these points the translator's refusal to use the word "foreigners" of inhabitants of the Empire (p. 224), his refusal to distinguish different classes of communities (p. 224), his designation of the Empire as a leadership (γεμόωνα), and his

17 For a good discussion of this concept see M. Rostovtzeff, "Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire" (Oxford, 1928), 127-128, and 115.
picture of Augustus as benefactor of the whole Empire (pp. 220–225). The existence of the Greek translation of the *Res Gestae* as a widespread and permanent document of propaganda must have made a material, if silent and unconscious, contribution to developing and fixing the *Stoic–Cynic* concept in the minds of the provincials in the eastern half of the Empire.  

The identity of the translator, whether Roman or Greek, official or lay, has not been considered in this paper. On the basis of currently available evidence it is insoluble, and for the purposes of the argument here it is enough to note that whoever the translator was, his work was certainly inscribed on the walls of Augustus' temple with knowledge and approval of Roman officials.