

# Image of augustus as potrayed in res gestae history essay



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Augustus who was born Gaius Octavius and he is viewed as the first emperor of Rome. He was born on 23 September 63 BC and lost his father at a tender age of four years. Nevertheless his reign in Rome transformed the Roman republic into an effective monarchy characterized by serenity and stability, synonymous to his name ' Augustus' that means ' lofty' or ' serene'. He took the name Augustus in 27 BC when he founded the principate, which is the system of monarchy headed by an emperor holding power for his life and his powers were based on constitutional forms.[1] Thus Augustus was one of the most influential leader in the history of Rome as he pioneered significant legal, political and military reforms in the Roman republic. Augustus is credited for unifying Rome and producing a cohesive society that influenced every single society that followed.

The image of Augustus as potrayed in Res Gestae

Res Gestae Divi Augusti is a Latin statement meaning ' the deeds of the Divine Augustus' which is a first- person account of the first Roman Emperor on his life, personal achievements and accomplishments. Eck, Werner et. al claims that these accomplishments were made to the Roman people from his own funds and as Augustus directed in the text, Res Gestae had been engraved on two bronze pillars and then placed in front of his mausoleum. [2] This account is a self-portrait of Augustus as he wished to be remembered by the Romans and it is criticized for dwelling so much on the personal achievements, consequently abandoning the weaknesses or flaws he had either in his personal life and political career. In his text, Res Gestae, he described his entry into the political arena or stage in Rome as stemming

from his own initiatives and the gifts to the Roman people as resulting from his own expenses or funds.[3]

Augustus wrote this text with an intention of potraying the importance of his deeds to the Romans and that he merited recognition for his accomplishments. Hence even after his death, the text was distributed to various provinces in Rome and consequently he received considerable glorification as he wished. Eck, Werner et. al argue that the text is not objective since it offers a very personal view point of the author capturing only matters relating to himself; the awards and honors he received for his achievements from the people and the senate.[4] Nonetheless, Augustus is credited for the peace and stability that prevailed in Rome during his long reign. He raised an army at age 19 that brought autonomy to the republic of Rome after numerous triumphs in battles. In addition, Augustus records that he brought peace to Spain and Gaul through expanding the territories of the Roman Empire. He was also a benevolent individual who donated grains and money whenever the taxes were deficient. Augustus was also involved in reconstruction and social reform which led to Rome being transformed with impressive new buildings and his image promoted in his empire by means of statues and coins.[5]

Image of Augustus as potrayed in Suetonius' Life of Augustus

Suetonius was among the historians that wrote on the life of Augustus. He worked as a secretary for Emperor Hadrian in the second century AD and wrote about the first twelve leaders who took the name Caesar. Being a secretary to Hadrian, Suetonius had access to all forms of records kept in the

imperial archives at the time. Thus he wrote widely on the life of Augustus including his political career, personal and social life. Suetonius describes the family of Augustus and more specifically his father, Gaius Octavius who was a man of wealth and repute which led him to readily attain high positions and filled them with distinction.[6] Augustus as displayed by Suetonius was involved in various expeditions and civil wars in Spain which he triumphed. This account of his life, though not in a chronological order depicts that Augustus experienced some defeats in wars especially those in Germany and those that he won, some of them he was not present but his generals fought on his behalf. Thus Suetonius paints a well-rounded image of Augustus that captures both the strengths and the flaws or weaknesses that he had as a human being.

In his personal life, the account shows that Augustus had been charged with adultery involving the wife of an ex-consul who was later divorced by the husband. Nevertheless, he was a likeable individual who organized dinner parties, festivals and holidays. Suetonius describes him as a handsome and graceful person though he had scars on his body and suffered from dangerous diseases in the course of his life.

In comparison, the two texts portray a positive image of Augustus who is considered to be the first emperor of Rome. They display his involvement in civic wars and expeditions that expanded the Roman territory as well as contributing immensely to peace and stability of the Roman Empire. They also describe him as a likeable person and a handsome in his youthful years. This led to his deification by the Roman people, a recognition he intended to have when he wrote *Res Gestae*. In the *Res Gestae*, Augustus who refers to <https://assignbuster.com/image-of-augustus-as-portrayed-in-res-gestae-history-essay/>

himself in the first person, created an independent type of self-depiction that had not existed before. None of his successors is known to have written anything similar to it.[7]

The two texts are also contradicting or rather controversial since Res Gestae presents the image of Augustus in an idealized manner where he concentrates on his strengths during his long reign in Rome that contributed to the empire's tranquility. At the age of 75 years, Augustus was given the title of 'father of my country' stemming from his contributions to promoting the nation's esteem. Thus the history of Augustus reign period as seen through his eyes is one-sided; many events are placed in a false light, and nowhere does he mention his enemies or opponents by name.[8]

Thus the text depicts a flawless image of Augustus while Suetonius is quick to capture the two sides of the coin; both the dark and bright side of the life of Augustus. Though in the Res Gestae, Augustus is described as a handsome man and does not capture any suffering that he experienced, Suetonius notes that his body was covered with scars and he was attacked by dangerous diseases. In addition, he captures the incident where he was charged with adultery as well arguing that his triumphs in battles should not be attributed to Augustus entirely since most of them were won at the command of his generals in his absence. Though Augustus was generous as displayed in Res Gestae, Suetonius claims that the generosity was mainly an obvious attempt to win the support and recognition of the Roman people.

In conclusion, the image of Augustus as depicted in his Res Gestae is that of a self-potrait where he emphasizes on the uniqueness of his achievements

and accomplishments. It is still a significant text that guides research on this influential leader in history. Suetonius brings out the positive and negative traits of Augustus in that despite the fact that he has been associated with adultery, Augustus accords great value to good morals and decency.

Nevertheless the text has helped various historians to gain insights into the personal life of Augustus away from his deeds in the Roman politics although the critics of the text claim that it is based on gossip.