

With reference to the
evidence of res
gestae and suetonius
augustus



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Suetonius claims it was a defensive and unambitious general policy, saying that Augustus never wantonly invaded any country, and “felt no temptation to increase the boundaries of the Empire or enhance his military glory”, Suet 21. However, in Suetonius there is also overwhelming evidence of the opposite. It is frequently found in Suetonius that he appears to record much that is contradictory or plainly gossip and not fact and must be studied with a certain degree of scepticism. The historian P. A.

Brunt takes the opposite, and I feel correct, view as the poets all speak of Augustus' great conquests, his arms going to every corner of the earth. He did add much territory to Rome, in fact Augustus himself admits to it in *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*- self propaganda written by Augustus. RGDA is a very useful source for looking at Augustus' achievements as viewed by him but it must be taken into account that it is self propaganda and therefore subject to contain bias. In RGDA 26-33 he says that he extended the territory of all those provinces of the Roman people “on whose borders lay peoples not subject to our government.

He also extended it to the Gallic and Spanish provinces as well as to Germany, throughout the area bordering on the Ocean from “Cadiz to the mouth of the Elbe”, though he said it was bringing peace to them. This was a massive and dramatic extension. Especially for someone who less than thirty years after the last of these was advising that the empire should not be “extended beyond its present frontiers,” (Tacitus). It seems that concerning the Northern frontier Augustus' aim was, for a period of time, that of consolidation- to create a secure frontier, free from damaging barbarian raids. Augustus campaigned in 35-33 to secure Illyricum in order

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to enhance his military reputation at the time of rivalry with Antony and also to secure the area nearest Rome to pave the way to making safe the road from Italy overland the Byzantium (the only convenient way to the East).

This was a definite expansion, however, it did begin as consolidation for safe travel to the East of the Empire. The expansion which occurred from this did not adhere to his own advice in his clause (as recorded by Tacitus). It did not succeed however and some sort of an agreement was reached because we find in 12 BC the Scordisci. In Strabo 206 by 16B.

C P. Servius Nerva seems to have conquered Noricum, which became a Roman province and is an other example of expansion of the empire. In 13B. C another campaign was begun against Illyricum and in 12 after Agrippa died and Tiberius took over advanced from the West while his allies came from the East. In 11B. C he subdued the Pannonians and Dalmations and made the Danube frontier safe after three years of fighting.

Illyricum was handed to Augustus by the senate. In 5A. D Tiberius reached the Elbe, and then tried to subdue the Macromanni. By linking the Elbe with the Danube a new frontier could have been established all the way to the Black Sea. This frontier could not have been planned as any maps of the time were unreliable and they could not have known what to expect until they got there.

In 6 A. D. Augustus' strategy for the Northern Frontier had to change because of what Scullard says may reasonably be called the Great Rebellion which was a great and bloody revolt in Pannonia and Dalmatia which Tiberius

finally crushed in AD 7-8 in Pannonia, and in AD 9 in Dalmatia. This revolt meant that Augustus had to settle for a Rhine Danube frontier instead.

It meant the end of a policy of expansion in the North and concentrating on keeping a firm hold of the area from then on. Activity in the Alps in 33B. C was an act of consolidation against the Salassi who threatened the passes of St. Bernard.

In AD 15 there was a major campaign. Tiberius and his brother Drusus opened their campaign from North and South. Tiberius advanced from Gaul and Drusus from Italy. They advanced together as far as the Danube and there was no more trouble in the Alpine region. Germany was all out attempted conquest wiping out the Salassi on the western side.

On the Eastern side of the Alps the frontier was pushed up to the Danube river, including Raetia and Noricum. With the Alpine passes open Cisalpine and Transalpine Gaul became more united and prosperous. The raids of the Alpine tribes on Italy had stopped thanks to consolidation and the Roman armies could more easily get to central Gaul and the Rhine. Roman control stretched from the Adriatic to the Danube, making an overland route from Rome to Illyricum through the Julian Alps, and connecting Macedonia to Italy and Gaul. It appears to me that the Northern Frontiers in this area was expansionist consolidation by Augustus and that the territorial acquisitions made here were made for the consolidation of gains already made and for communications and possible further expansion in the future.

The scholar David J. Breeze says that it has been argued that Augustus saw the conquest of Germany as imperative for the security of the Roman
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Empire. In 12BC Drusus conducted four campaigns into Germany as far as the Elbe. In AD 6 Tiberius was attacking the Macromanni who had given no provocation to Rome other than having a well trained army.

The Great Rebellion led to the total abandonment of the campaign and the start of fierce fighting in the Danube provinces. After this revolt was put down P. Quentilius suffered a heavy defeat and massacre in the Teutoburg Forest. It was at this point when Augustus was in his seventies that he wrote the advice to his successor not to extend the empire any further.

Concerning the Eastern Frontiers Augustus appears to follow his dictum throughout his life. He initiated a more defensive policy. He had to decide what to do concerning Armenia. He decided that the only practical option open to him was to set up a client kingdom.

RGDA 27 " but I preferred, following the model of our ancestors, to hand over that kingdom to Tigranes. " He made Tigranes a puppet ruler with his brother Atraxes as a hostage and was in no hurry to begin an unnecessary all out conflict. Rome expected Augustus to go on the offensive against Parthia in 30 to restore Roman prestige and honour after Actium and because it was an attractive prospect to attack due to its weakened state because of internal strife. However, against all expectation he decided not to as he realised that Parthia was not the threat she once had been.

He decided he would have more need to bring back peace and prosperity in the West before launching into further warfare. It seems Augustus knew how to prioritise. By about 23B. C Augustus was expecting the standards back, but after waiting about in vain he set out campaigning north of the Danube <https://assignbuster.com/with-reference-to-the-evidence-of-res-gestae-and-suetonius-augustus/>

in 22 BC. He arrived in Parthia with Tiberius. Under the threat imposed by this the Parthians in 20 BC decided to discreetly hand back the standards “ captured from Crassus and Antony”,(Suet 21) and the Roman prisoners.

Augustus was satisfied and did not act aggressively against Parthia. This was a great success which acted as a great opportunity for propaganda which Augustus made sure to turn to his advantage. It greatly raised the prestige of Rome in the East. Coins were minted showing the Parthian king kneeling.

In RGDA Augustus boasts of how he “ compelled” them and how they asked “ as suppliants for the freindship for th Romon Empire. In 25 there was a successful expedition against raids by the Ethiopians. Also in 25 Augustus attempted to conquer Arabia Felix but failed. The Red Sea was secured and sea trade with India was established. Augustus settled Juba as king of Mauritania in Africa which was valuable for grain supply to Rome. As Augustus says in RGDA 27 he “ added Egypt to the Empire of the Roman people.

” Egypt, after the death of Cleopatra was his first major gain which added much wealth to the Empire. Judea was made a Roman province in 6A. D, when at the request of the Jews, Archelaus, the son of Herod was driven out. It is my view after having researched the Augustan Frontiers that Augustus’ clause advising that the empire should not be extended beyond its present frontiers was not adhered to by Augustus during his lifetime, at least not in the Northern Frontier against the Dacians and the Germans. I do however believe that this clause was justifiable as Augustus recognised that even the greatest Empire ever to exist had its limits and that it would be unable to

manage much more territory. The legions would be too widespread and if one local revolt fired up it could spread to uncontrollable proportions.