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and the *Res Gestae* of Augustus

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Divine Support and World Conquest  
in the Stele Inscriptions of Qin Shi Huangdi  
and the *Res Gestae* of Augustus<sup>1</sup>

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ABSTRACT

This paper comparatively examines the propaganda of the first emperors of China and Rome, Qin Shi Huangdi and Augustus. Focusing on the interplay between divine support and claims of world conquest and utilising the Qin stelae and the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* as case studies, this paper will argue that both early imperial Chinese and Roman propaganda shared extremely similar rationales and methods. Divine support and military victories were intimately linked and mutually dependent. As such, the emperors' claims to unprecedented levels of divine support also impelled them to claim successful world conquest, lest the very ideological foundations of their regimes be called into question.

**Keywords:** Qin Shi Huangdi; Qin stelae; Augustus; *Res Gestae*; ancient propaganda; Sino-Roman comparative studies

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## INTRODUCTION

With the violent closing of the Warring States period in 221 BCE, Ying Zheng, the then King of Qin, proclaimed a newly unified world order of which he was the inaugural ruler – Qin Shi Huangdi. Touring his newly conquered territories, Qin Shi Huangdi erected seven inscribed stelae to broadcast his achievements to posterity. In 27 BCE, on the other side of the Eurasian continent, Gaius Octavius,<sup>2</sup> the great-nephew and adopted heir of the famed dictator Gaius Julius Caesar, was granted the title Augustus by an obsequious Roman Senate, heralding the death of the Roman Republic and the beginning of the Roman Empire. Like Qin Shi Huangdi, Augustus also penned a self-aggrandising inscription, called the ‘Deeds of Divine Augustus’ (*Res Gestae Divi Augusti*), which was carved onto two bronze pillars and erected outside of his mausoleum posthumously – a permanent monument glorifying his regime for the ages.

One particular theme in the Qin stelae and the *Res Gestae* is strikingly similar. Both Augustus and Qin Shi Huangdi steadfastly claimed that they had conquered the whole world. The success of Qin Shi Huangdi in pacifying All under Heaven permeates his stelae, and the very preface of the *Res Gestae* declares that Augustus had ‘placed the whole world under the command of the Roman people.’<sup>3</sup> Moreover, both emperors claimed an unprecedented level of connection to the divine in their propaganda. Even their very titles, *Huangdi* and *Augustus*, carry undeniable divine connotations.<sup>4</sup> Augustus, and its Greek counterpart, *Sebastos*, was a religious term that can be loosely translated as ‘Venerable One.’<sup>5</sup> According to the *Shiji*, the word *Huangdi* is an amalgamation of 皇 (*huang*), roughly meaning ‘supreme lord’, and 帝 (*dì*), the name of the chief deity of the Shang and Zhou dynasties.<sup>6</sup> Puett translates his title more literally as ‘August God’, while Kern provides a similar translation of ‘August

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<sup>2</sup> This paper will refer to the first emperor of Rome as ‘Octavian’ when discussing him prior to 27 BCE, and ‘Augustus’ after 27 BCE.

<sup>3</sup> *RGDA* 1. All translations in this paper are mine unless otherwise stated. Graeco-Roman sources are cited according to the Loeb Classical Library and Chinese sources are cited according to passage numbers from the Chinese Text Project.

<sup>4</sup> Kern 2000, 50; Kern 2008, 225.

<sup>5</sup> Suet. *Aug.* 7.

<sup>6</sup> *Shiji* 6.14.

Thearch'.<sup>7</sup> This fascinating parallel between Augustus' and Qin Shi Huangdi's propaganda, particularly in what drove the two emperors to claim such an unprecedented level of divine support, and how this subsequently impacted their portrayals of world conquest, will be the purpose of this paper.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In monocultural studies, Qin Shi Huangdi and Augustus are certainly two well-studied figures. Notable examinations of Augustan ideology particularly involving themes of war and conquest include Gruen,<sup>8</sup> Gurval,<sup>9</sup> Koortbojian,<sup>10</sup> Lange,<sup>11</sup> Lobur,<sup>12</sup> Rich,<sup>13</sup> and Woolf.<sup>14</sup> Cooley,<sup>15</sup> Damon,<sup>16</sup> Güvan,<sup>17</sup> and Ramage have all published influential analyses and commentaries on the *Res Gestae*.<sup>18</sup> Yavetz has also published explicitly on Augustus' self-representation in the *Res Gestae*.<sup>19</sup>

While the *Res Gestae* is certainly a well-studied topic, there are still aspects of the text that remain puzzling. Scholarship tends to view Augustus' interactions with foreigners almost entirely through a military lens. Havener, in particular, conducts an entire study analysing Augustan self-

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<sup>7</sup> Kern 2000, *passim*, and Puett 2002, 240.

<sup>8</sup> Gruen 1981 and 1990.

<sup>9</sup> Gurval 1995.

<sup>10</sup> Koortbojian 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Lange 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Lobur 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Rich 2009, 2010, and 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Woolf 1993.

<sup>15</sup> Cooley 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Damon 1995.

<sup>17</sup> Güvan 1998.

<sup>18</sup> Ramage 1981.

<sup>19</sup> Yavetz 1984.

portrayal purely from a military standpoint.<sup>20</sup> He concludes that the most central aspect of his rule was his military persona in the role of a leader and a victor. Although this paper certainly does not disagree with this view, it will argue that Augustus' interactions with foreigners, even in contexts of war and conquest, were also manipulated so as to accentuate a particular non-military aspect of Augustan self-portrayal: divine support.

Although Qin Shi Huangdi is also a well-studied figure, his public image and propaganda, especially as presented in his stele inscriptions, are less commonly analysed. Pines is one of the few scholars to have published extensively on the self-portrayal and propaganda of Qin Shi Huangdi.<sup>21</sup> Kern has provided extensive analyses of the stelae, authoring the only critical translation of all seven stelae in English.<sup>22</sup> The authoritative biography of Qin Shi Huangdi by Ma examines the emperor almost exclusively through later sources, rather than the contemporary stelae.<sup>23</sup> Qian's *Qin Han Shi* devotes a single page to the stelae, with hardly any critical analysis.<sup>24</sup> One of the very few annotated editions of all seven stelae (with a few fragments of other Qin dynasty texts) published in Chinese scholarship is also a modest work of no more than sixty-odd pages, with most of the commentary simply translations into Modern Chinese, rather than an analytical examination of the text.<sup>25</sup>

Sino-Roman comparative studies have piqued the interest of many scholars in recent times.<sup>26</sup> Most works thus far have focused on large-scale comparisons of social, economic, or political systems.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Havener 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Pines 2009, 2012, 2014a, and 2014b.

<sup>22</sup> Kern 2000, 2007, and 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Ma 1985.

<sup>24</sup> Qian 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Feng et al. 1975.

<sup>26</sup> See Mutschler 2023 for an in-depth summary of the state of scholarship on Sino-Roman comparative studies.

<sup>27</sup> Mutschler and Mittag 2008; Scheidel 2009, 2015; Ford 2020; Beck and Vankeerberghen 2021; Kim 2021.

Recent works have shown interest in Sino-Roman attitudes towards foreigners<sup>28</sup> and state religion.<sup>29</sup> There has also been a growing focus on a comparison of individuals, such as Julius Caesar and Qin Shi Huangdi<sup>30</sup> or Cicero and Confucius.<sup>31</sup> When Augustus and Qin Shi Huangdi are compared, however, they are mentioned only casually due to their obvious parallel as the first emperors of their respective empires. Yakobson and Pines each attempted a comparison of Augustus and Qin Shi Huangdi but did not engage in a full-scale comparative analysis due to their self-professed lack of expertise in the other culture.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, a comparative study examining the *Res Gestae* and the stele inscriptions of Qin Shi Huangdi is quite lacking,<sup>33</sup> and there has so far not been an examination of the fascinating interplay between state religious propaganda and Sino-Roman attitudes towards foreigners and conquest in these inscriptions. Through this comparative examination, this paper hopes to improve our understanding both of the Qin stelae and Augustus' *Res Gestae*, highlighting specifics of, and rationales behind, points of similarity that would have been difficult to accentuate in monocultural studies.

#### METHODOLOGY AND CONTENTION

This paper will adopt what Scheidel has termed 'Type Comparison', aimed at discovering any shared causes behind similar outcomes arising in historically distinct societies.<sup>34</sup> As this paper will show, both emperors manipulated their divine support to monopolise access to the divine while simultaneously portraying themselves as world conquerors. 'Type Comparison' allows us to examine how these two distinct historical societies, producing a similar historical outcome, might ultimately have shared a similar rationale behind their decisions.

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<sup>28</sup> Ford 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Robinson 2023.

<sup>30</sup> Engel 2021.

<sup>31</sup> Balbo and Ahn 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Yakobson 2014; Pines 2014a; Pines 2014b.

<sup>33</sup> See Zhao (forthcoming) for one of the few studies to have done so.

<sup>34</sup> Scheidel 2019, 5.

Indeed, Qin Shi Huangdi's self-aggrandisement and his emphasis on his connections to the divine, if not his own divinity, are undeniable: he regarded his divine connection as so critical that he continually reinforced it in his imperial ideology. This claim to the divine will help elucidate two underexplored aspects of Qin Shi Huangdi's stelae: why did the emperor stress that he had conquered All under Heaven, and why did he never mention any military setbacks or revolts against his rule?

A similar issue is apparent when we examine the *Res Gestae*. As Rosenstein insightfully notes, military losses in the Roman Republic rarely hindered, let alone destroyed, one's political power or career progression.<sup>35</sup> Even in propagandistic pieces, losses were perhaps diminished or excused, but rarely ignored outright. Julius Caesar, in the *Gallic War*, while laying the blame for the loss at Gergovia (52 BCE) on the lack of discipline of his soldiers, still nevertheless records this loss.<sup>36</sup> In his *Civil War*, Caesar's loss at Dyrrachium (48 BCE) is recounted in a fashion so as to portray himself as the hero, but is still recounted in vivid detail regardless.<sup>37</sup> Augustus, on the other hand, deliberately omitted any mentions of his military losses from the *Res Gestae*, even those that could easily have been blamed on others, such as on Publius Quinctilius Varus at Teutoburg Forest (9 CE). Moreover, revolts against Augustus' rule, such as in Spain, Gaul, and Pannonia, were never unambiguously recognised; for example, Augustus merely 'settled affairs' in Spain and Gaul.<sup>38</sup> A similar question is thus raised – what part of Augustan ideology forced the emperor to stress his ability to 'place the whole world under the rule of the Roman people' while wiping away all mentions of military losses or revolts?

This paper will first show that Qin Shi Huangdi's reason for stressing his divine connection was his need to portray himself as the Son of Heaven. By adopting the position of Son of Heaven, Qin Shi Huangdi manoeuvred himself into the status of the sole intermediary between Heaven and Earth, consolidating his new regime by accentuating his divine guidance and favour. An absolute criterion for

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35 Rosenstein 1990, 13–27, 41. Rosenstein analyses a full list of all Republican generals who suffered military losses and found little correlation between military loss and political progression. Even Lucius Gellius Poplicola and Gnaeus Cornelius Lentulus Clodianus, who shamefully lost against Spartacus, would go on to become Censors two years later.

36 Caes. *BGall.* 7.52; Havener 2016, 39–40.

37 Caes. *BCiv.* 3.69ff.; Havener 2016, 41.

38 *RGDA* 30.



the Son of Heaven, however, was the complete subjugation of All under Heaven, with a failure to do so being a sign that the ruler in question did not truly have Heaven's favour. This forced Qin Shi Huangdi to propagandise himself as a military ruler who effortlessly conquered the whole world, thanks to his divine support. This paper will then argue that Augustus' rationale was very similar. Although Rome certainly did not have as intricate a concept as the Son of Heaven, Augustus still wished to concentrate power on himself, by presenting himself as possessing a special, almost monopolistic, connection to the gods. Through Augustus, the gods granted Rome victory and an 'empire without end' (*imperium sine fine*).<sup>39</sup> Much like Qin Shi Huangdi, this was a position in which Augustus could not afford to be undermined by any recognition of military losses or revolts, as they would have represented a failure to secure his divine mandate. This would then have called into question his still novel position as emperor. Thus, Augustus also had to stress his conquest of the world as successfully manifesting Rome's divine destiny while concealing all his military losses, as they would have undermined his position as the gods' favourite.

We, then, see a fascinating parallel where both emperors attempted to justify their novel regimes by claiming an unparalleled connection to the divine, making them worthier than anyone else to rule their respective empires. This divine support, however, necessitated the two emperors to present constantly a persona of victory over foreign foes, to the point of adopting the air of a world conqueror, in order to validate the divine support and favour towards, and therefore the ideological foundations of, their regimes.

## QIN SHI HUANGDI

Upon his conquest of all the other Warring States and now ruling a unified China, Qin Shi Huangdi was faced with a need to justify his novel imperial rule to the elite and the masses alike. He did so by cleverly responding to existing schools of thought and striving to display his worthiness as the prophesied sage-king, the Son of Heaven, destined to rule All under Heaven.<sup>40</sup> The reasons for the First Emperor's claim

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<sup>39</sup> Eck 2007, 125.

<sup>40</sup> Yang 2003, 383; Pines 2012, 12–21, 33–54; Pines 2014b, 260–261, 266–279.

to be the Son of Heaven are multi-layered, and they can only be fully understood by tracking the evolution of the idea of the Son of Heaven in earlier Chinese literature.

Pre-imperial literature stresses the presence of one legitimate Son of Heaven at any given time, who, as the primary, if not sole, intermediary to Heaven, wields the Mandate of Heaven to rule.<sup>41</sup> The *Shijing* and *Shujing* contain numerous poems and speeches where the Mandate of Heaven is torn away from the ruling house of the Shang dynasty and given to the soon-to-be ruling house of Zhou, with never an instance where the Mandate is suggested to be shared. This is best represented in the *Duofang* chapter of the *Shujing*, where the Xia and Shang dynasties are attacked for having ‘committed many sins and failed to obey Heaven’; therefore, ‘Heaven has given [the Zhou dynasty] the Mandate (...) so that [the Zhou dynasty] might rule over those near and far’.<sup>42</sup> This idea, that a sole ruler ought to rule All under Heaven, was echoed in almost every subsequent philosophical and political school of thought.<sup>43</sup> The *Zuo Zhuan* exclaims: ‘Who can suffer a nation with two rulers?’<sup>44</sup> Xunzi concludes that ‘if there is only one ruler, the world is at peace; if there are two, then there will be chaos’.<sup>45</sup>

By claiming divine support and his position as the new Son of Heaven, Qin Shi Huangdi could monopolise divine favour.<sup>46</sup> He became the supreme, divinely supported ruler of all humanity, a position that was not, and could not be, shared with others.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, a clear juxtaposition was made between the religious backing of Qin Shi Huangdi and his foes. By ‘illuminating his ancestral spirits and setting forth the path of morality’, Qin Shi Huangdi ‘unified all within the seas (...) and brought peace to All under Heaven’; his opponents, on the other hand, ‘falsely pretended to have the powers of the divinities to deceive those from afar’.<sup>48</sup>

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41 Bodde 1986, 30; Loewe 1986, 662; Pines 2012, 12; Pines 2014b, 276.

42 *Shujing*, *Zhou Shu*, *Duofang*, 3–4.

43 Pines 2012, 17.

44 *Zuo Zhuan*, seventh Year of Duke Zhao, 2.

45 Xunzi, 14.7.

46 Loewe 1999, 1031.

47 Pines 2012, 12–13.

48 *Shiji* 6.24. See also *Shiji* 6.14, where Qin Shi Huangdi claimed that by ‘relying on the ancestral spirits, insignificant I

An important aspect of the Son of Heaven, however, which so heavily impacted on Qin Shi Huangdi's self-portrayal, was the requirements for this sacred position. It is crucial to stress that the Son of Heaven was, at least from an ideological perspective, never meant to be restricted to China, but was meant to rule over all humanity.<sup>49</sup> In the *Zuo Zhuan*, it is said that 'if a ruler does not disobey the virtues [of Heaven], then all nations will come in submission'.<sup>50</sup> The *Huangyi* poem in the *Shijing* unambiguously forges a connection between divine support and unfailing military success, as the triumphant conquest of foreign foes is explicitly due to the Zhou's piety and sacrifices to Heaven.

*Di* [the supreme god] is above and sees all below. He inspects the four directions and seeks peace for the people. He saw the Kingdom of Shang and how it had failed to win the hearts of the people. Inspecting the four directions, the god ponders and measures [the other kingdoms]. The god lays his cares on Zhou and sets about increasing its empire (...) Thanks to [the Zhou's] sacrifices to Heaven before and after their battles, their enemies surrender and yield, and none within the four directions dare to invade (...) whether attacking or campaigning, whether annihilating or exterminating, none within the four directions dare to resist.<sup>51</sup>

Referring to King Wen of Zhou, the *Jiale* poem says that 'he receives blessings from Heaven without limit', and thus becomes the 'rule and law of all four directions'.<sup>52</sup> Mencius states: 'He who is without a single enemy in All under Heaven is truly the agent of Heaven. In all of history, there has never been such a man who has failed to obtain kingship'.<sup>53</sup>

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exterminated the violent and the rebellious. The Six Kings have all submitted and confessed to their crimes, and All under Heaven is thus pacified'.

49 Creel 1937, 367; Fairbank 1968, 5–8; Rossabi 2004, 77.

50 *Zuo Zhuan*, twenty-sixth Year of Duke Zhao, 2.

51 *Shijing, Daya, Huangyi*, 1.

52 *Shijing, Daya, Jiale*, 3.

53 Mencius 2A5.

This, then, strongly impacted how the early Chinese viewed anyone who refused to submit to the Son of Heaven. Foreign or internal foes who dared to revolt against the Son of Heaven were portrayed as committing a sacrilegious act by revolting against Heaven's agent on earth.<sup>54</sup> When discussing supporting the then Son of Heaven of the Zhou dynasty, the Zhou vassals declared that anyone who disobeyed him would have 'the divinities punish him, causing his armies to fail and his nation to be lost'.<sup>55</sup> When Duke Wen of Zhao was criticised, it was said that '[Duke Wen] has betrayed the gods and the people. The divinities are angry and the people are rebellious, so how could he possibly survive long? He will not survive the end of the year. The angry gods refuse his sacrifices and the rebellious people refuse to heed his commands. If his sacrifices and commands are rejected, how could he possibly survive until next year?'<sup>56</sup> In the context of foreign foes, this is most clearly illustrated by a quotation attributed to Confucius: 'Those from afar cannot scheme against the Central States, and the barbarians cannot disturb the Chinese (...) to do so is an affront to the divine'.<sup>57</sup>

Peace and the submission of All under Heaven as a sign of Heaven's favour, however, is a double-edged sword. A ruler who suffered military losses against foreign foes, or failed to secure their submission, was thought either to have lost the Mandate of Heaven or to have never received it in the first place.<sup>58</sup> The *Yi* poem in *Shijing* declares that if one were to lose his virtue, then Heaven would not come to his aid.<sup>59</sup> *Zuo Zhuan* records an advisor stating: 'If a ruler does not disobey the virtues [of Heaven], then all nations will come in submission (...) if he did disobey heavenly virtue, then the people will be thrown into chaos'.<sup>60</sup> Mencius elaborates on this idea, commenting that when 'the Son of Heaven

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54 See in particular Mencius 4A7: 'He who accords with Heaven is preserved, he who opposes Heaven is destroyed'. For an analysis of this passage, see Puett 2002, 134, and Pines 2014b, 266.

55 *Zuo Zhuan*, twenty-eighth Year of Duke Xi, 2.

56 *Zuo Zhuan*, first Year of Duke Zhao, 2.

57 *Zuo Zhuan*, tenth Year of Duke Ding, 2.

58 Creel 1970, 240; Pines 2012, 19, 32–33.

59 *Shijing*, *Daya*, *Yi*, 2–4. The poem warns that, should a ruler lose divine support due to immorality, then 'Heaven will not come to your aid! Like a torrent of water rushing forth, the king and his vassals will all perish'.

60 *Zuo Zhuan*, twenty-sixth Year of Duke Zhao, 2.

is not compassionate, the four seas cannot be held (...) [and] the polity cannot be sustained.’<sup>61</sup> This idea is best represented in *Xunzi*, where the eponymous philosopher states that ‘if All under Heaven is not unified, and the vassals are prone to revolt, then the Son of Heaven this man is not.’<sup>62</sup> As such, in order to claim this position as the new Son of Heaven, legitimised by the gods to rule his new empire, Qin Shi Huangdi needed to propagandise a self-image in which he had successfully pacified All under Heaven. Conversely, should the military abilities of Qin Shi Huangdi come into question, the implication would be that he must not have been the true Son of Heaven, which would have delegitimised his entire regime.<sup>63</sup>

Indeed, the successful conquest of All under Heaven is one of the most central themes of Qin Shi Huangdi’s stelae, where the emperor’s military prowess and morality are elevated to a superhuman level in order to provide legitimacy for his claim as the new Son of Heaven. The stelae repeatedly utilised vocabulary that implies the victorious subjugation of the known world. ‘*Tianxia*’ (All under Heaven) appears in every stele. Other terms referring to the known world, such as ‘*siji*’ (Four Extremes), ‘*sifang*’ (Four Directions), ‘*yu*’ (Universe), and ‘*liuhe*’ (Six Combined [Directions]). This theme is particularly strong in the Mt. Langxie Stele.

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 where the doors face north.<sup>64</sup> To the east it enfolds the eastern sea, to the north, it goes beyond Da Xia.<sup>65</sup>

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61 Mencius 4A3.

62 *Xunzi*, 9.24.

63 Creel 1970, 207, 240; Pines 2012, 33.

64 Kern translates 北戶 (*beihu*) literally as those whose ‘doors face north’. Indeed, that is what *Bei Hu* literally means. As defined in the *Erya*, however, *Bei Hu* was not understood literally but as a reference to the name of a tribe who lived to the south of China. By the Late Warring States and the Early Imperial period, *Bei Hu* ceased to be used even as the name for the tribe but now became a term that just meant ‘the far south’. As such, this sentence means that the Qin Shi Huangdi’s empire stretched south as far as possible, rather than a reference to a particular place.

65 There have been debates as to what 大夏 (*Da Xia*) refers. It might be similar to *Bei Hu* and was a catchall term for everything considered the ‘far north/west’. There have been also some arguments that *Da Xia* referred to Bactria, although

Wherever human traces reach, there is none who does not declare himself [the Thearch's] subject.<sup>66</sup>

When conquests or wars are explicitly mentioned in the stelae, they are recorded in a brutally swift manner. No depictions of battles or wars last for more than a couple of lines at most, with nothing in the vocabulary betraying even a sense of impediment, let alone military loss. Any and all of Qin Shi Huangdi's enemies are defeated swiftly and thoroughly. In the Mt. Yi Stele, it is explicitly stated that the extermination of 'the six cruel and violent ones' took place over 'a passage of time not long' when, in reality, Qin Shi Huangdi spent almost a decade unifying China.<sup>67</sup> In the Stele on the Eastern Vista, the defeat of the six kings was skimmed over in a single line:

His military awesome influence radiated to all directions, shook and moved the four extremities, seized and extinguished the six kings. Far and wide He unified All under Heaven, disaster and harm were cut off and stopped, forever halted were the clashes of arms.<sup>68</sup>

Similarly in the Mt. Zhifu Stele, Qin Shi Huangdi rapidly conquered the 'immoral' six kings and effortlessly brought peace to the whole world.

The six kingdoms had been restive and perverse, greedy and criminal, insatiable – atrociously slaughtering endlessly. The August Thearch felt pity for the multitudes, and consequently sent out His punitive troops, vehemently displaying His martial power (...)

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this lacks firm evidence.

66 Mt. Langxie Stele, 61–68. This paper uses Kern 2000's translation of the Qin stelae, with slight emendations.

67 Mt. Yi Stele, 8–9.

68 Stele on the Eastern Vista, 13–18.

He boiled alive and exterminated the violent and cruel, succoured and saved the black-haired people, and all around consolidated the four extremities.<sup>69</sup>

After his wars of unification, Qin Shi Huangdi embarked on two major foreign wars of conquest, against the Xiongnu nomads of the north and the Yue peoples of the south. Although the Qin stelae do not speak of these foreign campaigns explicitly, we can still glean from later sources that a similar propagandistic technique was likely utilised. *Shiji* records matter-of-factly, in a single sentence, that after Qin Shi Huangdi had unified All under Heaven, he sent his chief general Meng Tian to 'drive away the Di and Rong from the North, and reclaim [the province of] Henan'.<sup>70</sup> Meng Tian is further described as keeping the nomads at bay with his ability to '*wei zhen*' (literally: to astound with force).<sup>71</sup> In the *Xinshu*, Jia Yi compliments the general and states that, after his invasion, 'the Xiongnu were pushed back more than 700 *li*, and do not dare approach the south even for pasturing'.<sup>72</sup>

Qin Shi Huangdi's invasion of the south was portrayed in a likewise fashion in the *Shiji*. His invasion of the southern Yue peoples is described simply as the emperor deciding to '*ding*' (to pacify, to bring into a state of tranquillity) the south after he had unified China.<sup>73</sup> Neither the stelae nor the *Shiji* acknowledges the arduousness of the conquest. It would be up to the *Huainanzi* to clarify that the Qin suffered atrociously in the campaign due to the Yue people's guerrilla tactics, taking three years and suffering hundreds of thousands of casualties to 'pacify' the South.<sup>74</sup>

As we can see, Qin Shi Huangdi was careful never to mention military losses or setbacks, even against foreign foes. People either submitted willingly, or they were obstinate and needed to be conquered, in which endeavour he had to be successful, as any military setbacks against foreign foes

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69 Mt. Zhifu Stele, 16–27.

70 *Shiji* 88.2.

71 *Shiji* 88.2.

72 *Xinshu*, *Guo Qin Lun* 1.3.

73 *Shiji* 113.1.

74 *Huainanzi*, 18.25.

implied that he did not truly have the support of Heaven.<sup>75</sup> This propagandistic self-image was so successful that even post-Qin sources hostile to Qin Shi Huangdi often conceded his alleged conquest of the known world and his dominance of foreigners. Indeed, the *Xinshu* states that the emperor's martial valour still kept those beyond the empire at bay even after his death: 'After the death of the First Emperor, the remainder of his *wei zhen* was still felt by those of alien customs'.<sup>76</sup>

In his propaganda, Qin Shi Huangdi portrayed himself as enacting divine will and upholding the divine order through his military conquests.<sup>77</sup> In all instances where warfare is mentioned, Qin Shi Huangdi effortlessly overcame all his foes, internal and external, thus legitimising his position as Son of Heaven. This is most clearly presented when Qin courtier Zhou Qingchen flattered Qin Shi Huangdi by declaring that 'thanks to the *shenling* (literally: 'divine soul' or 'divine spirit') of your majesty, all within the seas are pacified and the barbarians are driven away. Wherever the sun and the moon shine, there is none who does not submit willingly'.<sup>78</sup> Qin Shi Huangdi's connection to the divine and his conquest of All under Heaven is therefore intimately connected and mutually dependent: in order to be the unparalleled Son of Heaven, Qin Shi Huangdi needed to perform its most crucial tenet – the effortless conquest of All under Heaven. Failing, or seen to be failing, to do so would have destabilised the entire ideological justification for his regime.

## AUGUSTUS

This analysis of Qin Shi Huangdi's conjoining of divine support and military conquests can now help elucidate similar aspects of Augustan propaganda. Certainly, there are obvious differences between the two empires; Rome never developed so elaborate an idea as the Son of Heaven, for one – but the notion

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<sup>75</sup> As Kern argues, the First Emperor's sovereignty is grounded in a combination of politics and cosmology. See Kern 2007, 106.

<sup>76</sup> *Xinshu*, *Guo Qin Lun* 1.4.

<sup>77</sup> Kim 2009, 69.

<sup>78</sup> *Shiji* 6.16.



that Rome had a divine mission to create an 'empire without end' (*imperium sine fine*) is quite comparable with China's All under Heaven.<sup>79</sup>

Octavian's early career, particularly during the Triumvirate (43–32 BCE), was rocked by rumours of impiety. He allegedly threw a feast, with himself and attendees dressed as the Olympian gods, amidst a famine,<sup>80</sup> and taunted Neptune that he would have a naval victory over Sextus Pompeius despite the god.<sup>81</sup> Beset by these rumours, the future emperor began cultivating a self-image of piety and divine support. To commemorate his victory at the Battle of Naulochus (36 BCE), Octavian built a temple dedicated to Apollo adjoining the part of his house on the Palatine 'which, having been struck by lightning, the soothsayers had announced as desired by [Apollo]'.<sup>82</sup> After defeating Marc Antony at Actium (31 BCE), Octavian erected a shrine to Apollo at the location where his military tent had been set up.<sup>83</sup> Immediately after the capture of Alexandria (30 BCE), Octavian enlarged the temple of Apollo and dedicated temples to Mars and Neptune.<sup>84</sup>

In the *Res Gestae*, Augustus flaunts his piety through his repeated claims to various religious offices.<sup>85</sup> The crowd attending his election as Pontifex Maximus is emphatically claimed by Augustus as unprecedented in scale.<sup>86</sup> After his election, Augustus declared his own domicile to be public property and housed the Vestal Virgins next to it.<sup>87</sup> To further exemplify his piety, Augustus boasts of his

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79 Lintott 1981, 64; Isaac 2004, 304; Eck 2007, 125.

80 Suet. *Aug.* 70.1.

81 Suet. *Aug.* 16.2.

82 Suet. *Aug.* 29.3. For further analyses of this episode, see Galinsky 1996, 313, and Lange 2009, 40, 166–167. See also Alston 2015, 182, 230, where Alston notes that after Naulochus, Octavian began experimenting with his public image by having golden statues – normally reserved for divinities – erected for himself.

83 Cass. Dio 51.1.3.

84 Suet. *Aug.* 18.2.

85 *RGDA* 7, 10; Ramage 1981, 94.

86 *RGDA* 10. See Dunstan 2011, 224, where Dunstan argues that by becoming Pontifex Maximus, Augustus became the 'chief intermediary between the gods and Rome', cf. Belloni 1987, 79.

87 Cass. Dio 54.27.3. Ov. *Fast.* 4.949–5 also describes Apollo, Vesta, and Augustus dwelling in 'one (...) house', while 6.455

construction or repairing of numerous temples: 'I rebuilt eighty-two temples of the gods in the City, neglecting none that needed repair'.<sup>88</sup> The *Ara Pacis Augustae* (Altar of Augustan Peace) connects Augustus with military victory, peace, and Roman religion.<sup>89</sup> The continued building of temples was lauded by Suetonius as 'exceptional'.<sup>90</sup> Ovid, likely as a sarcastic echo of imperial propaganda, extortionately praises Augustus' building of temples to the point of calling them 'the Caesarian temples', upon which Mars descends and sees all the cumulated glory that is Augustus.<sup>91</sup> Yavetz notes that almost all surviving statues of Augustus show him as either offering sacrifice or acting in some religious or ritual capacity.<sup>92</sup> Augustus' piety was constantly placed in the foreground of his propaganda.<sup>93</sup>

This overt display of piety was not purely about aggrandising the emperor but served to claim divine favour and support for his regime.<sup>94</sup> Rumours were created that, upon his return to Rome after the assassination of Caesar, the Sun crowned him with a halo.<sup>95</sup> An extensive number of Augustan authors connected the emperor's victory at Actium with the divine, with Apollo defending Rome and

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describes the sacred hearth-fire of Vesta as 'under Caesar[']s care']. Levick 2010, 91, 153–154 calls this event 'a new phase in Augustus' penetration of religious institutions'.

88 *RGDA* 20.

89 Ramage 1981, 103; Yavetz 1984, 7; Cornwell 2017, 159–183. Kuttner 1995, 66–67, argues that the presence of Mars, Venus, Roma and Aeneas in the iconography of the *Ara Pacis* are there to proclaim Augustus' divine lineage and favoured position as the gods' chosen.

90 Suet. *Aug.* 29.1.

91 Ov. *Fast.* 1.13.

92 Yavetz 1984, 7. Even when the statue itself does not present Augustus in the role of a priest or in a similar capacity, there are often still religious connotations. The famous statue of Augustus of Prima Porta depicts the emperor supported by Cupid (and thus Venus) as well as Mars, confirming his divine connection. For further analyses on the Augustus at Prima Porta statue and its connections to the divine, see Taylor 1975, 180; Zanker 1988, 189, 192; Galinsky 1996, 160; and Cornwell 2017, 150–151. For a broader discussion of Augustus presenting himself as the 'priest *par excellence*', see Wallace-Hadrill 1993, 81–85.

93 Woolf 1993, 177; Gottlieb 1998, 28; Grebe 2004, 36.

94 Zanker 1988, 3.

95 Vell. Pat. 2.59.6.

Octavian against the 'barbarians' of the East, a theme which Gurval argues serves to exhibit Augustus as having won a divinely sanctioned victory.<sup>96</sup> A statue of the goddess Victory was established in the Senate House, which Cassius Dio states was to show 'that it was from her that he received his empire'.<sup>97</sup>

Not content with simply being pious, Augustus, similar to Qin Shi Huangdi, also elevated himself into the divine sphere to stress his unique and superhuman connection to the gods. Stories were disseminated that Octavian was the son of Apollo,<sup>98</sup> while Ovid calls Augustus 'Venus' boy'.<sup>99</sup> In the *Tristia*, Ovid twice refers to the house of Augustus as 'the house of Jove', one that was 'perpetually loved by that Leucadian God (i.e. Apollo)'.<sup>100</sup> Velleius Paterculus praises Octavian as having a 'heavenly soul'.<sup>101</sup> Similarly, Vitruvius also celebrates Augustus' 'mind and spirit' as 'divine'.<sup>102</sup> Numerous texts record that libations were poured for Augustus,<sup>103</sup> and hymns were sung of the emperor 'on equal terms with the gods'.<sup>104</sup> Augustus himself boasts how the Senate voted prayers for his health, and sacrifices were dedicated to him on the altar to Fortuna Redux.<sup>105</sup> Manilius' says of Augustus: 'He descended from heaven and will [one day] refill it'.<sup>106</sup> His future divinity is also unequivocally stated in an earlier verse: 'He is the greatest mover, now on Earth, later in Heaven'.<sup>107</sup> Augustus was openly worshipped as a god in

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96 Verg. *Aen.* 8.678–679, 8.704–706; Prop. 4.6. See Ramage 1981, 99; Gurval 1995, 222, 239; Grebe 2004, 59; and Lange 2009, 75, 167 for more on Augustus, Actium, and divine support.

97 Cass. Dio 51.22.2.

98 Suet. *Aug.* 94.4; Cass. Dio 45.1.2.

99 Ov. *Ars Am.* 1.165.

100 Ov. *Tr.* 3.1.35–42.

101 Vell. Pat. 2.60.2

102 Vitr. *De Arch.* 1.1.

103 Ov. *Fast.* 2.635–638; Hor. *Carm.* 4.5.31; Petron. *Sat.* 60.

104 Cass. Dio 51.20.1.

105 *RGDA* 11. In addition to Fortuna, Spes and Salus were also worshipped in connection to Augustus. See Clark 1983, 80–83.

106 Man. *Ast.* 1.799.

107 Man. *Ast.* 1.386.

provinces where this was permitted.<sup>108</sup> As Yakobson astutely notes, Augustus' rejection of being worshipped as a god in the city of Rome implied that such an offer must have been made in the first place.<sup>109</sup>

Furthermore, in a move away from standard Republican mores, Augustus chose to align himself with as many gods and divinities as possible, rather than just one.<sup>110</sup> During the Triumviral period, many of the leaders, Octavian included, aligned themselves with a patron god: Marc Antony with Hercules, then Dionysus,<sup>111</sup> Sextus Pompeius with Neptune,<sup>112</sup> and Octavian with Apollo.<sup>113</sup> While some scholars continue to argue that Augustus kept his relationship almost exclusively with Apollo,<sup>114</sup> Gurval makes a convincing argument that this was not the case.<sup>115</sup> Indeed, Augustus aligned himself with many divinities, and Augustan authors equated him, or prayed on the emperor's behalf, to a plethora of gods.<sup>116</sup> In addition to Actian Apollo, Augustus, after his victories at Actium and Alexandria, dedicated temples to

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<sup>108</sup> Eck 2008, 30; Witschel 2008, 246; Mayer 2010, 127; Dunstan 2011, 246; Woolf 2012, 125. See in particular Taylor 1975, 148–190, for an extant analysis on this topic, where Taylor notes that Octavian assumed the divine position of 'Pharaoh' in Egypt and was even hailed by Greek Egyptians as Zeus Eleutherios.

<sup>109</sup> Yakobson 2014, 286–287. On the other hand, Gradel 2002 argues that worship of Augustus while the emperor was alive did in fact exist in Rome and Italy, albeit just not as part of the state cult. See also *Aur. Vic.* 1.1, where he records that priests and cults were indeed dedicated to Augustus 'as a god both in Rome and throughout the provinces (...) while the emperor was alive and after he had died'.

<sup>110</sup> Lange 2009, 39.

<sup>111</sup> *Plu. Ant.* 24.3.

<sup>112</sup> *Suet. Aug.* 16; *App. B Civ.* 5.100.

<sup>113</sup> Lange 2009, 39, 42; Gurval 1995, 87–93; Fishwick 1987, 81–82.

<sup>114</sup> See for example Zanker 1988, 50, 52–53; Pelling 1996, 43–44; Lange 2009, 2, 4, 46, 166–167; Rossi 2010, 22; Darcos 2014, 26; and Luke 2014, 151. See also Fishwick 1987, 87, where Fishwick, though arguing that Augustus did associate himself with multiple gods, still believes that Augustus only associated himself 'with a select group of state deities': *Divus Julius*, Mars Ultor, Jupiter, and Apollo.

<sup>115</sup> See Gurval 1995.

<sup>116</sup> Galinsky 2013, 37.

Mars and Neptune.<sup>117</sup> Horace mentions Deified Julius alongside Jupiter, Apollo, Venus, Mars, and Mercury as patron gods of Augustus.<sup>118</sup> In *Carmen* 1.12, Horace prays to Saturn to reign alongside Caesar while also associating the emperor with Mercury, while his *Carmen Saeculare* opens with a prayer not only to Apollo but also to Diana. In Horace's *Epistles* 2.1, Augustus is further compared to the Deified Romulus, alongside other gods such as Liber, Pollux and Castor, Apollo, and Janus.<sup>119</sup> In the famed *Aeneid*, Virgil has Jupiter promise Rome an 'empire without end', and has Vulcan make a shield, upon which is foretold the subjugation of the entire world under Augustus, presented to Aeneas by Venus.<sup>120</sup> Most emphatically, Virgil has Jupiter declare that all the gods, even 'savage Juno', will come together in concord and with one mind aid the greatness of Rome (culminating in Augustus).<sup>121</sup> Propertius has Actian Apollo fight alongside Octavian but also prays to Mars and Venus to continue to bring Augustus victories.<sup>122</sup> Ovid's *Fasti* connects Augustus to Vesta and Apollo, before having Mars, rather than Jupiter, reaffirm the famous proclamation of Rome's 'empire without end'.<sup>123</sup>

In the *Res Gestae*, Augustus directly mentions a multitude of divinities without giving any unambiguous preferential treatment to any single god. These include Fortuna, Honor, Virtus, Pax, Janus, Apollo, Deified Julius, Jupiter, Minerva, Juno, the Lares and Penates of Rome, Iuventas, Mater Magna, Castor, Saturn, Mars, and Vesta. Some of the major gods are mentioned more than once – Mars four times, Jupiter and Apollo each thrice, and Janus and Deified Julius each twice – but no single deity dominates the text. So, unlike Rome's earlier military leaders, Augustan literature portrayed the emperor as being supported by the entire pantheon.<sup>124</sup> This paper thus argues that Augustus may have been implementing a method very similar to Qin Shi Huangdi. By portraying a concord of gods, all of whom

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<sup>117</sup> Suet. *Aug.* 18.

<sup>118</sup> Hor. *Carm.* 1.2.

<sup>119</sup> Hor. *Epist.* 2.1.

<sup>120</sup> See Verg. *Aen.* 8.729ff. and Putnam 1998, 151, 153.

<sup>121</sup> Verg. *Aen.* 1.279ff.

<sup>122</sup> Prop. 3.4, 4.6

<sup>123</sup> Ov. *Fast.* 6.359ff.

<sup>124</sup> Lacey 1996, 68.

supported Augustus, the emperor monopolised divine support, further consolidated his position, and prevented rivals from also claiming divine aid as was the case during the Triumviral period.<sup>125</sup>

While this unprecedented claim to monopolised divine support helped justify Augustus' regime, it also created a conundrum similar to that which Qin Shi Huangdi faced. In Roman culture, military successes were dependent on divine support. We see this clearly depicted in Augustan-era literature, with numerous examples of Augustus' divine support leading to military victories.<sup>126</sup> Ovid has Jupiter explain to Venus that Augustus 'will have us in his battles' and that 'whatsoever the habitable earth sustains will be his, the sea too will serve him!'.<sup>127</sup> Propertius prays to Mars to bring on the day when 'I would see the chariots of [Augustus] laden with spoils, and for captured chiefs to sit under arms'.<sup>128</sup> Propertius, speaking of Actium, further declares that 'Rome conquers by the faith of Phoebus (i.e. Apollo)'.<sup>129</sup> The opening of *Georgics* has Virgil praise Augustus as divine and call for the 'the entirety of the world' to accept him as sole ruler.<sup>130</sup> Indeed, the very concept of Rome's 'empire without end' was pronounced by the gods, with Jupiter doing so in the *Aeneid* and Mars in the *Fasti*.

Conversely, whenever a general did suffer a loss, it was almost always accredited to a failure of piety or some affront to the divine.<sup>131</sup> Livy places the blame for the sack of Rome by the Gauls (390/387 BCE) on the Romans for losing their piety.<sup>132</sup> Publius Claudius Pulcher (cos. 249 BCE)'s loss against the Carthaginians was attributed to a significant act of impiety: his kicking of the sacred chickens into the

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125 See particularly Taylor 1975, 145, where Taylor argues that Cornelius Gallus, Egypt's first Prefect under the Augustan regime, fell from favour because divine favours were offered to Gallus, which led him to 'become in a sense a rival to Octavian and was recalled under circumstances that led him to take his own life'.

126 Richardson 2012, 81.

127 Ov. *Met.* 15.821, 830–831.

128 Prop. 3.4.6, 13–14.

129 Prop. 4.6.57.

130 Verg. *G.* 1.25ff.

131 Zanker 1988, 184–185; Ando 2000, 284; Woolf 2012, 114–116.

132 Liv. 5.38.1. Marcus Furius Camillus' subsequent success in repelling the Gauls was accredited to his piety (Liv. 5.49–50).

sea.<sup>133</sup> Gaius Flaminius (cos. 223, 217 BCE) lost at Trasimene due to his refusal to attend religious rituals, thus causing his command to be defective, which Livy described as his 'waging a war not only against the Senate but even against the immortal gods'.<sup>134</sup> Similarly, Dionysius of Halicarnassus imputes the loss of Marcus Licinius Crassus (cos. 70, 55 BCE) against the Parthians to the Roman commander going to war 'having set himself against the divine'.<sup>135</sup> Ovid sardonically warns Augustus not to fight against the gods: 'Nor would I wish for you, Caesar, although you hasten to conquer, to move your standards if the auspices forbid it'.<sup>136</sup>

From this, one can see that Augustus' decision to create a unified pantheon wholly supporting his regime also created a 'double-edged sword', comparable to Qin Shi Huangdi's predicament. As is evident, military losses were often attributed to a failure of religious ritual or an act of impiety by the commander, causing the gods to withdraw their support.<sup>137</sup> If the gods were truly on Rome's side, then the Romans should be victorious in every battle, particularly if the gods were of one mind, as was presented in the Augustan imperial self-fashioning.<sup>138</sup> This is exacerbated by the fact that, as in China, Romans also viewed their 'empire without end' as granted by the gods, and thought that the conquest of foreign peoples was divinely ordained. Much like Confucius' exclamation that it was impious for 'barbarians' to threaten China, Propertius, after a lengthy diatribe against Cleopatra, declares that Rome 'presides over the entire world and stands not to be destroyed by human hands: these walls the gods have founded, [and] these walls the gods also protect', presenting a worldview where it was sacrilegiously wrong for Rome to be threatened by foreign powers.<sup>139</sup> Indeed, as Gurval elaborates, civil war in Rome was often presented as 'impious' while foreign conquests were divinely sanctioned.<sup>140</sup>

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133 For the records of this event, see Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.7 and Suet. *Tib.* 2, cf. Rosenstein 1990, 79, and Green 2023, 70–72.

134 Liv. 21.63.6, cf. Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.8. On this, see Rosenstein 1990, 78, and Gottlieb 1998, 22.

135 Dion. Hal. 2.6.4.

136 Ov. *Fast.* 6.763–764.

137 Rosenstein 1990, 55.

138 Rosenstein 1990, 56; Ando 2000, 285; Koortbojian 2006, 190–194; Erskine 2010, 35–36; Woolf 2012, 117.

139 Prop. 3.11.57–59; Gurval 1995, 203–204.

140 Zanker 1988, 2; Gurval 1995, 148–149, 180–181. See also Woolf 1993, 176, where Woolf argues that the Romans viewed civil

Seeing such points of comparability, this paper therefore posits that a similar interpretation can be applied to the cases of both emperors; Augustus, too, eschewed any mention of military setbacks or revolts against his ‘universal rule’ to avoid destabilising his tenuous position.<sup>141</sup> This is further complicated by the fact that Augustus centralised military command and glory by having all military campaigns be undertaken under his auspices.<sup>142</sup> Thus, Augustus could not have easily laid the blame for military setbacks on another general, since these men were acting as legates under his command, without simultaneously incriminating himself of impiety.<sup>143</sup> Much like Qin Shi Huangdi, Augustus could not afford to show any failures in subjugating foreigners and creating his divinely-ordained ‘empire without end’: to do so would be to suggest that he did not truly possess the gods’ unwavering support.<sup>144</sup>

Indeed, in the *Res Gestae*, Augustus does not mention any military losses or setbacks. The infamous massacre at Teutoburg Forest was entirely ignored, especially since this disaster was viewed by Augustus as a sign of divine wrath and, as such, certainly not to be advertised.<sup>145</sup> Even when losses were inferred in the *Res Gestae*, Augustus ensured that the audience knew that they occurred due to failures not associated with Augustus. When Augustus mentioned his restoration of military standards from Spain, Gaul, and the Dalmatians, the emperor stressed that they were ‘lost by other generals’ before

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wars as a sacrilegious breach of the ‘Peace of the Gods’ (*Pax Deorum*). For some examples of ‘impious’ civil war, see Hor. *Epod.* 7.19–20, *Carm.* 1.2, 1.14, 1.21, 1.35, 2.1, 3.6 and Prop. 2.15.41ff., where Propertius speaks of Rome’s civil wars and is comforted in knowing that at least his ‘battles’ in love offended no gods. This is very similar to China, where Chinese authors believed that Heaven withdrew its Mandate completely during the chaotic Warring States, and China was left without a legitimate ‘Son of Heaven’ for many centuries. On this, see Yang 2003, 383.

<sup>141</sup> Ridley 2003, 54.

<sup>142</sup> For a further discussion on Augustus and his supreme military command (*summum imperium auspiciumque*), see Vervaeke 2014, 275–285.

<sup>143</sup> Havener 2016, 27. Of course, one must note that Augustus seemed to have acknowledged Varus’ loss at Teutoburg while he was alive. Its omission from the *Res Gestae* could be explained by the fact that the text was a posthumous inscription meant for future generations, one which could not allow the basis of his reign – and the reign of his successors – to be challenged.

<sup>144</sup> Gottlieb 1998, 29.

<sup>145</sup> Cass. Dio 56.24.2: Cassius Dio, before listing all the terrible omens which preceded and followed Varus’ loss, claims that Augustus viewed the loss as due to ‘the anger of some divinity’.



his regime, while he was able to regain the standards when he defeated the enemies.<sup>146</sup> Relatively ambiguous campaigns, such as the abortive invasions of Arabia and Ethiopia, were presented as indubitable successes.<sup>147</sup> Augustus never mentioned the arduousness of his campaigns in Spain, Illyria, and Germania,<sup>148</sup> and spoke of the conquest (and re-conquest) of Pannonia in a single sentence,<sup>149</sup> betraying none of the struggle described by Suetonius as 'the most serious of all external wars since the ones against Carthage'.<sup>150</sup> Comparable to Qin Shi Huangdi's portrayal of the celerity and ease in his conquest of All under Heaven, Augustus' subjugation of the world, thanks to his divine aid, was presented as swift and complete. Due to a need to stress his unique and unparalleled support by the gods, Augustus, despite the blatant untruthfulness of it, claimed that he had 'placed the whole world under the command of the Roman people'.<sup>151</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Through this comparative analysis of Qin Shi Huangdi's and Augustus' propaganda, we are able to improve our understanding of both. Qin Shi Huangdi sought to legitimise his rule by depicting his position as the divinely supported Son of Heaven, a position which monopolised divine favour. Since military losses or a failure to subjugate All under Heaven was a sign that the gods had withdrawn their support and that the ruler was not truly the Son of Heaven, however, Qin Shi Huangdi could not afford

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<sup>146</sup> *RGDA* 29. The Spanish standards were likely the ones lost by Pompey's sons after their defeat by Julius Caesar at the Battle of Munda in 45 BCE. Although, Caes. *BHis*. 31 records that Julius Caesar was able to capture all thirteen of the standards (while Appian and Cassius Dio do not mention the standards at all), which leaves the identity of the ones recovered by Augustus still mysterious. The Dalmatian standards might have been the ones lost by Aulus Gabinius and Publius Vatinius in the 40s BCE. The identity of Gallic standards is so far still unknown.

<sup>147</sup> *RGDA* 26.

<sup>148</sup> See Zanker 1988, 187: 'There are no references to the difficult and protracted campaigns in Spain, Illyria and Germany. Indeed, the emphasis on scenes of peace and security helped wipe out the memory of these wars'.

<sup>149</sup> *RDGA* 30.

<sup>150</sup> Suet. *Tib*. 16.

<sup>151</sup> *RGDA pr*.

to display any military setbacks in his self-portrayal and propaganda. The legitimacy of his regime was heavily dependent on divine favour, and military losses, or a failure to conquer the known world, would have shaken the foundations of his rule.

Augustus, too, monopolised divine support by portraying a concord of gods for his reign, rather than a single patron god as seemed to have been more common during preceding times. Moreover, in order to re-establish the Roman sense of superiority and what was considered the ‘natural order’ – Roman supremacy over the known world – Augustan propaganda also flaunted the idea that the gods had granted Rome an ‘empire without end’, which Augustus had undertaken to bring about. Since there were no more adverse divinities, however, any failure to complete this divinely mandated task would imply that Augustus had lost the divine support which he needed as a legitimising factor for his regime.<sup>152</sup> Thus, in a similar way to Qin Shi Huangdi, Augustus also avoided mentioning any losses or setbacks against foreign foes while asserting that he had indeed completed his divinely mandated task of conquering the known world.

In both cases, we see a fascinating parallel of two ancient cultures approaching a similar problem with an astoundingly similar solution. Through this comparative study, we have pinpointed the rationale behind why and how these two inaugural emperors crafted their self-image: for Qin Shi Huangdi and Augustus, monopolistic divine support compelled them to present themselves as conquerors of the known world, with a failure to be seen as doing so a sign that they did not truly have such unparalleled divine support and thus were not fit to rule.

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App. *B Civ.* = Appian, *Civil Wars*, in *Roman History*

Aur. Vic. = Aurelius Victor, *De Caesaribus*

Caes. *BCiv.* = Julius Caesar, *Civil War*

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<sup>152</sup> The very preface of the *RGDA*, as Chauvot 2016, 69, argues, shows that Augustus presented himself as having successfully completed Jupiter’s proclamation.

- Caes. *BGall.* = Julius Caesar, *The Gallic War*  
Caes. *BHis.* = Julius Caesar, *The Spanish War*  
Cass. Dio = Cassius Dio, *Roman History*  
Cic. *Nat. D.* = Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*  
Dion. Hal. = Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*  
Hor. *Carm.* = Horace, *Odes*  
Hor. *Carm. Saec.* = Horace, *Carmen Saeculare*  
Hor. *Epist.* = Horace, *Epistles*  
Hor. *Epod.* = Horace, *Epodes*  
Liv. = Livy, *History of Rome*  
Man. *Ast.* = Manilius, *Astronomica*  
Ov. *Ars Am.* = Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*  
Ov. *Fast.* = Ovid, *Fasti*  
Ov. *Met.* = Ovid, *Metamorphoses*  
Ov. *Tr.* = Ovid, *Tristia*  
Petron. *Sat.* = Petronius, *Satyricon*  
Plut. *Ant.* = Plutarch, *Lives: Antony*  
Prop. = Propertius, *Elegies*  
*RDGA* = Augustus, *Res Gestae*  
Suet. *Aug.* = Suetonius, *Life of Divine Augustus*, in *Lives of the Caesars*  
Suet. *Tib.* = Suetonius, *Life of Tiberius*, in *Lives of the Caesars*  
Vell. *Pat.* = Velleius Paterculus, *Compendium of Roman History*  
Verg. *Aen.* = Virgil, *Aeneid*  
Verg. *G.* = Virgil, *Georgics*  
Vitr. *De Arch.* = Vitruvius, *On Architecture*

OTHER ABBREVIATIONS

cos. = consul in the year of (...)

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