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Geography as Imperial Science: Strabo and Augustan Rome

As a descendant of Greek geography, Roman geography has often been denigrated by scholars due to its explicit attention to the practical applications of geography rather than some of the seemingly more philosophical questions that interested Greek writers (Dilke 1987). Notably, Roman geography often acknowledges an allegiance to contemporary political structures. Under no Roman leader is the tendency to utilize geography for political aims more evident than the emperor Augustus. In his ground-breaking work, *Space, Geography, and Politics in the Early Roman Empire*, Claude Nicolet demonstrates convincingly that representations of space and geography were critical to the Romans' conceptions of identity and empire during the Augustan Period (1991, 1ff.).

While Nicolet's work provides masterful analysis of many administrative documents which attest to the regime's interest in controlling space, his work does not examine the text of any ancient geographers at length, a type of project that he suggests "can only be philological" (8). In this paper, *pace* Nicolet, I would like to undertake a critical reading of the Augustan geographer Strabo. In particular, I seek to examine the ways in which Strabo defines geography as an intellectual and textual enterprise—one intimately related to the functioning of military and political power. While my approach suggests a type of genre study (i.e., what does "geography" mean to Strabo), I also seek to integrate Strabo, whose work has long been read only by "specialists" in the history of science, into broader discussions of ideology and imperialism in the Augustan Period.