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The Auctoritas of Augustus

Res Gestae 34, 3 is commonly understood as Augustus' crowning definition of his power. The Greek reads, *axiómati pánton diénegka*; the Latin is restored, 'post id tem[pus] a]uctoritate [omnibus praestiti]'; and the passage is translated, 'I excelled all in influence' (Brunt and Moore). For M. Grant, the shift from Republic to Principate was a shift *From Imperium to Auctoritas*. For K. Galinsky in *Augustan Culture*, *auctoritas* resembles the leadership style advocated by management guru Tom Peters.

But there is a difficulty. *Auctoritas* in the sense of the emperor's personal influence is a hapax; it is never used in this sense in connection with Augustus or any other emperor.

In this talk I propose interpreting the Greek differently, restoring the Latin, 'a]uctoritate [omnium praestiti]', and translating, 'I prevailed by the express will of all'. Augustus would thus be referring not to his own *auctoritas*, but to the *auctoritas* of his subjects. The clause would be a variation on an argument running through the *Res Gestae*, that the Emperor ruled by consensus.

In support I argue that:

1. This is a possible interpretation of the Greek.
2. Collective expressions of Italian communities were termed (*publicae*) *auctoritates* (as in Cicero, *Verr. I*). Under Augustus and Tiberius, *auctoritas* was used to refer to local decrees (EJ 329) or to informal preliminaries to decrees (EJ 69; 333).
3. In the *Res Gestae*, *auctoritas* otherwise refers to decrees of the Roman senate (12, 1; 20, 4).
4. Augustus makes a running argument in the *Res Gestae* that he enjoyed a consensus of support and recognition, and the *auctoritas* passage belongs in this context (9-10; 14; 25). The *auctoritas* passage falls between two declarations of universal consensus (34, 1: 'per consensus universorum'; 35: 'senatus et equester ordo populusque Romanus universus') and says much the same thing; it refers to the will or opinion of public bodies, especially the councils and assemblies of Italian towns.
5. *Auctoritas* appears in inscriptions in connection with the emperors only in connection specific measures (e.g. placing *termini*: *ILS* 964; 5963) and formal collective decisions (*ILS* 4966: 'senatus c(oire) c(onvocari) c(ogi) permisit e lege Iulia ex auctoritate Aug(usti)'). Nowhere does *auctoritas* connote overarching imperial influence.

Interpreting *auctoritas* in *Res Gestae* 34, 3 as the express will of subjects is only a proposal. Either interpretation -the Emperor's influence or the will of his subjects -is possible. But the proposal fits both external comparanda and the internal logic of the *Res Gestae* better -and has the virtue of shifting attention from a single abstract noun to the concrete political system in which Augustus exercised his undoubted influence.