DOMENICO CARRO

ORBIS MARITIMVS

Imperial Geography and the Maritime Grand Strategy of Rome

ROMA ÆTERNA Series

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On the cover:
The Roman Empire on the planisphere
in orthographic projection
(D. CARRO drawing)

Index

I.	*Pax Augusta* and the Construction of the Empire	4
II.	Geographical Knowledge, Cartography, and Nautical Documents	-
III.	Naval Presence in the Mediterranean and the Strategic Role of Imperial Fleets	-
IV.	Naval Presence in the Atlantic Ocean and Projections toward the Islands	-
V.	Naval Presence in the North Sea and Projections into the Northern Ocean	-
VI.	Naval Presence in the Black Sea and Projections toward the Caspian Sea	-
VII.	Naval Presence in the Red Sea and Projections into the Persian Gulf	-
VIII.	Projections toward the Southern Ocean	-
IX.	Projections into the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea	-
X.	Maritime Strategy of the High Empire	-
	Abbreviations	24
	Ancient sources cited	25
	Bibliography	27

I
Pax Augusta and the Construction of the Empire

Romanae spatium est Urbis et orbis idem.
OV. *fast.* 2.684

In the wake of the naval victory at Actium, having established peace on land and sea[1], Augustus was able to progressively extend Rome's dominion—the *orbis Romanus*—to the very edges of the known world—the *orbis terrarum*—at least insofar as it encompassed habitable lands and navigable seas[2]. This expansion followed the conceptualizations of the time, which were, of course, grounded in classical antiquity's perceptions of the terraqueous globe. For the peoples of the Mediterranean—accustomed to their privileged climate—both the frigid northern lands and the scorching southern zones, corresponding to the Saharan, Libyan-Nubian, and Arabian deserts, appeared virtually uninhabitable.

To the west, Rome's provinces faced directly onto the Ocean, while to the east they extended only modestly beyond the Syrian shore of the Mediterranean. Beyond that point, the world remained too distant, having been only fleetingly penetrated by the ephemeral campaign of Alexander the Great, and ultimately excluded from Roman conquest due to the persistent resistance of the Parthians. Setting aside this inviolate East, the *oecumene* did not appear substantially vaster than the Roman Empire itself, as it had been conceived, assembled, and ordered by Augustus.

That outcome, however, was far from assured at the close of the Actian War. At the time the Temple of Janus was shut, the

[1] Cfr. "*terra marique esset parta victoriis pax*" (*R.Gest.div.Aug.* 13).
[2] "Rome rules over all the land accessible and habitable by man, and also over the entire sea—not only up to the Pillars of Hercules, but even over the Ocean, except for that part which is unnavigable" (DION. HAL. *ant.* 1.3.3). Strabo specifies the extent (in the time of Tiberius) and the nature of the rule exercised by the Romans over "the best and most well-known parts of our inhabited world" (STRAB. 17.3.24).

Roman Empire—despite its considerable territorial reach—was neither geographically cohesive nor easily defensible. It had taken shape during the Republican era through a series of circumstantial events, largely lacking any deliberate or rational expansionist strategy. Moreover, it had been gravely weakened by civil wars, especially in the eastern Mediterranean basin, whose populations had for years supported the insurgent cause of Brutus and Cassius—who had arbitrarily seized the Balkan and Asian provinces—and had later joined the vast Levantine coalition mustered by Antony and Cleopatra in open defiance of the Roman Senate[3].

Amidst this state of ongoing vulnerability to both internal and external threats, imperial security required, on the one hand, a robust and efficient military apparatus at constant readiness, and on the other, a series of significant interventions capable of rendering the Empire sufficiently secure. To ensure the timely deployment of military forces when needed, Augustus instituted a standing army—the first in Roman history—after over seven centuries during which Rome had waged wars using ad hoc legions and fleets raised solely for specific campaigns. This innovation, conceived with remarkable foresight precisely after peace had been solemnly proclaimed across all lands and seas, would remain in force throughout the Empire's existence. We shall return to examine this institution in greater detail, focusing on the maritime forces, in Chapter III and the subsequent sections. For now, let us consider the principal measures undertaken by Augustus to confer a more rational territorial structure upon the Empire.

First and foremost, the *Mare Nostrum* could not yet be regarded as an internal basin of the Empire, although the

[3] Among the kingdoms in the Mediterranean, the following monarchs had actively contributed to the military operations of the Eastern coalition: Sadala, king of Thrace; Tarcondimotus of Plain Cilicia; Philadelphus of Paphlagonia; Amyntas of Galatia; Polemon of Pontus; Archelaus of Cappadocia; Mithridates II of Commagene; Herod of Judea; Malchus of Nabataean Arabia; and Bogud of Mauretania (PLUT. *Ant.* 61). Further contributions came from the kingdom of the Sabaeans in Arabia Felix and from more eastern realms, such as the Indo-Greek kingdom on the northwestern shore of the Indian subcontinent (cf. VERG. *Aen.* 8.685–688 and 705–706).

annexation of Egypt following Cleopatra's suicide had already made a significant contribution to the goal of consolidating Roman dominion along the entire Mediterranean coastline. Achieving full continuity, however, still required addressing several other potential fractures, particularly in those kingdoms that had been granted the status of *amici populi Romani*[4], yet lacked rulers appointed by the emperor.

Among the coastal realms, several held particular geostrategic importance: Mauretania, due to the great length of its shores from the *Mare Ibericum* to the Atlantic Ocean; Nabataean Arabia and Judea, by virtue of their positions linking the Syrian coast to the Red Sea; and Thrace, which controlled access to the Black Sea. The kings of Nabataea and Judea were granted the emperor's trust in light of their demonstrated zeal prior to Cleopatra's final defeat. The Nabataeans had burned the ships she had prepared in the Red Sea for her escape[5], while Herod had sailed to Rhodes to meet Octavian before his fleet's advance toward Egypt[6].

Augustus entrusted the Mauretanian kingdom to the twenty-seven-year-old Juba II[7], whose education he had overseen in Rome and whom he married to Cleopatra Selene, daughter of Mark Antony, raised in the household of Octavia. Their son and successor, Ptolemy—like Herod the Great's grandson[8]—was also educated within the imperial family[9]. Similar criteria were later applied to the ruling house of Thrace: upon the death of Rhoemetalces I, Augustus assigned the coastal region to Cotys II, whose wife, Antonia Tryphaena, was a daughter of the King of

[4] Client kingdoms were the preferred Roman solution in cases where direct annexation was too burdensome or problematic to administer. These were placed under Rome's protection through the granting of *amicitia*: "Formula che comportava diritti e doveri: diritto di essere assistito in eventuali attacchi esterni, dovere di offrire determinate somme a Roma e piccoli contingenti militari in caso di aiuto richiesto." (SIRAGO 2006, p. 11).
[5] CASS. DIO 51.7.1 e PLUT. *Ant.* 69.
[6] IOS. *bell. Iud.* 1.387-393.
[7] He was the son of Juba I, king of Numidia, defeated by Caesar in the African War.
[8] Marcus Julius Agrippa, better known as Herod Agrippa, future king of Judea.
[9] He was raised in the household of Antonia Minor, daughter of Mark Antony and Octavia.

Pontus and great-granddaughter of Mark Antony[10]; their three sons, likewise, were educated in Rome, each destined to rule a different kingdom[11].

In reality, the Empire was not only divided into provinces and client kingdoms, but also included cities and territories whose relationships with Rome were governed by distinct arrangements[12]. Along the maritime frontier, notable examples included Rhodes and Lycia—whose cities had once resisted Cassius and Brutus and retained their autonomy—and the territory of Sparta, ruled by Euricles, who had sided against Antony during the Actian War. Augustus did not interfere with Rhodes or Lycia and granted Roman citizenship to the tyrant of Sparta—who became Gaius Julius Euricles—bestowing upon him the island of Cythera (Cerigo) during one of his journeys to Greece. On that same occasion, but for the opposite reason, he stripped Athens of the island of Aegina, which dominates the Saronic Gulf facing Piraeus, and also deprived it of the tributary city of Eretria, which controlled the southern access to the Euripus Strait.

Another discontinuity along the Mediterranean coastline was represented by the Maritime Alps, which, like the more northerly Alpine regions, had never been subjected to Roman rule. This created a sharp division between Italy and Gaul. To remedy this problematic anomaly, Augustus ordered a series of campaigns led by his legates. These began with the suppression of a revolt in 26 BCE in the territory of the Salassi[13]—where, following victory, the city of *Augusta Praetoria Salassorum* (modern Aosta) was founded in the princeps' honor—and concluded in 14 BCE with

[10] His maternal grandmother was Antonia of Tralles, daughter of Mark Antony (who had married a cousin, Antonia Hybrida, in his second marriage).

[11] Also raised in the house of Antonia Minor were Remetalces—future king of Eastern Thrace like his father—Coti, future king of Lesser Armenia, and Polemon, future king of Pontus like his grandfather (CASS. DIO 59.12.2).

[12] "Of the whole territory subject to the Romans, some parts are ruled by kings, while the Romans retain others for themselves, calling them provinces and sending governors and tax collectors. But there are also free cities, either because they have had friendly relations with the Romans from the beginning or because they were granted freedom by the Romans as an honor. There are also certain potentates, phylarchs, and priests subject to them, who live according to ancestral laws" (STRAB. 17.3.24-25).

[13] CASS. DIO 53.25.2-3.

the submission of the so-called *Ligures Comati*, who until then had remained independent in the Maritime Alps[14]. This success was widely celebrated by the emperor himself[15] and commemorated with the erection of the imposing Trophy of the Alps (*Tropaeum Alpium*) at La Turbie on the French Riviera.

On the Atlantic front, Augustus sought to definitively resolve the gap in Roman control across the two vast contiguous regions facing the Bay of Biscay: Aquitania, shaken by revolt, and Cantabria, which had never before been conquered. In Gaul, the emperor dispatched the proconsul Marcus Valerius Messalla Corvinus, who had previously commanded one of Agrippa's naval squadrons at Actium. Messalla's campaign extended not only through Aquitania proper—between the Atlantic coast, the Pyrenees, and the Garonne River—but also to the wider region reaching as far north as the Loire and east to the Rhône Valley. Once the region was pacified (27 BCE), the province of Aquitania was formally expanded to these broader boundaries. Augustus, having arrived in *Narbo* (Narbonne), ordered a census of all Gaul, while Messalla returned to Rome to celebrate a triumph[16].

From Gaul, the emperor moved to Spain, where hostilities instigated by the *Cantabri* and the *Astures* justified a campaign that would lead to the annexation of the entire northern maritime region of Hispania, up to the Pyrenees. That war unfolded in two successive phases: the first (26–25 BCE), commanded personally by Augustus, achieved success in large part thanks to decisive Roman naval intervention[17]; the second (20–19 BCE), led by Agrippa, proved necessary to secure lasting peace.

At that point, the entire Atlantic coastline of Europe—from the Pillars of Hercules to the mouth of the Rhine—belonged to the Roman Empire. Through the campaigns ordered by Augustus and led by his two adoptive sons—Drusus (from 12 to 9 BCE) and

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[14] PLIN. *nat.* 3.135-136; CASS. DIO 54.24.3.

[15] *R.Gest.div.Aug.* 26.3. The *amicitia* with the client king Cottius (already an *amicus* of Caesar) was also confirmed over the mountainous region adjacent to the Maritime Alps, which from that time became known as the Cottian Alps (AMM. 15,10,3).

[16] APP. *civ.* 4.38; STRAB. 4.2.1; TIB. 1.7.3-12; LIV. *per.* 134; CASS. DIO 53.22.5; *Fasti triumphales* (*CIL* 1-1, p. 50); POSTGATE 1903, pp. 112-115.

[17] CASS. DIO 53.25.2 e 5; FLOR. *epit.* 2.33.49; OROS. 6.21.4-5.

Tiberius (in 8–7 BCE and again in 4–5 CE), both supported by naval forces—Roman control extended over a substantial portion of Germania, reaching as far as the Elbe River[18]. It is true that the later loss of Varus's three legions, massacred in the ambush at Teutoburg Forest due to the betrayal of the Romanized prince Gaius Julius Arminius (9 CE), temporarily hampered Rome's ability to conduct large-scale operations beyond the Rhine. Nevertheless, Tiberius's renewed intervention in Germania (10–12 CE), involving successful naval and land expeditions[19], allowed Rome to retain control over the coastal zone up to the mouth of the Elbe, thereby securing the continued loyalty of the coastal populations—namely the Batavi, Frisians, and Chauci. Finally, Augustus ordered the resumption of large-scale operations between the Rhine and the Elbe starting in 13 CE, assigning command to Germanicus, the young son of Drusus. The subsequent developments will be addressed in Chapter V.

Even though the northeastern frontier of the Empire had not yet been fully consolidated along the Elbe, a well-organized and reliable defensive line was firmly established along the Rhine. This river had naturally served as the base for both a fluvial and maritime fleet since the time of Drusus. Augustus sought to ensure similar security along the northern borders of the Alps and the Balkans. In fact, as a result of several military operations he ordered between 12 BCE and 6 CE in Pannonia, Illyricum, and Moesia, Roman rule was extended to the Danube[20].

In this regard, it is worth noting that the true strategic value of riverine frontiers did not lie solely in the limited protection that such waterways could offer[21]. We know, in fact, that the Germanic peoples were capable of navigating and waging war along rivers[22], while the Dacians and Goths were able to launch raids across the Danube with relative ease—at times even crossing it with wagons

[18] *R.Gest.div.Aug.* 26.2; VELL. 2.106.3; FLOR. *epit.* 2.30.22-27; CASS. DIO 55.6.
[19] VELL. 2.121.1; SUET. *Aug.* 18-20.
[20] *R.Gest.div.Aug.* 30; FLOR. *epit.* 2.28.19; SUET. *Aug.* 21.1-2 e *Tib.* 16.2-4.
[21] "Au plan militaire, les fleuves étaient des positions impossibles à tenir: le duc de Wellington l'affirmait sans ambage en 1808 lorsqu'il refusa le puissant fleuve Indus comme frontière Nord de l'Inde" (WHITTAKER 1989, p. 24).
[22] For instance, the Batavian naval battle on the Rhine: TAC. *hist.* 5.22-23.

over the frozen surface[23]. The most tangible and valuable advantage of frontier rivers instead consisted in the opportunity to exploit these long and wide waterways both for commercial navigation and for supplying the garrisons stationed along their course. They also served as operational corridors for the fluvial fleets[24], whose main missions included patrol surveillance, the suppression of hostile or illegal activities, and tactical support for ground forces when needed.

It should also be borne in mind that, in the absence of active hostilities in a given region, the frontiers of the Empire did not serve as impermeable barriers jealously protecting the civilized world from the menacing *barbaricum*. Rather, they were porous lines open to exchanges of mutual interest—commercial trade, diplomatic agreements with local chieftains, Roman cultural influence beyond administrated territories, military recruitment, and so on. Control over border crossings was therefore mostly aimed at fiscal needs (such as customs duties) and, of course, at ensuring security—preventing unauthorized entries[25] or even the simple clandestine passage of petty thieves[26].

Up to this point, we have briefly reviewed the main actions undertaken by Augustus for what we have called the "construction of the Empire"—that is, to render Rome's territorial dominion as cohesive, powerful, manageable, controllable, and defensible as possible. The results he achieved, marked by coherence and rationality—as scholars widely acknowledge[27]—suggest that they

[23] "Some race with wagons over the frozen back of the untamed Danube, where once only oars had passed" (CLAUD. *carm., Ruf.* 2.28-30).

[24] "Chains of forts along a river could also ensure the safe and speedy transport not only of trade goods but of military supplies for whatever purpose." (MATTERN 1999, ch. 3.2).

[25] "Dove … il *limes* si appoggiava al Reno e al Danubio, i punti controllati con accampamenti di unità militari coincidevano spesso con le foci di un affluente, il cui corso costituiva sempre una via seguita negli spostamenti di genti migranti e di commercianti." (FORNI 1987, p. 293)

[26] As an ancient inscription states, the emperor Commodus reinforced the garrisons along a section of the Danube "against the secret crossings of bandits" (*ad clandestinos latruncolorum transitus oppositis*: *CIL* 3.3385).

[27] "Augustus … filled in the territorial gaps and rounded off the areas of direct rule by completing the conquest of Spain, annexing the Alpine districts, and pushing the Balkan border to the Danube" (WHEELER 1993, p. 227). It was also

were pursued as part of a predetermined geopolitical plan. Unfortunately, none of the scant surviving ancient sources provide explicit confirmation of such an intent. Nonetheless, we may attempt to investigate along these lines by examining whether Augustus possessed the requisite knowledge to deliberately conceive and implement such a strategy. But before doing so, we must ask whether it is historically accurate to attribute to the ancient Romans a decision-making process equivalent to our modern concept of "strategy."

On this point, an analysis of the ancient sources reveals—as might be expected—that the Romans indeed possessed a geopolitical[28] mindset, albeit *ante litteram*. In classical antiquity, the term *strategia* held a broader and more generic meaning than it does today, and was often used to describe what we would now classify as tactical planning. However, when referring to genuine strategic thought or long-term plans, Latin authors such as Cicero, Livy, Tacitus, and Fronto often used the term *consilium*[29]. Terminology aside, ancient Roman historians like Polybius, Strabo, Florus, Cornelius Celsus (as cited by John the Lydian), and Ammianus Marcellinus demonstrated a remarkably clear understanding of the strategic importance of specific geographic areas[30]. It would thus be illogical to exclude the possibility of geopolitical and geostrategic analysis at the highest decision-making levels of the Empire.

Although the formulation of strategy, planning, and resulting directives was not entrusted to a general staff in the

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appreciated "l'intelligenza geografica di Augusto, l'imperatore che rinuncia all'idea di sottomettere la ricca Arabia Eudaemon … e resiste alla tentazione di ridurre a provincia l'Armenia maggiore … ma combatte a lungo per sottomettere l'arco alpino … e per raggiungere i confini sull'Oceano Atlantico e sul Danubio" (DE ROMANIS 2016, p. 45)

[28] "Greeks and Romans … could think strategically – even in geopolitical terms" (WHEELER 1993, pp. 23-24).

[29] "*Consilium*, also a synonym for stratagem, frequently appears in the sense of 'strategy' in Latin sources" (*Ibid.* p. 217). The Roman sources cited include: CIC. *Att.* 7.11.3; 10.8.4; LIV. 36.7.21; TAC. *ann.* 1.1.8 and *hist.* 2.81.3; FRONTO *Ver.* 2.3.1. Cornelius Celsus was one of the sources used by Vegetius (VEG. *mil.* 1.8).

[30] *Ibid.* p. 239. The sources cited include: POL. 1.10 and 4.38-45; STRAB. 6.4.1-2; FLOR. *epit.* 1.33.3-5; AMM. 23.5.18 e LYD. *mag*. 3.33-34.

modern sense, there were evidently individuals who ensured that all necessary actions were effectively carried out[31]—likely across various branches of the military administration[32] and under the supervision of the *consilium principis*[33] or the emperor's inner circle of advisors, the *amici principis*[34].

As for Augustus' awareness in directing his strategic choices after having thoroughly acquired and carefully assessed all relevant factors, we can already find considerable evidence in his political testament—now known as the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*. This was the second[35] of four documents personally written by the emperor and entrusted to the custody of the Vestal Virgins, to be made public only upon his death.

Contrary to popular belief, the *Res Gestae* is not his autobiography; that role belonged to the *Commentarii de vita sua*, a now-lost literary work of significantly greater length and written in the refined stylistic elegance that characterized Augustus' prose. Instead, the *Res Gestae* is a concise and meticulous summary of his actions at the helm of the state.

Of particular interest is the third section of the text[36], which recounts his achievements by sea, overseas, and beyond the Alps—his land and naval victories, territorial conquests, and diplomatic successes. This section, which has been likened to a veritable lesson in political and military geography[37], provides a

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[31] "Emperor's ability to transfer units from one frontier to another and to assemble expeditionary forces for major wars clearly indicates that general staff work was done even if the specific mechanisms of higher command and control remain one of the arcana of Roman government." (*Ibid* p. 234).

[32] "Romans clearly planned in many different spheres of military administration. … In any case, there was no lack of strategy" (*Ibid.* p. 235).

[33] SUET. *Aug.* 35.3; CASS. DIO 53.21.4.

[34] "Augustus had a parallel private committee of his own friends (the *amici principis*), chosen by himself, and we may guess that it was in this committee that the decisions which really mattered were taken before presentation to the *consilium*." (AUSTIN - RANKOV 1995, ch. 5).

[35] The first document contained the testamentary dispositions: SUET. *Aug.* 101; CASS. DIO 56.33.

[36] *R.Gest.div.Aug.* 25-33.

[37] "les chapitres 25-33… se présentent très évidemment comme une véritable leçon de géographie politique et militaire." (NICOLET 1988, p. 34).

rational and synthesized overview of the extraordinary geographical extent attained by the Roman dominion[38].

Even more fascinating would have been the reading of the *Breviarium totius imperii*, the third of the documents Augustus entrusted to the Vestals after drafting it himself. This document contained an inventory of the Empire's resources: the size and distribution of military personnel, the structure and deployment of the fleets, the condition of the provinces and tributary kingdoms, the amounts of money held in the public treasury and imperial coffers, the figures for direct and indirect taxation, revenues, fixed public expenditures, and discretionary donations[39].

Although we no longer have access to this critical document, its mere existence and the nature of its contents leave no doubt about the emperor's deep conviction regarding the necessity of transmitting to his successor the essential knowledge about the state of the Empire—data that, together with geopolitical information, were indispensable for correctly identifying governmental priorities and formulating coherent strategies. Augustus had long been persuaded of this need: thirty-seven years earlier, when seriously ill and fearing imminent death, he had already delivered a similar document to the serving consul[40].

The scope of this knowledge went beyond the ideal requirements for senators outlined by Cicero—namely, those responsible for supreme governance under the Republic[41]. Augustus' example was followed by several of his successors, who sought to publish updated data on the Empire's condition. The first was the young Emperor Gaius[42], better known by his

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[38] "les *Res Gestae* affirment bien la maîtrise de la terre habitée (*orbis terrarum*, dès la première phrase). Et elles la prouvent méthodiquement, sans recours à la moindre symbolique, par une série d'énumérations topographiques qui correspondent à des connaissances géographiques précises, naturellement conformes à la science du temps" (*Ibid.* pp. 39-40).

[39] SUET. *Aug.* 101.6-7; TAC. *ann.* 1.11.3; CASS. DIO 56.33.2.

[40] CASS. DIO 53.30.1.

[41] "A senator must have thorough knowledge of the conditions of the state, the strength of the armed forces, the availability of the treasury, which peoples are allies, friends or tributaries, the laws, the conditions, the treaties" (CIC. *leg.* 3.18.41).

[42] *Rationes imperii*: text lost (SUET. *Cal.* 16.1).

childhood nickname, Caligula. Another may have been Claudius, or more likely Nero, since data from his reign were used by Flavius Josephus in composing a speech delivered by King Agrippa II, meant to illustrate the power of Rome across its provinces and client kingdoms[43]. This latter text can therefore offer us a more concrete idea of the type of detailed information included in Augustus' *Breviarium*.

Finally, the fourth document left by Augustus for the benefit of his successor contained various recommendations and pieces of advice on internal policy, as well as the famous *consilium*—which we should by now interpret as a true strategic directive—not to further expand the Empire beyond its current borders. The aim was to avoid making its governance unmanageable and to prevent the risk of losing territories already annexed[44]. Augustus' conviction—on which we shall briefly return in Chapter V—reflected his understandable concern over a potential imbalance between the revenues of a new province and the costs of defending it, as well as between the Empire's size and the capacity of its armed forces. He was fully aware that the latter could not be indefinitely expanded (due to recruitment issues and financial constraints), having personally witnessed the difficulty of replacing the three legions lost by Varus five years before his death[45].

We have thus established that Augustus, who lived in a society where strategic thinking was by no means unknown, indeed possessed a personal and profound understanding of the information necessary to consciously and rationally conceive his strategies. We also know, as previously mentioned, that no ancient text provides any clear insight into the geostrategic assessments

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[43] IOS. *bell. Iud.* 2.16.345-401.

[44] CASS. DIO 56.33.5. Tacitus, with a superficiality unworthy of such a renowned historian, refers to "the advice not to expand the borders of the Empire, whether out of fear or envy, it is not known" (TAC. *ann.* 1.11.4).

[45] "Augusto non fu in grado di sostituire le tre legioni distrutte nel 9 d.C. nella selva di Teutoburgo. Un problema gravissimo era rappresentato dagli oneri finanziari che l'organismo militare imponeva al bilancio imperiale. Il collegamento fra esercito e fiscalità (del resto fenomeno costante in tutti i tempi) è presente per la sua gravità in tutta la tradizione antica sulla storia imperiale" (GABBA 1989, p. 493).

expressed by Augustus himself or by his successors. This is not so much due to the immense losses suffered by the historiography of that era, but rather because such topics were addressed exclusively within the restricted circle of the princeps' friends and advisors, being protected by the strictest secrecy[46].

Scholars who have already examined the broader history of the Roman Empire through the lens of strategy offer us some partial support, having identified a substantial continuity in the major decisions made by the Empire's founder and his successors. This continuity even suggests the existence of an imperial "grand strategy" [47], which may be subdivided across the three main periods (Julio-Claudian, Flavian-Antonine, and from Diocletian onwards), in which one can broadly identify three distinct security systems[48].

These important studies have primarily sought to investigate the strategic measures adopted by the Romans to protect their frontiers—undeniably a matter of vital importance for the Empire's survival. However, the resulting picture risks appearing somewhat distorted and may evoke a sense of incompleteness. One might, in fact, infer that for the Romans, the only strategic goal of any significance was to remain obsessively entrenched within the long perimeter of the *limes*[49], perceiving anything beyond their dominion as a threat. Yet we know well that such a mindset could not have belonged to the Romans, who were innately inclined to establish mutually beneficial relations with all the peoples they encountered. Another rather surprising gap is the

[46] This secrecy was already well-guarded during the Republic, when the Senate as a whole was the architect of strategy (LIV. 42.14.1: *eo silentio clausa curia erat*), and it became even more impenetrable as the number of those involved drastically diminished (CASS. DIO 53.19.3–5). Cfr. WHEELER 1993, p. 219.

[47] "There can be no doubt that the first Roman Emperor pursued a conscious, albeit changing, grand strategy, and that he left a military legacy that shaped the policies of his successors for centuries." (FERRIL 1991, p. 1).

[48] LUTTWAK 1997, pp. 17-18 and 255-259.

[49] For instance, we read: "With frontiers that were territorially definable and geographically rational, Roman leaders adopted the grand strategy of preclusive security that is so famously characterized by the ruins of Hadrian's Wall" (FERRIL 1991, p. 20); and again: "whether by accident or design, the grand strategy of preclusive security worked well for the Roman Empire in the first and second centuries" (*Ibid.* p. 41).

near-total absence of references to the role of naval forces, which are either hastily dismissed[50] or relegated to the level of an inconvenient option for maritime transport[51].

To achieve a more complete picture, we must first consider the extraordinary context of the *pax Augusta*, under which the Roman Empire lived and thrived—at least during the first millennium of Rome. In that context, for the first time in history, the conditions arose for adopting a strategy suited to "peacetime," using this term exactly as we understand it today: a situation that does not rule out the emergence of crises or local conflicts in peripheral areas.

Thus, while emperors were careful to consider the need for border control and the necessary measures for its defense, they also had to pay attention to all major and ongoing geopolitical and geostrategic interests typical of peacetime, which are the essence of grand strategy[52]. Accordingly, it was not only defense requirements that mattered, but also internal security, oversight of client kingdoms, foreign relations, the economy, trade, and so on. Even the military instrument was not confined to defensive tasks; it was also employed for other missions, including, at times, offensive ones—in response to specific crises or in occasional campaigns of conquest, which were generally decided with a view to keeping Roman expansion within sustainable and defensible limits.

Before proceeding further, it is useful to observe that among the instruments of peacetime strategy, even in the Roman

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[50] "Indeed, naval power was not terribly important in Roman imperial grand strategy." (*Ibid.* p. 10).

[51] "Ancient sailors could not contend at all easily with rough weather... Moreover, long sea journeys were liable to impair the health of the troops. Nevertheless, troops were frequently transported at sea, and special transports were also available for horses." (LUTTWAK 1997, p. 115).

[52] "A true grand strategy was now concerned with peace as much as (perhaps even more than) with war. It was about the evolution and integration of policies that should operate for decades, or even for centuries. It did not cease at a war's end, nor commence at its beginning." (KENNEDY 1991, p. 4). "The crux of grand strategy lies therefore in policy, that is, in the capacity of the nation's leaders to bring together all of the elements, both military and non-military, for the preservation and enhancement of the nation's long-term (that is, in wartime and peacetime) best interests." (*Ibid.* p. 5).

era, diplomacy, deterrence, and maritime dominance held a prominent place. In particular, diplomacy—understood in terms of outcomes, namely the granting of *amicitia*—was cited by Livy as one of the two main factors (alongside war, *ça va sans dire*) behind Rome's domination of the entire *oecumene*[53]. As for deterrence, it was well understood in antiquity[54], as can be seen, for instance, from what Vegetius wrote about the deterrent role of the imperial fleets[55].

Closely associated with deterrence was maritime dominance, which the Romans had exercised since the Republican era. The function of this dominance was succinctly captured by Pompey the Great in a notably effective expression[56]—one that closely resembles the aphorism coined two centuries ago by the Neapolitan Giulio Rocco, the originator and first theorist of maritime power[57]. A substantially similar concept was expressed by the English adventurer Sir Walter Raleigh[58], who referred to maritime trade as a source of wealth—an aspect certainly present in the imperial Roman era, given the extraordinary development of the Roman merchant navy.

The needs and opportunities of the maritime traffic organized and utilized by the Romans will therefore be given due attention in the following chapters, as these matters have a significant impact on maritime power. It must not be forgotten that

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[53] From a fragment—transcribed in the 5th century—of the lost book 135 of Livy: *"totum orbem terrarum tam bello quam amicitiis, Romano imperio pacis abundantia subditum"* (APON. 12, ed. Roma 1843 p. 237).

[54] "The idea of deterrence (in the sense of military strength and preparedness as a prerequisite for peace) flourished in antiquity." (WHEELER 1993, pp. 35-36).

[55] "The Roman people, for its prestige and in accordance with the demands of its greatness, even without any imminent threat, always maintained its fleet in a state of readiness so as to have it available at need. Undoubtedly, no one dares to challenge or harm that kingdom or people who are known to be ready to fight, and determined to resist and to avenge themselves" (VEG. *Mil.* 4.31).

[56] Cicero reported Pompey the Great's thought as follows: "*Qui mare teneat, eum necesse esse rerum potiri*" (CIC. *Att.* 10.8.4).

[57] "Colui il quale ha il dominio dei mari necessariamente signoreggia" (ROCCO 1814, p. 192).

[58] "Whosoever commands the sea commands the trade; whosoever commands the trade of the world commands the riches of the world, and consequently the world itself." (RALEIGH 1829, p. 325).

this latter, as the aforementioned Giulio Rocco astutely recognized, is "the result of a well-ordered naval military and a sizeable merchant fleet." Under Augustus and his successors, maritime power thus relied on the imperial naval forces (war fleets, auxiliary vessels, and the *classiarii* corps), naval bases and logistical infrastructure, as well as the merchant fleet, seaports, and major maritime works (such as networks of lighthouses and coastal signal stations, navigable canals, and more).

If the conditions established by the *terra marique pax* made possible the invention of a "peacetime strategy," the scale conferred on the Empire by Augustus projected the scope of Rome's geopolitical and geostrategic interests to the very limits of the known world. The strategy thus acquired what we may term a "global" dimension. This term, which must of course be related to the geographical knowledge of the time, corresponds perfectly to the perspective the Romans themselves could have had. The idea that Rome had come to be recognized as the hegemonic power throughout the *oecumene* had already emerged in the time of Pompey the Great[59], and became firmly rooted during the age of Augustus[60], when there was a growing awareness of the prestige enjoyed by the Empire well beyond its administrative borders.

Hence the vision of Rome as *caput orbis* and the ideal of an *imperium sine fine*, celebrated by the poets Ovid and Virgil[61]. Hence too the appearance in Roman iconography of the sphere, a symbolic representation of the terrestrial globe, which became one of the most significant emblems of Roman power[62]—placed beneath the feet of the winged Victory or the goddess Roma,

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[59] Cicero argued that the war against the pirates, conducted by Pompey throughout the Mediterranean, had been sufficient "to make us appear at last as the true masters of all peoples and all nations on land and sea" (CIC. *Manil.* 56).
[60] "L'idea … poggia sul presupposto che l'egemonia di Roma si estenda anche agli ambiti geografici dell'*orbis* non militarmente controllati, grazie a una molteplicità di strumenti diplomatici: dall'assegnazione di *reges* dati alla recezione di ostaggi, dal recupero delle insegne cadute in mano al nemico alla pattuizione di *foedera*, dall'accoglienza di ambascerie provenienti dai più remoti paesi della terra alla stipula con essi di vantaggiosi accordi commerciali" (CRESCI MARRONE 1998, p. 307).
[61] OV. *am.* 1.15.26 and VERG. *Aen.* 1.278-279.
[62] CRESCI MARRONE 1993, pp. 196-201.

included in statues of emperors (either held in the hand or placed underfoot), or later incorporated into the imperial scepter.

In light of all the introductory considerations outlined thus far, it is now easier to narrow the scope of the analysis to be undertaken in the following chapters. The *pax Augusta* was the unprecedented condition that allowed Augustus to build the Empire according to a strategic design which, seen in retrospect, reveals a remarkable degree of rationality—especially in its close correlation with the constraints and opportunities presented by geography.

Moreover, the Augustan construction was carefully preserved by his successors, at least throughout the High Empire, except for certain variations that, over time, proved both possible and advantageous. This has led to the impression that the major strategic decisions devised in the secrecy of the imperial palaces on the Palatine Hill maintained a substantial continuity of direction from the time of Augustus onward.

Since this continuity has already been the subject of interpretation through the lens of grand strategy—but only with respect to the defense of frontiers by land forces—it is conceptually useful to complement those studies with an examination that duly considers the maritime theater, which is strategically indispensable but has thus far been neglected. Therefore, among the innovative imperial strategies—developed in peacetime and on what was, subjectively, a global scale—attention must be focused on all the major novelties that bear some connection to the seas, oceans, and other navigable waters, as well as to the long and jagged coastlines of the Roman Empire and of other lands of interest to Rome.

In summary, of our entire blue planet—the *orbis terracqueus*, in which the sea, even in ancient geography, held clear preeminence over land—the greater portion will be considered, here referred to for brevity as *orbis maritimus*[63].

In identifying the medium- to long-term imperial orientations in the fields of geopolitics, geostrategy, and, to some

[63] This expression, evidently coined as an alternative to *orbis terrarum*, became popular in the seventeenth century, to the point of appearing in the titles of several publications.

extent, geoeconomics, we will necessarily refer to the concept of grand strategy, albeit with certain essential clarifications. In brief, grand strategy may be defined as the political line which, under the impetus of the governing authority, mobilizes, harmonizes, and employs in a coordinated and synergistic fashion all the available resources (diplomatic, military, economic, informational, etc.) that are useful in achieving the satisfaction of a nation's most significant long-term interests.

More precise definitions tend to be longer and more nuanced. Nonetheless, a recent study has shown that the various interpretations proposed thus far by theorists of grand strategy can all be grouped into three broad categories, succinctly described as: "grand plans, grand principles, and grand behaviors"[64]. In the first two cases, the intentionality of the strategy is indisputable, whereas in the third, it may be open to doubt[65]. Since no grand plans or overarching strategic principles (except the all-encompassing one of maritime dominance) have come down to us from Roman antiquity, we must rely on an examination of behaviors, assessing whether these may reflect stable criteria in the use of military, diplomatic, and economic resources for the security, prosperity, and prestige of the Empire. If so, those criteria will themselves, in our view, represent the grand strategy[66]. This methodology, moreover, is not unlike that adopted by scholars who have thus far written on the grand strategy of the Roman Empire

The analysis will begin with a review of the geographical knowledge of maritime spaces acquired by the Romans under the principate of Augustus (Chapter II), followed by an

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[64] "Grand plans specify ends and the means by which to achieve them in detail. Grand principles do the same in more general terms. Grand behavior is a pattern in the relative allocation of means to certain ends" (SILOVE 2017, p. 19).

[65] "Grand plans and grand principles are, by definition, intentional, whereas the concept of grand behavior explicitly or effectively leaves the question of intentionality open for empirical investigation." (*Ibid.* p. 24).

[66] "Grand behavior is the long-term pattern in a state's distribution and employment of its military, diplomatic, and economic resources toward ends." (*Ibid.* p. 23); "if grand strategy is conceptualized as a pattern of behavior, then its existence depends upon demonstrating that pattern. In this case … the pattern of behavior is itself the grand strategy." (*Ibid.* p. 24).

examination—focused on various maritime basins (Chapters III to IX)—of the actions undertaken during the imperial period to ensure security and to expand Rome's geographical horizons, area of control, sphere of influence, and maritime trade, all to the benefit of the Empire's prestige and the wellbeing of its peoples. The final chapter (Chapter X) will present the conclusions that may be drawn from this analysis.

Fig. 1 - Winged Victory on a rostral prow depicted on a silver denarius minted by Caesar Octavian to celebrate the naval victory at Actium (Rome, Capitoline Medals Cabinet; photo by D. CARRO)

Fig. 2 - Trophy of the Alps: remains of the monument erected by Augustus at La Turbie, on the French Riviera near Monte Carlo (anonymous photo reworked by D. CARRO).

Fig. 3 - Remains of the Temple of Augustus and Rome in Ankara, from whose wall the text of the *Res Gestae* was taken (photo by A.G. BAYDIN).

Fig. 4 - Winged Victory on the globe: likely reproduction of the famous statue that adorned the Senate House (Taranto, Archaeological Museum; photo by D. CARRO). "Nel 29 a.C. la scelta per la la statua da collocare all'interno della Curia Iulia cade … sulla famosa Vittoria tarantina, ma il principe ha cura di integrarne l'iconografia originaria con l'aggiunta … del globo sottoposto ai suoi piedi." (CRESCI MARRONE 1993, p. 198).

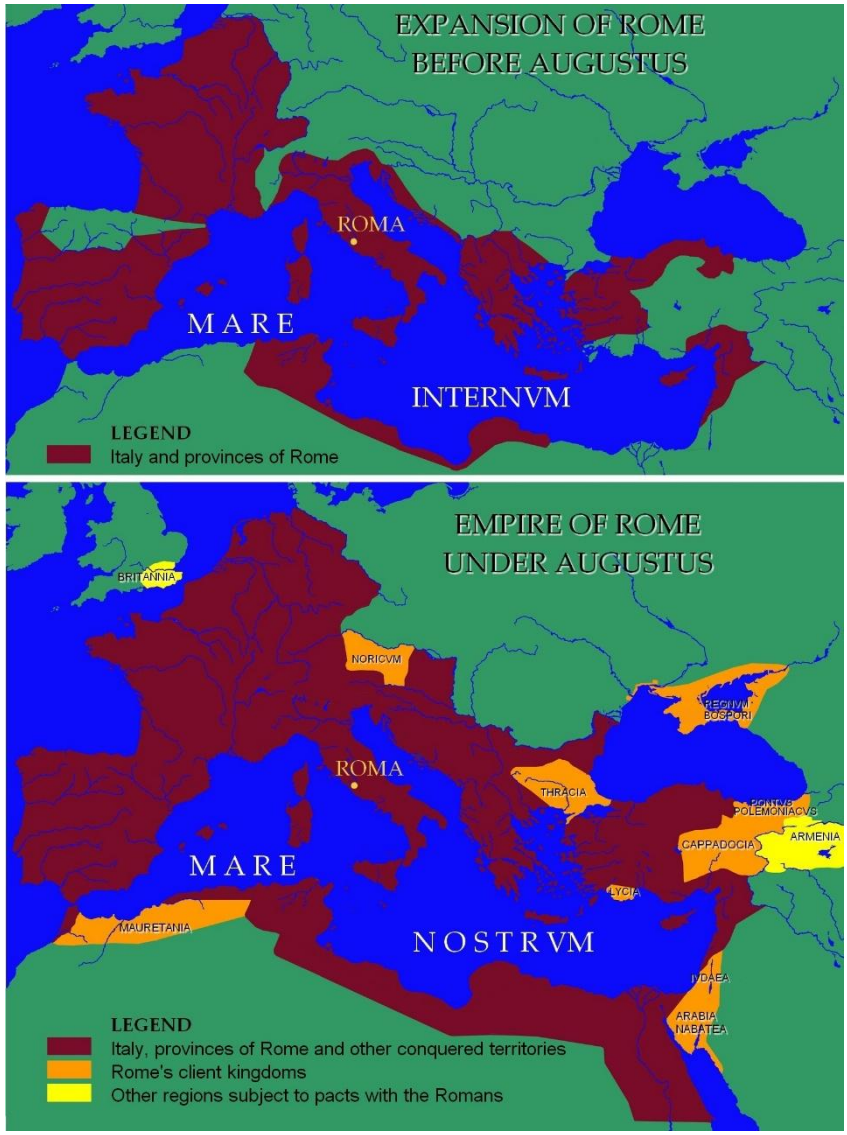

Fig. 5 - Expansion of the Empire under Augustus (drawing by D. CARRO).

ABBREVIATIONS

AE	*L'Année épigraphique*
CIL	*Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum*
fig.	figure
GeoAnt	*Geographia antiqua. Rivista di geografia storica del mondo antico e di storia della geografia*
Ibid.	*Ibidem*
Id.	*Idem* (same author)
Syria	*Syria. Revue d'art oriental et d'archéologie*
vol.	volume

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Abbreviations	Author	Work
AMM.	Ammianus Marcellinus	*Res gestae*
APON.	Aponius	*Canticum Canticorum explanat.*
APP. *civ.*	Appian	*Bella civilia*
CASS. DIO	Cassius Dio	*Historia Romana*
CIC. *Att.*	Cicero	*Epistulae ad Atticum*
CIC. *leg.*	"	*De legibus*
CIC. *Manil.*	"	*Pro lege Manilia (de imperio…)*
CLAUD. *carm. Ruf.*	Claudian	*Carmina, In Rufinum*
DION. HAL. *ant.*	Dionysius of Halicarnassus	*Antiquitates Romanae*
FLOR. *epit.*	Florus	*Epitomae*
FRONTO *Ver.*	Fronto	*Ad Verum Imperatorem*
IOS. *bell. Iud.*	Josephus	*Bellum Iudaicum*
LIV.	Livy	*Ab Urbe Condita*
LIV. *per.*	"	*Periochae*
LYD. *mag.*	John the Lydian	*De magistratibus*
OROS.	Orosius	*Historiarum adversus paganos*
OV. *am.*	Ovid	*Amores*
PLIN. *nat.*	Pliny the Elder	*Naturalis historia*
PLUT. *Ant.*	Plutarch	*Antonius*
POL.	Polybius	*Historiarum libri*
R.Gest.div.Aug.	Augustus	*Res gestae divi Augusti*
STRAB.	Strabo	*Geographica*
SUET. *Aug.*	Suetonius	*Divus Augustus*
SUET. *Cal.*	"	*Gaius*
TAC. *ann.*	Tacitus	*Annales*
TAC. *hist.*	"	*Historiae*
TIB.	Tibullus	*Elegiae*

VEG. *mil.*	Vegetius	*Epitoma rei militaris*
VELL.	Velleius Paterculus	*Historiae Romanae*
VERG. *Aen.*	Virgil	*Aeneidos*

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The Roman Empire was organized and governed by Augustus according to guiding principles that were also followed by his successors, with only limited variations that gradually became possible and advantageous over time. As a result, Rome's major strategic decisions retained a substantial continuity throughout the early imperial period, leading various modern scholars to identify the outlines of a "*grand strategy*." Since these studies have focused exclusively on the defense of the land frontiers, it has proven conceptually useful to complement them with an analysis duly attentive to the maritime theater—strategically essential but thus far neglected.

This study is therefore intended as a contribution to filling that gap, focusing on the innovative imperial strategies adopted in the unprecedented context of the *pax Augusta* and on a subjectively global scale, with specific reference to the seas, oceans, and other navigable waters, as well as to the long and intricate coastlines of the Roman Empire and of other lands considered habitable and of interest to the Romans. The totality of these waters and corresponding maritime shores—extending well beyond the borders of Rome's dominion (the *orbis Romanus*)—is here referred to, for the sake of brevity, as the *orbis maritimus*.

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