

Augustus: The Path to Power

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Introduction

In 44 BC,¹ the assassination of Julius Caesar at the hands of a group of disgruntled senators resulted in a power vacuum at the heart of the Roman Republic. Two men, Antony and Octavian, looked set to grasp the mantle of power, and initially they worked closely together to divide the republic between them. This arrangement eventually failed, and Octavian, who initially appeared to be the weaker partner, managed to defeat Antony and establish himself as the first emperor of Rome - though he was careful never to use that title.

In this discussion we will be taking a broad overview of the early life of Octavian, up to the point of his Second Settlement with the Senate. We will look at some of the key events in this period from his perspective, including the formation of the Second Triumvirate and the final decisive battle with Mark Antony. Finally, we will discuss how Octavian managed to become the most powerful man in Rome, and put the foundations in place for an empire that would last for hundreds of years.

The intensity of activity during the period under discussion (c. 49 - 23), and the volume of surviving literary and archaeological material, means that we will either mention briefly or skip altogether some of the events which occurred, and the people involved in them. Some suggestions for further reading are provided for those who wish to examine the period in more detail.

A future talk, *Augustus: First Emperor of Rome*, will discuss Augustus' reign.

Early life

Born Gaius Octavius, but known to us as Octavian and, as we shall see, Augustus,² there was nothing particularly notable about the boy or his parents. His father was a senator, though at the time of Octavian's birth he had only reached the rank of quaestor.³ Later sources tell of auspices which predicted Octavian's rise to power, but all were written after his death and may well be based on retrospective imagination rather than fact.⁴

Octavian's father died early in the boy's life, and he was brought up by his grandmother, until she too passed away.⁵ After coming of age (at fifteen or sixteen), he began to be associated with Julius Caesar,

¹All dates are BC unless otherwise indicated.

²Octavian used and was known by a variety of names during his life, including Octavianus and Caesar. For convenience, and to avoid confusion with the more famous Julius Caesar, we will refer to him as Octavian until he was awarded the title Augustus by the Senate.

³Quaestor was the first rung on the *cursus honorum* ('course of offices'), which specified the order in which the five main magistracies must be held. The most important aspect of the quaestorship was that it conferred membership of the Senate on the occupier of the office.

⁴Suetonius lists the omens present at Octavian's birth and during his life (Suetonius, *Augustus* 94). One senator, known for his astrological prowess, 'prophesied for him absolute power', and there were reports of other auspicious events involving Caesar, Catulus and Cicero (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 45.1-2).

⁵Suetonius, *Augustus* 8

who allowed him to receive military prizes at one of his triumphs. Octavian accompanied Caesar on campaigns, and was reportedly allowed to share his carriage - a sign of the patronage that was later to come. Although unknown at the time, Caesar had deposited a new will at Rome naming Octavian as his principal heir.⁶

There is little of note of Octavian's life between his coming of age and the next major event, the assassination of Julius Caesar.

Assassination of Julius Caesar

After the assassination of Pompey in Egypt in 48, and with his supporters defeated or on the run, Caesar was in sole control of the Republic. Amongst the offices bestowed upon him over the course of three years were tribune, censor and dictator, enabling him to veto the Senate, add and remove senators, and command the Roman army.⁷ Effectively he was emperor in all but name, and no one appeared to be willing to openly challenge him.

However, many senators were uncomfortable with Caesar's seemingly unlimited power. His behaviour, if accounts written after the event can be believed, certainly did not help. As well as the oft-told story that Antony offered Caesar a diadem with a laurel wreath attached,⁸ Caesar is also reported to have behaved disrespectfully towards both the tribunes and senators, refusing to rise when the latter came to greet him.⁹

In the background, a number of men were conspiring to bring Caesar's reign to an early end. Several plans were discussed, but the favoured option was to kill Caesar in the Senate, as he would be alone and unguarded - unlike at other public events such as elections or gladiatorial shows. The date chosen was March 15 (in the Roman calendar), better known as the Ides of March.¹⁰

In the days before the Senate meeting, Caesar's friends had warned him to stay away, with his wife claiming to have been frightened by a vision in her dreams.¹¹ However, one of Caesar's supposedly firm friends, who was actually one of the conspirators, convinced him that to stay at home would insult the Senate and there was no need to listen to idle gossip and dreams.¹²

Upon arrival at the Senate, Caesar was surrounded by the conspirators and stabbed many times, finally falling on the steps of the Senate house. His last words are a subject of debate, the most well-known being 'et tu, Brute?' from Shakespeare.¹³ Plutarch and Suetonius both claim that Caesar said nothing as the attacks rained down, although Suetonius does mention that other sources report Caesar's last words as 'you too, child'.¹⁴

The immediate effect of Caesar's assassination was to plunge Rome into chaos. Mark Antony initially fled Rome, assuming that the assassins would come for Caesar's supporters as well. He soon returned as sole consul and took charge of the state treasury, along with Caesar's personal papers and property. After negotiating with the assassins and the Senate, a compromise was reached whereby the assassins

⁶Suetonius, *Julius Caesar* 83

⁷Suetonius considers that Caesar accepted 'excessive honours', including some 'he should certainly have refused' (Suetonius, *Caesar* 76).

⁸Plutarch, *Caesar* 61

⁹Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 44.8; Suetonius *Caesar* 78

¹⁰Plutarch, *Caesar* 63; Suetonius, *Caesar* 80. Dramatised in Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* Act I Scene 2, where a soothsayer twice warns Caesar to 'beware the Ides of March' (see also: Appian, *Civil Wars* 2.153).

¹¹Plutarch, *Caesar* 63

¹²Plutarch, *Caesar* 64. Given Caesar's previous behaviour and attitude towards the Senate, one wonders why this was a convincing argument.

¹³Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* Act III Scene 1

¹⁴Plutarch, *Caesar* 66; Suetonius, *Caesar* 82

would be pardoned and provinces would be allocated to Brutus and Cassius. In return, all of Caesar's actions would be ratified.¹⁵ A few days later, Caesar's will was opened and read.

Caesar's will

Caesar left approximately three quarters of his estate to Octavian.¹⁶ Although we do not have exact figures for the value of the estate, it is safe to assume that it was substantial, given the number of successful military campaigns which Caesar had run and the funds which such campaigns would have raised. In addition, and perhaps even more importantly, Caesar adopted Octavian as his son and heir.¹⁷ Octavian also took the name 'Caesar' - it was common for adoptees to use the name of their adopter - though it was not used immediately by everyone (notable examples who did not include Antony and Cicero).¹⁸

No specific reason is attested for *why* Caesar decided to bequeath the majority of his wealth to Octavian, or to adopt him as his son. Caesar was Octavian's great uncle,¹⁹ so not a particularly close relative, though Romans did place great weight on family ties. Octavian had also delivered a funeral oration for his grandmother, Caesar's sister, which may have warmed him to Caesar.²⁰

First consulship of Octavian

Towards the end of Antony's consulship, his relations with the Senate had deteriorated to the point where he openly ignored resolutions to stop his fighting with Decimus Junius Brutus Albinus, a provincial governor who refused to hand over Cisalpine Gaul to Antony. Octavian was inducted into the Senate and granted *propraetor imperium*, and sent off with the two consuls to relieve the siege.²¹

Although Antony's forces were defeated twice (at Forum Gallorum and Mutina), both of the consuls were killed, leaving Octavian in sole command. Despite the overall success, the Senate were unwilling to allow Octavian to continue in command, and attempted to assign the legions to Decimus Brutus. An embassy of centurions was sent to Rome with the demand that Octavian be elevated to the vacant consulship, despite not meeting any of the criteria.²² When the Senate demurred, a centurion is reported to have opened his cloak to display the hilt of his sword and said: 'if you do not make him consul, this will!'²³ Although the Senate continued to refuse, they relented once Octavian marched on Rome with his legions, and he received the consulship, along with his relative Quintus Pedius.

¹⁵Plutarch, *Antony* 14

¹⁶Suetonius, *Caesar* 83

¹⁷Appian, *Civil Wars* 2.143. Adopting a boy or young man with promising potential was not unusual in Rome, although the adoption usually took place during the adopter's life rather than via a will. For example, Scipio Aemilianus, who oversaw the final destruction of Carthage in the Third Punic War, was adopted. Whether Octavian's adoption was technically legal is arguable, but it succeeded in practical terms.

¹⁸Mark Antony is reported to have said to Octavian: 'and you, boy [...] who owe everything to your name', suggesting that he did not think much of Octavian using the name Caesar. However, this is a report from Cicero, who was not exactly a neutral party (Cicero, *Philippics* 13.11.24-25).

¹⁹Suetonius, *Augustus* 4-7

²⁰Suetonius, *Augustus* 8

²¹A *propraetor* was a magistrate holding the powers of a praetor, but generally only within a specific area or for a given campaign. *Imperium* was the power and authority to command armies and dispense corporal and capital punishment.

²²Technically the prerequisites for holding the consulship were a minimum age of 42 (Octavian was 19) and a previous praetorship (Octavian had not held this office). However, in the final decades of the republic there were several men who flagrantly ignored the *cursus honorum* - including Marius, Pompey and Caesar - and indeed the centurions drew a direct comparison with Pompey (Appian, *Civil Wars* 3.88).

²³Suetonius, *Augustus* 26.1; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 46.43

Second Triumvirate

By 43 BC, Octavian had fallen out with Cicero, possibly due to the latter's strong republican tendencies, and decided to offer an olive branch to Antony. The two men, and Lepidus,²⁴ met for three days and agreed to divide the republic between them.²⁵ The alliance was cemented by the agreement of Octavian to marry Antony's stepdaughter, Clodia.²⁶ In order to eliminate political opponents and raise money, the three men drew up a list of three hundred senators and knights who were to be killed, in a similar manner to Sulla's proscriptions.²⁷ Cicero, the ardent republican who had made an enemy of Antony by publishing the invective *Philippics*, was one of the first to be put to death.²⁸

The agreement between the three men has been given the name of the Second Triumvirate, to distinguish it from the earlier alliance of Pompey, Caesar and Crassus, although in Rome it was simply referred to as *tresviri rei publicae constituendae* ('triumvirate for organising the state').²⁹ Unlike its predecessor, the Second Triumvirate was legalised via the passing of the *Lex Titia*, and it was to last for ten years (43-33 BC).³⁰

At the formation of the triumvirate, Antony appeared to be in the strongest position. The relative positions of Octavian and Lepidus are harder to judge - Octavian had Caesar's name, money and veterans, whereas Lepidus had considerably more experience and had shown himself to be a cautious negotiator.³¹

Defeating Caesar's assassins

Initially the triumvirate worked well, at least from the point of view of the three members. Antony and Octavian quickly defeated Brutus and Cassius, two of the assassins of Caesar, in battles fought at Philippi.³² After this victory the division of the republic was agreed, with Antony taking the rich east and Octavian the poorer west (but including Rome). Lepidus had to sacrifice the bulk of his existing territory and was left with part of Africa.³³ This division appears to have reflected the bargaining positions of the triumvirs at the time, with Antony being the most powerful and therefore receiving the richest provinces.

Sextus Pompey

Despite the defeat of Pompey the Great by Caesar at Pharsalus in Greece, and his later assassination in Egypt, his sons continued to resist against Caesar and then later the Triumvirate. The youngest son, Sextus Pompeius Magnus Pius (also known as Sextus Pompey), would continue to cause problems for several years, escaping to Sicily and raising an army in Spain.

²⁴Despite his position as a member of the Triumvirate, we know relatively little about Lepidus compared to Antony and Octavian.

²⁵Plutarch, *Antony* 19

²⁶Plutarch, *Antony* 20

²⁷If a man's name was on the list, he could be killed legally, and there was a reward for bringing his head to the triumvirs. The property of the dead man was confiscated and sold at auction, often at prices well below its market value.

²⁸Octavian is said to have argued against placing Cicero's name on the list for two days, but was eventually convinced by Antony (Plutarch, *Cicero* 46). Plutarch later reports that Augustus (as he then was) perhaps regretted Cicero's death, describing him as 'a learned man and a lover of his country' (Plutarch, *Cicero* 49). In addition, he made Cicero's son consul, 'by way of apology for his betrayal of Cicero [the father]' (Appian, *Civil Wars* 4.51).

²⁹This was abbreviated on coins of the period as: *III VIR R P C*.

³⁰The First Triumvirate was an unofficial alliance, with no legal backing. However, its existence appears to have been an open secret at Rome, with over two hundred senators attending a meeting between Pompey, Caesar and Crassus in Luca (Plutarch, *Caesar* 21).

³¹Appian describes Octavian as 'superior in intelligence and experience', but he was writing over a century later, by which point the historical record may have adopted a bias towards Octavian (Appian, *Civil Wars* 1.5).

³²This was despite the fact that Caesar's assassins had been given amnesty, in exchange for the ratification of all of Caesar's acts whilst dictator.

³³Appian, *Civil Wars* 5.3, 5.12; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 48.1-2

Pompey caused particular problems for the Triumvirate in two ways. First, he offered sanctuary for those named in the proscriptions, and also paid a higher bounty for the safety of men turned over to him than would be given for killing them.

Second, and perhaps more worryingly for the Triumvirate, he targeted Sicily and blocked the importation of grain into Italy. At the time, Rome was not self-sufficient in food and relied on imports, and any interruption in the supply could quickly result in civil disorder. Since 123, the distribution of grain to the residents of Rome, known as the *cura Annonae* ('care of Annona', the goddess who personified the grain supply), was a key mechanism for obtaining and retaining support amongst the populace.³⁴

Once Caesar's assassins had been dealt with, the Triumvirate turned their attention to dealing with Pompey. Initially a treaty, known as the Peace of Misenum, was agreed in 39 to end the blockade of Italy.³⁵ In exchange, Pompey was offered future offices, including the consulship. However, the peace did not last long, and perhaps was only intended to give the Triumvirate time to marshal their forces.³⁶

Hostilities recommenced, and although Pompey defeated Octavian in one battle at Messina, the final outcome was not in doubt. Octavian handed over responsibility to his trusted general Agrippa, who eventually destroyed Pompey's fleet at the Battle of Naulochus in September 36. Pompey escaped, but was captured and executed without trial, possibly on Antony's orders.³⁷ After this, there were no serious external challenges to the Triumvirate.

End of the Triumvirate

Despite its initial success, and the fact that it managed to last for ten years, the Second Triumvirate suffered from similar problems to the First - chiefly that it consisted of more than one man who wished to be sole leader of Rome. Although they started close together, the three men - especially Antony and Octavian - gradually drifted apart.

Eventually the gap between Octavian and Antony grew too large, particularly over women and their relationships with the two men. Despite making effective marriage alliances³⁸ - Octavian married Antony's stepdaughter, and Antony married Octavian's sister - Antony openly lived with Cleopatra in Egypt, and went as far as having children with her.

Antony's infidelities, whilst not particularly unusual amongst senior Roman politicians, helped stoke Octavian's propaganda machine. Octavian was able to present Antony as fraternising with a foreign queen and living the life of a Hellenic king, both of which combined to suggest that he was not a 'true Roman'. Octavian's position in Italy, whilst economically poorer than Greece and Egypt, allowed him access to Rome, which was still the political centre of the Republic. Eventually Octavian read out Antony's will, or ordered it to be read out, to show that Antony had 'failed to conduct himself as befitted a Roman citizen'.³⁹ In particular, the will named as heirs the children which Antony had fathered with Cleopatra.⁴⁰ The Roman people considered the contents of the will to be outrageous, and

³⁴Juvenal drily comments that the populace were only interested in two things: 'bread and circuses' (Juvenal, *Satires* 10.77-81).

³⁵Velleius Paterculus, *History of Rome* 2.77

³⁶Pompeius was hoodwinked with a bogus peace' (Tacitus, *Annals* 1.10).

³⁷Appian states that the execution may have been on Antony's orders, but also that Plancus (the governor of Syria) may have given the order (Appian, *Civil Wars* 5.144). Velleius Paterculus is clear: 'he [Pompey] was slain by Titius on the orders of Marcus Antonius' (Velleius Paterculus, *History of Rome* 2.79). Although Roman citizens were not supposed to be executed without trial, this was sometimes ignored in the Late Republic.

³⁸Marriage alliances were common amongst Roman politicians, and a man could further his career by marrying the 'right' woman. Such alliances frequently broke down, either because of the participants or due to deaths giving birth, and Antony alone had at least four wives (Pompey the Great managed five marriages).

³⁹Suetonius, *Augustus* 17

⁴⁰Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 50.3

worried that, if Antony were to defeat Octavian, 'he would hand over the city of Rome to Cleopatra and transfer the seat of government to Egypt'.⁴¹

Battle of Actium

When the Second Triumvirate formally expired at the end of 33 BC, it was not renewed. The Senate was split in its support of Antony and Octavian (no one appears to have backed Lepidus), and both consuls left to join Antony in Egypt, where he and Cleopatra were preparing a vast fleet. Octavian responded by building a fleet of his own, and sending his highly competent general Agrippa to capture towns held by Antony. Octavian also continued his maneuvering in the Senate, managing to get Antony removed from the consulship which had been designated to him, and a declaration of war against Cleopatra.⁴²

The scale of the forces involved and the difficulties in moving men across any distance meant that little happened for several months, beyond some minor skirmishes. Agrippa continued to move across Greece, and Antony took the decision, allegedly under Cleopatra's influence,⁴³ to return the main fleet to Alexandria. Octavian decided to launch his attack and trap Antony as he attempted to withdraw.⁴⁴

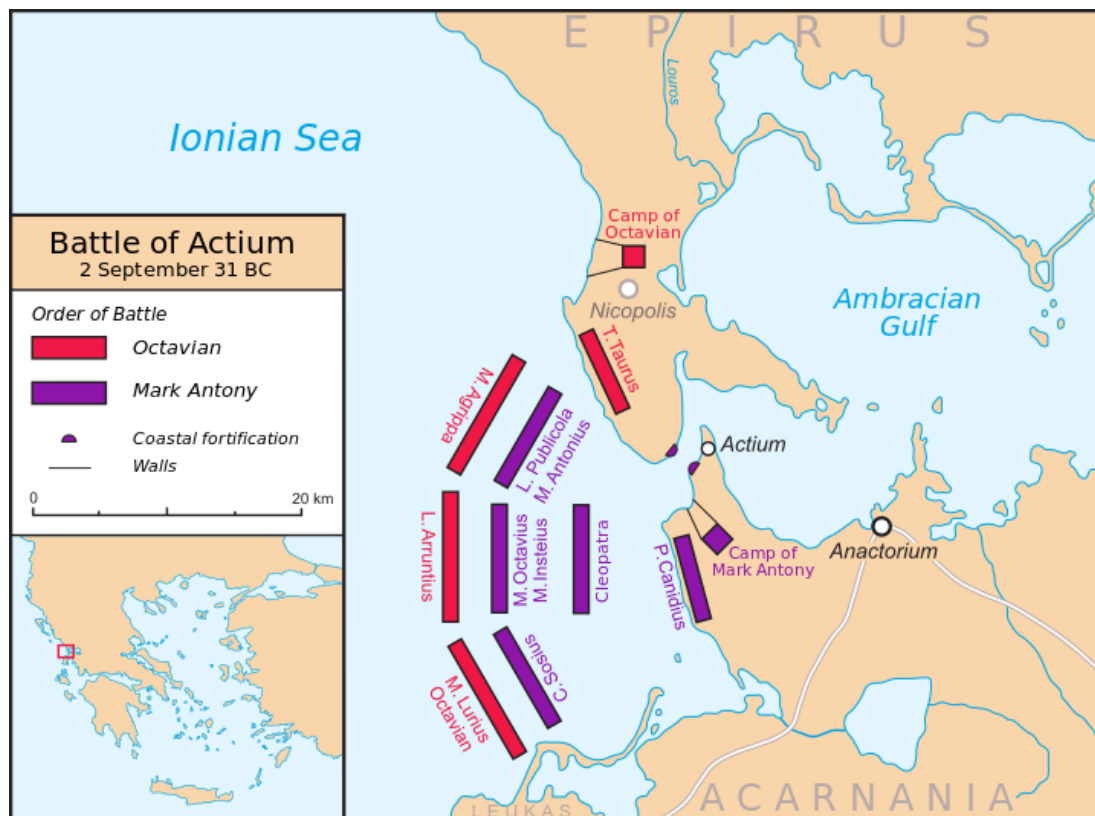


Figure 1: Battle of Actium (source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Actium)

The exact balance of the forces is unclear, although Plutarch reports that Antony started with more ships but decided to burn all but sixty of those provided by Egypt.⁴⁵ Octavian relied on smaller, faster

⁴¹Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 50.4

⁴²Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 50.4. Antony was not declared a public enemy, and his followers were offered a pardon if they defected.

⁴³Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 50.15. As the majority of Antony's forces came from Egypt, he may have had little choice in the matter.

⁴⁴Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 50.30

⁴⁵Plutarch, *Antony* 62-64

ships, whereas Antony opted for stronger but slower vessels.⁴⁶ With the advantage of plans brought to him by the deserter Quintus Dellius,⁴⁷ Octavian was able to position his fleet to prevent Antony from reaching the open sea, whilst remaining far enough from the shore to avoid any ballistics.

Antony was eventually forced to leave the protection of the shore and attempted to force his way through Octavian's fleet. The battle raged for most of the day, without any decisive result. However, whilst Antony and Octavian were engaged, Cleopatra began to retreat to the open sea, assisted by the fact that a favourable wind had arisen.⁴⁸ Antony's fleet began to panic as they assumed defeat and began to retreat too, with Antony following them. Whilst Octavian could not attack Cleopatra - expecting a battle rather than pursuit, he had not brought sails on his fleet - the removal of her ships meant the numerical advantage switched in favour of Octavian. He also decided to deploy fire against Antony's ships, having hesitated before to avoid destroying any treasure which they might contain.⁴⁹ Once the conflagration had started to spread, Antony's remaining forces were soon defeated.

Octavian continued the pursuit back to Egypt, where he defeated Antony in battle - although Antony committed suicide rather than be captured.⁵⁰ Cleopatra was caught by Octavian, though she too managed to commit suicide in captivity.⁵¹ Cassius Dio concludes that these events left Octavian alone with all the power of the state in his hands,⁵² and Tacitus states that after Actium 'the interests of peace required that all power should be concentrated in the hands of one man'.⁵³

Settlements

Although by this point Octavian had defeated Antony and neutralised Lepidus - though it is unclear whether the latter was ever a serious threat - he was now in the unfortunate position of being clearly the number one man in Rome, like Caesar before him.⁵⁴ This was politically awkward, as Romans still felt uneasy about monarchy, and recent experiences with Marius, Sulla and Caesar had shown that allowing one man to take control did not end well. However, Octavian could not simply disclaim his authority and stand down the legions, as such action might destabilise Rome and plunge it into yet another civil war. What was needed was a phased handover of power - or at least the perception of one - from Octavian to the Senate and People of Rome.

First Settlement

In 27 BC, Octavian returned full power to the Senate and gave up his control of the provinces and the legions within them, at least on paper. In reality, his personal authority remained as he had the loyalty of the legions and a vast fortune which could be used to buy favours, such as by financing public works. The Senate also requested that Octavian assume command of the provinces, placing him officially in charge of the majority of the Roman legions, a proposal which he accepted with feigned reluctance.⁵⁵ On the surface, this maintained the myth of the constitution continuing as before, by suggesting that the Senate had the authority to appoint men to commands and provinces.

⁴⁶Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 50.32

⁴⁷Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 50.23

⁴⁸Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 50.33

⁴⁹Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 50.34

⁵⁰Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 51.10

⁵¹Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 51.14

⁵²Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 50.1

⁵³Tacitus, *Histories* 1.1. Tacitus is therefore dating the beginning of the principate as 31 - several years before the First Settlement.

⁵⁴'He [Octavian] could also, like Caesar and more powerfully than Caesar, declare himself ruler both of his own country and of all the nations subject to her, without further need of appointment or election or the pretence of it.' (Appian, *Civil Wars* 1.5). Appian is correct in that Octavian did not need to pretend to require appointment or election, but nevertheless he felt it prudent to do so.

⁵⁵Cassius Dio reports Octavian's speech and the reaction (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 53.2-12).

In addition to provincial commands, the Senate bestowed two titles on Octavian. The first, *Augustus*, would become the name by which he would be referred to from this point on.⁵⁶ The second, *Princeps*, demonstrated that he was the 'first man' in Rome,⁵⁷ and this period is often referred to as the *principate* rather than the empire. Although we now refer to Augustus as the first emperor of Rome, this was not a title used at the time.⁵⁸

Second Settlement

By 23 BC, gaps were beginning to show in the First Settlement. Augustus had retained the annual consulship, which meant that only one other man could be elected to the highest office, even if in practice this would be a subordinate role. A serious illness also sparked fears that Augustus was preparing to appoint a successor to the principate - a clear sign of monarchy. After his recovery, Augustus came to an arrangement with the Senate whereby he gave up his consulship, making room for ambitious senators to hold the position. In exchange, he retained his consular imperium (the right to command armies and dispense justice and punishment) throughout the empire.

Augustus also followed in his adopted father's footsteps, acquiring the powers of a tribune and censor. Since the majority of legions were nominally under his command, he could also take credit for any victories which were achieved on his behalf.⁵⁹ Although he was never foolish enough to allow himself to be appointed dictator for life, as Caesar had, the effect was the same. The only office which Augustus lacked was that of *pontifex maximus*, which he took over a decade later following the death of Lepidus.⁶⁰

Conclusions

Augustus was by almost any measure the most successful politician in Roman history.⁶¹ Not only did he oversee the final turbulent years in Rome's transition from republic to empire, he outlasted all of his successors by at least a decade.⁶²

Like his great-uncle, Julius Caesar, Augustus took some serious risks, but fortunately most of them paid off. He showed himself to be a skilled politician, combining ruthlessness when needed and clemency where it suited his purposes. He was also aware of the limits of his abilities and knew when to delegate - in particular to trusted subordinates such as Agrippa in military matters. This stands in contrast to Caesar, who tried to excel at everything.

However, his masterstroke was how he handled the Senate and the wider public, presenting himself as reluctantly taking on duties for the good of Rome. Although he held similar powers to Julius Caesar,

⁵⁶Some senators were in favour of bestowing the title *Romulus*, but were persuaded otherwise. It seems unlikely that Octavian would have preferred that title, given the lengths he went to in order to avoid being portrayed as a king or emperor (Suetonius, *Augustus* 7).

⁵⁷*primus inter pares* (first amongst equals) was also used to describe Augustus' new position.

⁵⁸Soldiers would often hail a victorious general as *imperator*, which is where the English (via Old French) *emperor* derives from. However, in the Republic and early Empire, *imperator* reflected military command rather than a political position, and even Cicero, self-proclaimed 'saviour of the Republic' (Cicero, *Pro Cnaeo Plancio* 36.89), received this accolade on one occasion.

⁵⁹Commanders took credit for victories regardless of their personal contribution - a fact which caused great resentment from Sulla towards Marius many years earlier.

⁶⁰Unlike most offices, which were held for a specific period (usually a year), *pontifex maximus* was a lifetime appointment. It was not a particularly powerful role, but appears to have been sought after for its prestige - Julius Caesar was a previous holder of the post. Suetonius reports that Augustus 'could not bring himself to divest his former colleague [Lepidus] of it' (Suetonius, *Augustus* 31).

⁶¹It could be argued that Cicero was the most successful politician who followed the standard career path of the *cursus honorum*.

⁶²Based on the reigns of emperors who ruled the Roman Empire as a whole and alone, before its division into East and West. Theodosius II reigned for longer, but only over the Eastern Empire.

Augustus was careful to avoid offices and titles such as dictator for life. As a result, he largely kept the Senate and People on side, and would continue to reign successfully for long after the Second Settlement.

Chronology

All dates are BC.

- 63 Birth of Octavian, Consulship of Cicero.
- 49 Caesar crosses the Rubicon. Civil war breaks out.
- 44 Assassination of Caesar.
- 43 First consulship of Octavian.
- 43 Beginning of the Second Triumvirate (Octavian, Antony, Lepidus).
- 42 Battle of Philippi, defeat of Caesar's assassins.
- 42 Birth of Tiberius (successor to Augustus).
- 37 Second Triumvirate renewed for a further five years.
- 33 End of the Second Triumvirate.
- 31 Battle of Actium, defeat of Antony and Cleopatra.
- 30 Death of Mark Antony.
- 27 First Settlement of Augustus.
- 23 Second Settlement of Augustus.
- 13 Death of Lepidus, Augustus becomes Pontifex Maximus.

Sources and further reading

Primary sources

We are fortunate that this time period is well documented, and many of the primary sources are still available to us.

Our primary sources are a mixture of Latin and Greek. For those unfamiliar with either language, English translations are available for all the major sources (e.g. Appian, Plutarch) in the Penguin Classics, Oxford World's Classics and Loeb Classical Library series (the latter retains the original language alongside the translation). More obscure sources (e.g. Velleius Paterculus) are only available in the Loeb series, as are some books of authors such as Cassius Dio.

Cicero: Key figure courted by all sides for his skills as an orator and lawyer. An unsubtle self-publicist at times, Cicero nevertheless leaves us with a collection of speeches and letters which give an insight to the period, albeit from a man who failed to appreciate (or accept) the changes which brought about the end of the Republic.

Plutarch: Greek (later Roman) biographer known for his *Parallel Lives* which discuss and compare individuals whom Plutarch felt to be worthy of note, including Caesar, Antony and Brutus.⁶³ Care must be taken as Plutarch wrote biographies as opposed to history, and in places he can digress on a moral tangent.

Appian: Roman historian of Greek origin whose *Roman History* covers the beginning of Rome to the time of Trajan (c. 100 AD). Books 8-17, which cover the Civil War and its aftermath, have come to us intact.

Suetonius: Private secretary of Hadrian who wrote biographies of twelve men who held the office of emperor or its near equivalent, starting with Caesar.

⁶³Plutarch also wrote Lives of the Roman Emperors, including Augustus, but only the Lives of Galba and Otho survive. These were not written as Parallel Lives.

Cassius Dio: Roman statesman of Greek origin who wrote a history of Rome from the founding of the city to around 229 AD. Most of the 80 volume work exists only in fragments or quotations in other sources, but books 50-56 are largely complete and cover the period in question.

Tacitus: Roman historian and politician (c. 56 AD - 120 AD) who produced multiple works, although large chunks are missing. Although mainly writing about the period after the death of Augustus, he does refer back to earlier events.

Velleius Paterculus: Roman soldier, historian, and senator who wrote a history of Rome. Although not generally considered a careful historical study, it is useful for its connected narrative of certain periods.⁶⁴

Further reading

The popularity of this period has resulted in a large number of publications aimed at the general reader. The works below are a starting point for those who wish to find out more about this era of Roman history.

From the Gracchi to Nero: A History of Rome 133 BC to AD 68, H. H. Scullard. Standard undergraduate text for this period, written at a level which is accessible to those with an existing background understanding of the subject.

The Roman Republic, Michael Crawford. Slimmer and less academic alternative to Scullard.

The Roman Empire, Colin Wells. Picks up where Crawford's *The Roman Republic* finishes.

Augustus, Adrian Goldsworthy. Definitive work on the first Roman emperor. Aimed at a broad audience but backed up with a substantial number of notes and research.

Antony and Cleopatra, Adrian Goldsworthy. Sympathetic account of the couple who could have ruled Rome, had events played out differently.

Notes

The notes from this and other talks can be found online at: www.pwaring.com/talks

⁶⁴Unlike the other authors listed here, Velleius Paterculus is not widely available with an English translation, however it does appear as volume 152 of the Loeb Classical Library, together with the *Res Gestae* of Augustus.