

= Romulus Augustulus =

Romulus Augustus ( Latin : Romulus Augustus ; born c . AD 461 ? died after AD 476 , and was apparently still alive as late as 507 ) was an emperor ( alleged usurper ) reigning over the Western Roman Empire from 31 October AD 475 until 4 September AD 476 . His deposition by Odoacer traditionally marks the end of the Western Roman Empire , the fall of ancient Rome , and the beginning of the Middle Ages in Western Europe .

He is mostly known by his nickname " Romulus Augustulus " , though he ruled officially as Romulus Augustus . The Latin suffix -ulus is a diminutive ; hence , Augustulus effectively means " Little Augustus " .

The historical record contains few details of Romulus 's life . He was proclaimed as emperor by his father Orestes , the magister militum ( master of soldiers ) of the Roman army after forcing Emperor Julius Nepos to leave Italy . Romulus , little more than a child , acted as a figurehead for his father 's rule and reigned for only ten months . His legitimacy and authority were disputed beyond Italy and Romulus was soon deposed by Odoacer , who had defeated and executed Orestes . Odoacer sent Romulus to live in the Castellum Lucullanum in Campania , after which he disappears from the historical record .

= = Life = =

Romulus ' father Orestes was a Roman citizen , originally from Pannonia , who had served as a secretary and diplomat for Attila the Hun and later rose through the ranks of the Roman army . The future emperor was named Romulus after his maternal grandfather , a nobleman from Poetovio in Noricum . Many historians have noted the coincidence that the last western emperor bore the names of both Romulus , the legendary founder and first king of Rome , and Augustus , the first emperor .

Orestes was appointed Magister militum by Julius Nepos in 475 . Shortly after his appointment , Orestes launched a rebellion and captured Ravenna , the capital of the Western Roman Empire since 402 , on 28 August 475 . Nepos fled to Dalmatia , where his uncle had ruled a semi @-@ autonomous state in the 460s . Orestes , however , refused to become emperor , " from some secret motive " , said historian Edward Gibbon . Instead , he installed his son on the throne on 31 October 475 .

The empire Augustus ruled was a shadow of its former self and had shrunk significantly over the previous 80 years . Imperial authority had retreated to the Italian borders and parts of southern Gaul : Italia and Gallia Narbonensis , respectively . The Eastern Roman Empire treated its western counterpart as a client state . The Eastern Emperor Leo , who died in 474 , had appointed the western emperors Anthemius and Julius Nepos , and Constantinople never recognized the new government . Neither Zeno nor Basiliscus , the two generals fighting for the eastern throne at the time of Romulus ' accession , accepted him as ruler .

As a proxy for his father , Romulus made no decisions and left no monuments , though coins bearing his name were minted in Rome , Milan , Ravenna , and Gaul . Several months after Orestes took power , a coalition of Heruli , Scirian and Turcilingi mercenaries demanded that he give them a third of the land in Italy . When Orestes refused , the tribes revolted under the leadership of the Scirian chieftain Odoacer . Orestes was captured near Piacenza on 28 August 476 and swiftly executed .

Odoacer advanced on Ravenna , capturing the city and the young emperor . Romulus was compelled to abdicate the throne on 4 September 476 . This act has been cited as the end of the Western Roman Empire , although Romulus ' deposition did not cause any significant disruption at the time . Rome had already lost its hegemony over the provinces , Germans dominated the Roman army and Germanic generals like Odoacer had long been the real powers behind the throne . Italy would suffer far greater devastation in the next century when Emperor Justinian I reconquered it .

After the abdication of Romulus , the Roman Senate , on behalf of Odoacer , sent representatives to the Eastern Roman Emperor Zeno , whom it asked to formally reunite the two halves of the

Empire : " the west ? no longer required an emperor of its own : one monarch sufficed for the world " . He was also asked to make Odoacer a patrician , and administrator of Italy in Zeno 's name . Zeno pointed out that the Senate should rightfully have first requested that Julius Nepos take the throne once more , but he nonetheless agreed to their requests . Odoacer then ruled Italy in Zeno 's name .

= = Later life = =

The ultimate fate of Romulus is a mystery . The Anonymus Valesianus wrote that Odoacer , " taking pity on his youth " ( he was about 16 ) , spared Romulus ' life and granted him an annual pension of 6 @,@ 000 solidi before sending him to live with relatives in Campania . Jordanes and Marcellinus Comes say Odoacer exiled Romulus to Campania but do not mention any financial support from the Germanic king .

The sources do agree that Romulus took up residence in the Castel dell 'Ovo ( Lucullan Villa ) in Naples , now a castle but originally built as a grand sea @-@ side house by Lucullus in the 1st century BC , fortified by Valentinian III in the mid @-@ 5th century . From here , contemporary histories fall silent . In the History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire , Edward Gibbon notes that the disciples of Saint Severinus of Noricum were invited by a " Neapolitan lady " to bring his body to the villa in 488 ; Gibbon conjectures from this that Augustulus " was probably no more . " The villa was converted into a monastery before 500 to hold the saint 's remains .

Cassiodorus , then a secretary to Theodoric the Great , wrote a letter in 507 to a " Romulus " confirming a pension . Thomas Hodgkin , a translator of Cassiodorus ' works , wrote in 1886 that it was " surely possible " the Romulus in the letter was the same person as the last western emperor . The letter would match the description of Odoacer 's coup in the Anonymus Valesianus , and Romulus could have been alive in the early sixth century . But Cassiodorus does not supply any details about his correspondent or the size and nature of his pension , and Jordanes , whose history of the period abridges an earlier work by Cassiodorus , makes no mention of a pension .

= = = Last emperor = = =

As Romulus was an alleged usurper , Julius Nepos claimed to hold legally the title of the emperor when Odoacer took power . However , few of Nepos ' contemporaries were willing to support his cause after he ran away to Dalmatia . Some historians regard Julius Nepos , who ruled in Dalmatia until being murdered in 480 , as the last lawful Western Roman Emperor .

Following Odoacer 's coup , the Roman Senate sent a letter to Zeno stating that " the majesty of a sole monarch is sufficient to pervade and protect , at the same time , both the East and the West " . While Zeno told the Senate that Nepos was their lawful sovereign , he did not press the point , and he accepted the imperial insignia brought to him by the senate .

= = In popular culture = =

The 2007 film The Last Legion , and the novel on which it is based , includes a heavily fictionalized account of the reign and subsequent life of Romulus Augustus ; escaping captivity with the aid of a small band of loyal Romans , he reaches Britain , where he eventually becomes Uther Pendragon .

The Marvel Comics character was known as Tyrannus has the " real name " of " Romulus Augustus " , and originates in ancient Rome .

The play Romulus the Great ( 1950 ) , by Friedrich Dürrenmatt , an " Ungeschichtliche Historische Komödie " ( unhistorical historical comedy ) about the reign of " Romulus Augustus " and the end of the Roman Empire in the West .