Augustus: First Emperor of Rome

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Introduction

By 23 BC, Augustus was in sole control of the remains of the Roman Republic, and had reached a Second Settlement with the Senate in which his power was nominally relinquished, but in reality he remained in complete control. He went on to reign as 'first emperor' (though, as we shall see, 'emperor' is not a word the Romans would have used) until his death in 14 AD.

In this discussion we will be taking a broad overview of the reign of Augustus, up to his death and succession. We will look at some of the key events in this period from his perspective, including his reforms to the Roman army, the expansion of the Empire, his relationship with the Senate, and some of the personal relationships with those close to him who were at least partially responsible for his success and legacy. Finally, we will discuss how Augustus managed to reign for longer than any of his successors, and put the foundations in place for an empire that would last for hundreds of years.[1]

Given the length of Augustus' reign (c. 27 BC - 14 AD), the volume of surviving literary and archaeological evidence, and the number of individuals involved, we will mention briefly or skip altogether some of the events which occurred and the people involved in them. Suggestions for further reading are provided at the end for those who wish to examine the period in more detail.

A previous talk, *Augustus: The Path to Power*, discussed in detail how Augustus came to be First Emperor of Rome.

Background

After defeating Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium, Octavian (as he then was) emerged as the most powerful man in Rome, and this had a profound effect on the dying republic.[2] Although he was in theory just another senator and consul at this point, later sources refer to him by his imperial title when describing the aftermath of Actium.[3]

Over the next few years, Octavian consolidated his position by concluding two 'settlements'. On paper, these resulted in him relinquishing control of the provinces and legions (although the Senate asked him to retain control of some) and giving up the annual consulship, which he had held since 30 BC. As thanks, the Senate bestowed upon him the title of Augustus,[4] which is the name we will use

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[1]The dating of the fall of the Roman Empire is open to discussion, but a date of 476 AD is often given as the fall of the West.

[2]For example, the flood of money washing into Rome after Octavian's victory caused interest rates to plummet from 12% to 4% (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 51.21).

[3]Velleius Paterculus, *History of Rome* 2.81. The same author gives a gushing account of Octavian's return to Rome and all his achievements (*History of Rome* 2.89).

[4]Some senators were in favour of bestowing the title *Romulus*, but were persuaded otherwise (Suetonius, *Augustus* 7). Cassius Dio records that Octavian wanted the title *Romulus*, but changed his mind as he understood that this might arouse suspicions of kingship (*Roman History* 53.16).

from now on.[5]

Titles and names

After the Second Settlement, the only major office (or powers thereof) that Augustus lacked was that of *pontifex maximus* (usually translated as 'chief priest'). This was a lifetime appointment, and had been held by Julius Caesar and then Lepidus. Even though Augustus could probably have got away with taking the office from Lepidus, and had been asked to do so privately and publicly,[6] he choose to wait until the death of his former triumvir.[7] From this point on however, pontifex maximus was effectively one of many titles of the current emperor, and would not be held by anyone else.

Although we refer to Augustus as the first 'emperor' of Rome,[8] this is a modern interpretation and not a word which the Romans would have used. Our word *emperor* originates (via Old French) from the Latin *imperator*, which was how soldiers would hail a victorious general after battle.[9] Although it was not a formal title or office (unlike consul, praetor, tribune etc.), being hailed as imperator was something which the recipient would like everyone to know about, given that it was a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for a triumph.[10]

Apart from *Augustus*, the title used was *princeps*,[11] which is often translated as 'first citizen'.[12] As a result, the period from Augustus onwards is referred to as the *principate*. A related term is *primus inter pares* (first amongst equals), which is still used today.[13] Augustus is also referred to as 'Caesar' in places, however to avoid confusion with Julius Caesar we will use the name Augustus. Caesar became a title, and when later emperors had a 'deputy' the emperor would be called Augustus and the deputy Caesar.[14] Finally, in 2 BC, Augustus was granted the title *pater patriae*,[15] an honour which had only been conferred a few times in the past.[16]

Relationship with the Senate

One aspect that dominated Augustus' reign, and may be considered chiefly responsible for its length and relative stability (certainly when compared with the prior decades of civil war), was his relation-

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[5]Augustus can be considered a title or a name, however some of the ancient sources and most modern works use it as a name. The Latin is *appellatus* ('address as' or 'call by name'), which allows either interpretation (*Augustus*, Res Gestae 34.2). Suetonius on the other hand describes it as a *cognomen*, sometimes described as a 'third name' (Suetonius, *Augustus* 7.2) and often used to highlight an achievement of an individual (c.f. Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus, with *magnus* meaning 'the great' (Plutarch, *Pompey* 13)).

[6]Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 54.15; Augustus, *Res Gestae* 10.2

[7]Ovid, *Fasti* 3.415 for Augustus adding this to his list of titles. Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 54.27 for this taking place after the death of Lepidus. Suetonius also reports that Augustus 'could not bring himself to divest his former colleague [Lepidus] of it [the office of pontifex maximus]' (Suetonius, *Augustus* 31).

[8]It could also be argued that Julius Caesar's appointment as 'dictator for life' (*dictatori perpetuo* (Cicero, *Philippics* 2.87), exact date unknown but sometime in early 44 BC), together with his many other powers and offices (including tribune and censor, both of which Augustus would acquire) made him the first 'emperor', albeit for only a couple of months at most.

[9]For example: Plutarch, *Pompey* 12

[10]However, if we consider that Cicero - who was not exactly a military genius - was hailed as imperator, one wonders how low the bar was (Cicero, *Letters to Friends* 15.5).

[11]As Latin is an inflected language, where the word forms change depending on general, number etc., *princeps* may be written as *principis* and other forms.

[12]'Augustus then brought a world exhausted from civil dissension under his authority, with the title of "First Citizen" ' (Tacitus, *Annals* 1.1).

[13]For example, the UK prime minister, like all ministers, serves 'At Her Majesty's Pleasure', but in practice has the ability to appoint and dismiss other ministers, and therefore is 'first amongst equals'. The pigs in the George Orwell novel *Animal Farm* also describe themselves as 'more equal than others'.

[14]When the Empire was split into East and West, there would be two Augusti and two Caesars, known as the *tetrarchy* ('rule of four').

[15]Usually translated as 'Father of my/your/his/the Country' (Augustus, *Res Gestae* 35.1; Suetonius, *Augustus* 58).

[16]Previous recipients included Romulus, Cicero and Julius Caesar.

ship with the Senate. Whilst the Senate's authority had been gradually chipped away, along with other aspects of the constitution (e.g. the *cursus honorum*, as we have seen previously with the likes of Marius, Pompey and Caesar, who showed no intention of adhering to the usual course of offices), it remained a body of men with significant influence.

In 27 BC, Octavian returned full power to the Senate as part of the First Settlement, and on paper gave up his control of the provinces and the legions within them. In reality, his personal authority remained absolute, 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 some of the provinces, placing him officially in charge of the majority of the Roman legions, a proposal which he accepted with feigned reluctance.[17] 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.[18]

As part of his Second Settlement, Augustus had given up the annual consulship, thus freeing up the office for ambitious senators. Although by this point the consulship was not the same as the mid to late republic, it was still considered an honour to be hold this office.

Reduction in size

Despite the proscriptions of Sulla and those of the Second Triumvirate, where lists were drawn up of men who were to be killed and their property seized, the Senate had grown in size from three hundred to six hundred as a result of Sulla's reforms, and then increased again by Caesar - who was notorious for enrolling foreigners into the Senate.[19] Augustus felt that the Senate was both too large and contained men who were not worthy of such status, and took steps to drastically alter the membership.[20] These steps included a substantial increase to the minimum wealth qualification, which was raised from 400,000 to 1,000,000 sesterces.[21]

No doubt some men were happy to depart the Senate, to relieve themselves of the responsibilities and the restrictions on engaging in commerce. Given that the 'republic' was now clearly run by one man, there was a ceiling placed on the ambitions of anyone other than Augustus. Despite the desperate pleas from the Senate for Augustus to continue in some capacity, there must have been men who saw beyond the facade and realised that the Senate was in practice a shadow of its former self. Indeed, this became such a problem that Augustus was forced to bring in a decree (passed during his absence, but likely with his knowledge and approval) compelling men to become senators if they met the property qualification and were not disqualified on grounds of health.[22]

Senatorial and imperial provinces

As part of the First Settlement, provinces were split into two types: senatorial and imperial. Senatorial provinces were mostly those which had existed under the Republic, such as Greece and North Africa (including Carthage), and were governed by a pro-magistrate chosen by the Senate. Imperial provinces tended to be further away from Rome and were also governed by a pro-magistrate, but chosen by the emperor. The main exception to this was Egypt, which was governed by an equestrian chosen by the

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[17]Cassius Dio reports Octavian's speech and the reaction (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 53.2-12). As with many speeches in ancient sources, this is more likely to be an idea of what was said (or, in some cases, what the source's author thought *should* have been said) as opposed to a transcript.

[18]Even towards the end of his reign, Augustus felt it necessary to claim he had restored the Republic, despite all the evidence to the contrary (Augustus, *Res Gestae* 34.1).

[19]Suetonius, *Julius Caesar* 80

[20]Suetonius records the size of the Senate as 1,000 men, and describes them (from Augustus' viewpoint) as a 'sad and ill-assorted rabble' (Suetonius, *Augustus* 35).

[21]Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 54.26. As always, it is difficult to translate ancient monetary values into a modern equivalent, however the 150% increase should give an indication of how significant this was.

[22]Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 54.26

emperor. Regardless of the province's status and how the governor was selected, Augustus' *maius imperium* (greater imperium) meant that he could always overrule decisions made by the governor.[23]

Overall, Augustus' relationship with the Senate was in marked contrast to that of Julius Caesar, who is reported to have behaved disrespectfully towards both tribunes and senators in the run up to his assassination, refusing to rise when the latter came to greet him.[24] Regardless of the fact that Augustus could have dictated terms to the Senate, who were in no position to stop him, he was always careful to make it appear that he was consulting them, and it was not unusual for senators to disagree with and speak against his proposals.

Army reforms

During the reign of Augustus there was a general move towards a standing professional army, unlike in the Republic where legions were raised and disbanded according to fluctuating needs. Service became a career path, rather than a civic duty, with standardised rates of pay and discharge settlements.[25] This was necessary for several reasons:

1. The size of the Empire.
2. The requirement to keep permanent garrisons in some provinces, particularly those bordering areas not subject to Roman rule.
3. Augustus' power was based on troops loyal to him, which required continuous service and payment.

Army service was initially fixed at sixteen years in main service, followed by a further four years as 'reserves', at the end of which a cash lump sum would be paid.[26] This was a marked change from the situation in the Republic, where soldiers would often expect a settlement of land on discharge.[27] Cash payments may have reflected the relative lack of land available for settlements, and the risk of disaffection that seizing land for veterans could cause amongst the populace.[28]

The reasons for fixing service as sixteen years (plus four) is open to speculation, however sixteen years was the maximum length of service for infantry in the Republic, subject to an upper age limit of forty six.[29] For comparison, the average length of service in an infantry regiment in the British Army in 2014 was between seven and eleven years, depending on age at enlistment.[30]

At some point, soldiers were banned from marrying during service - a column of wives and children following the army was unwelcome. Given how long men had to serve, this may have resulted in them marrying earlier or later in life, or simply ignoring the rule.[31]

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[23]Cassius Dio lists the provinces in each class, and notes that the weaker provinces were given to the Senate (*Roman History* 53.12). Suetonius relays similar information but with a different emphasis, stating that Augustus kept hold of some provinces which could not be 'safely administered by an annual governor' (*Augustus* 47).

[24]Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 44.8; Suetonius *Caesar* 78

[25]Suetonius, *Augustus* 49. Augustus claims to have discharged over 300,000 soldiers (over the whole of his reign) and given them land or money (*Res Gestae* 3.3).

[26]Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 54.25. Tiberius as emperor would later insist that the lump sum was only due if the veterans were discharged after twenty years, i.e. early discharge would result in no entitlement (Tacitus, *Annals* 1.78).

[27]One example is the settlement of Pompey's veterans in 59 BC, on the request of Caesar as consul (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 38.1; Appian, *Civil Wars* 3.40).

[28]Cassius Dio reports that the population hoped that 'they would not in future be robbed of their possessions through their land being given to the veterans' (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 54.25).

[29]This limit could be raised to fifty in emergencies, though it is not clear whether this also increased the maximum length of service (Polybius 6.19).

[30]UIN 201309: https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2014-06-18/201309

[31]Augustus is said to have disliked giving even his generals leave to return home to visit their wives, and reluctantly permitted this only during the winter months, when campaigning would be subdued (Suetonius, *Augustus* 24)

Praetorian Guard

In addition to reforming the main army, Augustus also formalised the Praetorian Guard, which would form the personal bodyguard of the emperor. Prior to this, several men had used praetorians for this purpose,[32] however Augustus was the first to have them permanently garrisoned in the city of Rome.[33] Members of the Praetorian Guard were paid a higher wage than legionaries of equivalent rank, and their mandatory length of service was shorter. These benefits, together with the prestige associated with serving the emperor closely and directly, made it a sought-after position.

As with other reforms by Augustus, the Praetorian Guard would remain a feature of the Roman Empire for centuries to come. In particular, they would often have a key role in deciding who the next emperor would be - usually 'their' candidate, selected by the commercial decision of who promised them the most money.[34]

Expanding the Empire

The seemingly perpetual expansion of the land under the control of Rome continued under Augustus, who claimed to have 'extended the boundaries of all the provinces which were bordered by races not yet subject to our empire'.[35] Numerous colonies were founded, and Spain was finally brought under full Roman control.[36]

Shortly after the Battle of Actium, Egypt was annexed and made part of the Roman Empire. The principle allure of Egypt was its ability to supply grain to Rome. 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.[37] Since 123 BC, the distribution of grain to the residents of Rome, known as the *cura Annoae* ('care of Annona', the goddess who personified the grain supply), was a key mechanism for obtaining and retaining support amongst the populace.[38]

However, the expansion had its limits. Britain was considered for conquest at least three times, however no invasion went ahead.[39] Possible reasons for this include the minimal risk that the Britons posed towards Rome, the limited scope for commerce, and the likelihood that the costs of invasion, together with the inevitable requirement for a permanent garrison, would outweigh any benefits.[40]

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[32]For example, Antony was accompanied by five praetorian cohorts at Actium (Orosius, 6.19.8). See Appian *Civil Wars* 5.3 for the incorporation of men into the praetorian cohorts after the defeat of Caesar's assassins at Philippi.

[33]Known as the *pomerium*, soldiers were not allowed to cross the boundary of Rome, except under limited circumstances (e.g. as part of a triumph). For the use of praetorian cohorts as a defensive force for the city, see Tacitus *Annals* 4.5, and for the size of the Praetorian Guard (10,000 men) see Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 55.24. However, Suetonius (*Augustus* 49) records that no more than three cohorts were stationed in the city at any one time.

[34]Perhaps the best known example of the Guard playing a role in accelerating the transition between two emperors is their assassination of Caligula and his replacement by the somewhat reluctant Claudius (Suetonius, *Caligula* 56-59; Suetonius, *Claudius* 10). The rapid change of emperors in 69 AD ('Year of the Four Emperors') was also brought about partly by the Guard and their bribery by men who wanted to take the top job.

[35]Augustus, *Res Gestae* 26-30 for this claim, followed by a list of conquered and subdued provinces.

[36]Although Iberia (as Spain was known) had been part of Rome's overseas possessions, it was not fully 'pacified' until the end of the Cantabrian Wars in 19 BC, and minor rebellions continued until 16 BC.

[37]When Sextus Pompeius (son of Pompey the Great) blockaded the importation of grain into Rome from Sicily, the angry population of the city pelted Octavian and Mark Antony with missiles, including stones. Although the arrival of troops quelled the disorder (by the rather brutal method of killing members of the crowd), the episode demonstrated that not even the triumvirs were immune to public anger caused by a lack of food (Appian, *Civil Wars* 5.67-68).

[38]Juvenal drily comments that the populace were only interested in two things: 'bread and circuses', hence the focus on the grain supply and public games by anyone wishing to obtain and hold onto political power (Juvenal, *Satires* 10.77-81). Eventually Augustus imposed a limit (200,000) on the number of citizens who were entitled to receive free grain (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 55.10).

[39]Cassius Dio mentions planned expeditions to Britain by Augustus twice: *Roman History* 53.22.5 & 53.25.2

[40]Strabo, *Geography* 2.5.8. Britain was eventually invaded in force in 43 AD, but there were regular crises during the occupation, and for much of the time it required a permanent garrison of three legions.

Parthia was another possible target, however this was never realised. Instead Augustus, via Tiberius, negotiated the return of the standards that were lost by Crassus at the Battle of Carrhae.[41]

Sometimes expansion attempts ended in total disaster, with the most notable being the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest. Referred to in our sources as *Clades Variana* (the Varian Disaster, after the Roman general Publius Quinctilius Varus), it resulted in the destruction of three legions (XVII, XVIII and XIX) and put a halt to Roman expansion in Germania.[42] When the news reached him, Augustus is said to have stopped cutting his hair and beard, and could be heard shouting: 'Quintilius Varus, give me back my legions!'[43]

Despite aggressive expansion and what seems like constant fighting, Augustus claims that nevertheless the doors of the Temple of Janus were closed three times during his reign, which symbolised that the whole empire was at peace. Prior to this, the doors had only been closed twice in the whole of Roman history.[44]

Personal relationships

Before and during his reign as emperor, Augustus had a number of close personal relationships which would have a significant influence throughout his life, and without which he may not have enjoyed the same level of success or legacy.

Livia Drusilla

Born in 59 BC, Livia and her family were on the losing side on several occasions, with her first husband fighting alongside Caesar's assassins, Mark Antony (against Octavian, before the Second Triumvirate was formed) and Sextus Pompeius (against the triumvirs). Despite this inauspicious start, she made a positive impression when she was introduced to Octavian in 39 BC, and her husband, Tiberius Claudius Nero, arranged for her to marry Octavian.[45] As well as marrying Livia, Octavian adopted her existing children: Tiberius (future emperor) and Nero Claudius Drusus.

The fact that Augustus remained married to Livia for the rest of his life is remarkable for the time, when we consider that marriages were often made for political reasons and ended when a more compelling opportunity presented itself (or, as was common at the time, when the woman died whilst giving birth).[46] However, it is plausible that Augustus was in such a powerful position that he saw no need to divorce Livia and marry another woman purely for political purposes.

Livia's portrayal in the sources and modern works of historical fiction (especially the Robert Graves novel *I Claudius* and the famous BBC adaptation for television) have given her a bad reputation, however this does not seem wholly deserved, and there is little evidence to back up the claim that she poisoned several of her relatives, including Augustus.[47]

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[41]Augustus, *Res Gestae* 29.2; Suetonius *Tiberius* 9. Augustus claims he 'compelled' the Parthians to return the standards, but this may be an exaggeration and a compromise was likely reached. Horace put this to verse ('And Persians bow before his throne'), which no doubt pleased Augustus (*Odes* 3.5).

[42]Velleius Paterculus (*History of Rome* 2.119) records the defeat as the worst since Crassus lost his life and the majority of his army at the hands of the Parthians at Carrhae in 53 BC.

[43]'*Quintili Vare, legiones redde*' (Suetonius, *Augustus* 23)

[44]Augustus, *Res Gestae* 13

[45]Velleius Paterculus, *History of Rome* 2.79. Given Octavian's position, even at this early stage, it seems unlikely that Livia's husband had much choice in the matter.

[46]For comparison, Pompey had at least five wives, including the daughter of the judge at his trial for misappropriation of public property (Plutarch, *Pompey* 4).

[47]Livia was suspected of being involved in the deaths of Gaius and Lucius (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 55.10A; Tacitus, *Annals* 1.3) as well as Augustus (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 56.30; Tacitus, *Annals* 1.5). In both cases neither author offers evidence, it is clear that they are reporting rumours and suspicions, and alternative options are offered (natural causes in the case of Gaius and Lucius).

Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa

Born in 63 BC (the same year as Augustus), Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa was from a plebeian and equestrian family of humble and obscure origins. Little is known of his early career, however he became close friends with Octavian, was with him when news of Caesar's death arrived, and advised him to take up command of the legions.[48] From then on Octavian would rely heavily on Agrippa in military matters, until the latter's death in 12 BC.

By all accounts, Agrippa was a highly talented general and admiral, and was instrumental in winning the Battle of Actium for Octavian, for which he was the first recipient of a naval crown.[49] He was also given the privilege of being permitted to fly a blue ensign as a result of his victories against Sextus Pompeius in Sicily.[50] In addition to being trusted with command of Rome's armies and navies, he was also permitted to read and, perhaps more importantly, alter letters which Augustus was planning to send to the Senate.[51]

Agrippa held the consulship multiple times and financed enormous infrastructure projects, particularly the construction and restoration of aqueducts which supplied the city of Rome. His connection to Augustus was finally turned into a member of the family through his marriage to Julia, Augustus' daughter and only biological child (with his second wife, Scribonia).[52]

As far as we can tell, Agrippa accepted his subordinate status and never once attempted to usurp Augustus.[53] It is difficult to know whether Agrippa ever resented the higher status of his friend and later father-in-law, but the rewards of being the emperor's most trusted general must have gone a long way towards assuaging any feelings of resentment.

Tiberius

Born in 42 BC to Livia and Tiberius Claudius Nero, Tiberius was brought into the family of Octavian when the future emperor married his mother. We have limited evidence for his early life, but he took part in Octavian's triumph after the Battle of Actium, riding alongside the chariot - a possible reference back to when Julius Caesar allowed Octavian to ride in his carriage.[54]

Once he reached an age at which he could command armies, Tiberius began to build his reputation as a competent general. Early in his military career, he moved troops into Armenia and restored to the throne a king who was friendly to Rome, thus helping to secure Rome's borders. As we saw earlier, Tiberius also led the mission to restore the lost standards of Crassus from Parthia.[55] Augustus naturally took the credit for this, but the fact that he trusted this task to Tiberius marked him as a man to watch.

Although Tiberius spent several years in a sudden and self-imposed retirement,[56] he eventually returned and became a right-hand man and assistant to Augustus, including receiving joint command of the provinces with the emperor.[57] Eventually Tiberius succeeded Augustus as emperor, making it clear (to anyone who might not have been convinced by this point) that Rome was no longer a republic.

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[48] Velleius Paterculus, *History of Rome* 2.59

[49] Velleius Paterculus, *History of Rome* 2.81

[50] Suetonius, *Augustus* 25

[51] Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 51.3

[52] Tacitus, *Annals* 1.3

[53] Agrippa is described as 'well disciplined in obedience, but to one man [Augustus] alone' (Velleius Paterculus, *History of Rome* 2.79)

[54] Suetonius, *Tiberius* 6

[55] Suetonius, *Tiberius* 9

[56] Suetonius, *Tiberius* 10; Velleius Paterculus, *History of Rome* 2.99; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 55.9

[57] Suetonius, *Tiberius* 21

Children

Although Livia did not give birth to any children by Augustus (decrees penalising childless couples clearly did not apply to the emperor),[58] there were many children who formed an important part of Augustus' life. Despite defeating Mark Antony and purging most of his legacy,[59] he asked his sister Octavia to bring up all the children of Antony, with the exception of his eldest son who was put to death.[60]

In addition to Antony's eldest son, a major exception to Augustus' good relationships with children was Ptolemy XV Caesar, known as Caesarion, who was the son of Cleopatra and Julius Caesar. In 30 BC, after defeating Antony and Cleopatra and capturing the city of Alexandria and before the Second Settlement, Octavian had Caesarion murdered to ensure there would be no one to counter his claim to be the heir of Caesar.[61]

Death and legacy

Despite rumours that Livia had something to do with Augustus' death, it seems far more likely that he died of natural causes (old age). He was 75 at the time, and had lived longer than most of his predecessors, helped in part by the expediency of not getting killed in battle (c.f. Crassus, Pompey) or being assassinated (c.f. Caesar).

Augustus' legacy is probably the greatest of any Roman. As we have seen, he achieved, amongst others, the following:

- Reform of the Roman army, from a citizen militia to a professional standing army where service was a career path.
- Centralised control in the hands of one man - something which Caesar tried and failed.
- Peace and prosperity throughout the Empire - though the border provinces which were invaded may not have agreed with this!
- As with Julius Caesar, Augustus had a month named after him, which we still use today.[62]

The combined empire of East and West lasted until 286 (single emperor) or 476 (Romulus Augustus, Emperor of the Western Empire, forced to abdicate), and the Eastern Empire lasted until 1453 (if we consider the Byzantine Empire to be a direct successor, as its emperors did). Who else in history - with the exception of religious leaders - can claim to have founded a system that lasted anything from 300 to 1500 years?

Conclusions

Augustus was by almost any measure the most successful politician in Roman history.[63] Not only did he oversee the final turbulent years in Rome's transition from republic to empire, he outlasted all of

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[58]The *Lex Papia Poppaea* was the main law encouraging marriage and procreation (Tacitus, *Annals* 3.25). See also the *Leges Iuliae*, a collection of incremental reforms by Augustus regarding marriage. Unsurprisingly, people found imaginative ways to get around the rules (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.19).

[59]During Augustus' consulship with Cicero's son in 30 BC, the honours bestowed upon Mark Antony were revoked, his statues were taken down, and it was decreed that no future members of his family would bear the name Marcus (Plutarch, *Cicero* 49; Appian, *Civil Wars* 4.51).

[60]Plutarch, *Antony* 81, 87

[61]Plutarch, *Antony* 81-82. Areius, a philosopher with a close connection to Augustus, remarked: 'not a good thing is a multitude of Caesars'.

[62]Prior to this, August was known as Sextilis (originally the sixth month, hence the name, but moved to the eighth month). Augustus chose this month as it was when he had won his first consulship (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 55.6; Suetonius, *Augustus* 31).

[63]It could be argued that Cicero was the most successful politician who followed the standard career path of the *cursus honorum*, but he was an outlier when compared with the likes of Marius, Sulla, Pompey, Caesar and Augustus.

his successors by at least a decade, and left in place a system that would continue for centuries to come.[64]

How then, did Augustus manage to achieve so much where other men failed?[65] We have examined some possible reasons, but perhaps the most important were:

1. An awareness of his weaknesses and a willingness to delegate to trusted subordinates who could fill these gaps. The clearest example of this is Agrippa, who was a superb general (and admiral, as seen in the Battle of Actium), yet sufficiently loyal not to pose a threat to Augustus.

2. The ability to manipulate the Senate to overlook his blatant dominance (political, military and financial) and believe that he was 'restoring the Republic', despite the fact that he was setting up a monarchy. In particular, by relinquishing the consulship he made room for men who wanted the prestige of office, whilst ensuring that in practice they never had sufficient power to challenge him.

3. Remaining in and around Rome - the base of political power in both the Republic and Early Empire - instead of leaving to fight foreign wars (c.f. Caesar, who was always looking towards the next military victory in a location far from Rome, and Antony, who decided the East was the better part to govern).[66]

The fact that Augustus was either careful or lucky enough not to meet an early end, and therefore had a long period over which to consolidate his power, doubtlessly helped.[67] A private life largely free of scandal, at least by Roman standards, probably did no harm either.[68]

Finally however, we must remain aware of the fact that Augustus reigned for so long that by the end there would be few men who remembered the times prior to this, including unedifying episodes such as the proscriptions of the Second Triumvirate. History is written by, or at least shaped considerably in favour of, the victors, and few had as complete a victory as Augustus.

Chronology

- **63 BC** Birth of Octavian and Agrippa.
- **49 BC** Caesar crosses the Rubicon. Civil war breaks out.
- **44 BC** Assassination of Caesar.
- **43 BC** First consulship of Octavian.
- **42 BC** Battle of Philippi, defeat of Caesar's assassins.
- **42 BC** Birth of Tiberius (successor to Augustus).
- **33 BC** End of the Second Triumvirate.
- **31 BC** Battle of Actium, defeat of Antony and Cleopatra.
- **27 BC** First Settlement of Augustus.
- **23 BC** Second Settlement of Augustus.
- **13 BC** Death of Lepidus, Augustus becomes Pontifex Maximus.
- **12 BC** Death of Agrippa.

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[64]Based 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.

[65]Such men included Pompey and Caesar, who were far more skilled in military matters.

[66]Augustus did spend considerable time outside of Rome, however he was clearly aware of its importance and was often near enough to return quickly should the need arise.

[67]It is difficult to overemphasise the importance of Augustus' longevity - it was not uncommon for aspiring Roman politicians to have their life cut short by battle, assassination or diseases which would not ail a modern politician.

[68]There are mentions of Augustus having mistresses in the ancient sources, but these do not appear to have been particularly scandalous (see Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 54.19 for an example) - certainly not on the same scale as Antony and Cleopatra. Antony was married to Octavian's sister at the time, and named his children with Cleopatra as heirs (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 50.3). Along with his lifestyle as a 'Hellenic king', this behaviour suggested he had 'failed to conduct himself as befitted a Roman citizen' (Suetonius, *Augustus* 17).

- **4 AD** Return of Tiberius to Rome.
- **9 AD** Battle of the Teutoburg Forest, three legions destroyed.
- **14 AD** Death of Augustus. Tiberius becomes second emperor of Rome.

Sources and further reading

We are fortunate that this time period is well documented, and many of the ancient sources are still available to us. There is also a wide range of further reading for those who wish to explore the subject further.

Ancient sources

Our ancient 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.

Some of these sources relate mainly or exclusively to times before the Augustan Age - they are included to allow comparison with the Republic as, despite what Augustus may have said, many changes were made in the early days of the Empire.

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 Julius Caesar.

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.[69]

Augustus: The *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* (Deeds of the Divine Augustus) is a list of the acts from his life which Augustus wished to have engraved and erected in front of his mausoleum. The author, and the fact that it was revised towards the end of his life when his position was secure, means it is by no means a neutral account, however it is useful to read how Augustus saw his achievements and how he wanted to be remembered.[70]

Livy: Roman writing in the reign of Augustus (and, according to Tacitus, a friend of the emperor).[71] Whilst sometimes criticised as unreliable, patriotic, and concerned mainly with telling a good story,

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[69]Unlike 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.

[70]Many commentaries on the Res Gestae are available, including detailed analysis of the Latin and Greek (inscriptions exist in both languages). Two of note are: P.A. Brunt & J.M. Moore and Alison E. Cooley.

[71]Tacitus, *Annals* 4.34

Livy used several sources which would otherwise be lost, and is therefore a useful guide to some parts of the late Republic. Unfortunately, the section of his work covering the reign of Augustus is lost.

Polybius: Greek with a heavy Roman bias. Polybius was a hostage in Rome between the Second and Third Punic Wars, and a tutor for Scipio Aemilianus. These connections meant that he had a greater insight into the Roman military, and he may have been present when Carthage was sacked in 146. Generally considered to be more reliable than Livy, Polybius is a major source for the Punic Wars, and is useful for a comparison of the Mid Republic with the Late Republic and Early Empire, especially the army.[72]

Orosius: Priest who wrote a history from a Christian perspective, approximately four centuries after Augustus.[73]

Ovid: Roman poet whose *Fasti* details Roman holidays and customs.

Further reading

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 Empire, Colin Wells.

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.

Augustus Caesar, John B. Firth.

Augustus: The Biography, Jochen Bleicken and Anthea Bell.

The Making of the Roman Army: From Republic to Empire, Lawrence Keppie. Comprehensive coverage of the composition of the Roman army, its equipment, and the changes from republic to empire.

Marcus Agrippa, Lindsay Powell.

Notes

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

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[72]For books 1-5 of Polybius, the Oxford World's Classics edition has the complete English translation. The Penguin Classics edition does not include the full text, e.g. chapters 1.65-88 are missing.

[73]The most up to date English translation of Orosius, with an introduction and notes, is by A. T. Fear (Liverpool University Press).