

Chapter 10: Rome: From City-State to Empire: 10-2e The Triumvirates

Book Title: World Civilizations

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## 10-2e The Triumvirates

The final collapse of the pseudo-democracy and the republican system was brought on by the patrician general and politician [Julius Caesar \(\(100–44 B.C.E.\) Roman patrician who formed the First Triumvirate and who was the victor in Rome's second civil war.\)](#) (died 44 B.C.E.), who saw that it had become corrupt and was unsuited for governance of a far-flung empire. He conspired with others who were also discontented with the Senate leadership to form an alliance known as the *First Triumvirate* (try-UM-vuh-rayt; the “rule of three”). The other members were the wealthy speculator Crassus and the brilliant general Pompey (pom-PAY).

During the 50s B.C.E., Caesar made his reputation by conquering the semicivilized Gauls (gawls) in what is now France, which he turned into a Roman province of great potential. With his ambitions fully awakened, he now wished to become consul and use that powerful office to make basic changes in the structure of government. His former ally Pompey and the large majority of the Senate viewed him as a dangerous radical and opposed him. Emerging the victor after a difficult struggle, Caesar made himself dictator and fully intended to start a royal dynasty. He subordinated the Senate entirely to himself and initiated several major reforms of the existing system, even including the Roman calendar. In March 44, however, conservative senators assassinated him. His only surviving male relative was his adoptive son Octavian Caesar, whom he had made his political heir. But Octavian (ahk-TAY-vee-an) was only eighteen when Caesar died. He had little political experience and lacked military prowess, so it seemed unlikely that he would ever fill the office of his adoptive father.

When the senatorial assassins of Julius Caesar could not agree on what should be done to restore the republic, Octavian, the financier Lepidus, and the general Mark Antony formed an alliance known as the *Second Triumvirate*. The three allies crushed the assassins and then divided the empire: Antony took the East and Egypt; Octavian, Italy and the West; and Lepidus, Africa. Octavian soon showed himself to be a gifted politician, but he stood in the shadow of Mark Antony. (Lepidus had no independent political hopes and could be ignored.) Antony made himself unpopular in Rome by apparently succumbing to the charms of the queen of Egypt, Cleopatra, and maltreating his noble Roman wife and her influential family. Octavian cleverly built his political strength in Italy and acquired much experience in handling men. When the test came, he was ready. In 32 B.C.E. Octavian maneuvered Antony into declaring war against him. The victory of Octavian's forces at the decisive [Battle of Actium \(\(ACK-tee-um\) The decisive battle in 31 B.C.E. in the struggle between Octavian Caesar and Mark Antony, in which Octavian's victory paved the way for the Principate.\)](#) (ACK-tee-um) in 31 B.C.E. marked the effective beginning of the Roman Empire.

### Roman Infantryman.

This picture shows a bronze figure of a Roman legionary in full dress at the time of the empire in the second century C.E. The soldier's vest is constructed of overlapping metal bands that, although heavy and awkward, effectively protected him from enemy thrusts.



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