

# I

## Augustus

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On March 15, 44 BC, a cataclysmic event stunned the people of Rome. In the senate chamber inside the Theater of Pompey, Gaius Julius Caesar lay in a pool of his own blood. He had been assassinated. During the previous disastrous civil wars he had been opposed by his arch-rival Pompey and by most of the senators, but he had prevailed, and gone on to establish autocratic rule. The precise nature of this rule had not yet been clearly defined, but he had made it clear that he had no intention of relinquishing control of Rome or of allowing supreme authority to slip out of his hands. After all, what else could the title *dictator perpetuo*, “dictator for life,” as proclaimed on his coins, mean? The frustration of many of his enemies, among them highly respected men like the two senators Brutus and Cassius, was understandable. They saw no real place for themselves in this political scheme. This is why the conspiracy to assassinate him was able to succeed.

For a brief moment the conspirators seemed to have achieved their aim: freedom for Rome, which of course meant freedom for the ruling senatorial aristocracy. Soon, however, it became evident how little they had in fact achieved. They had attributed the crisis of the republic to a single man. They had not recognized that the crisis went much deeper and that there were many others striving for the same goals as Caesar. Confronted by popular anger and the astuteness of Marc Antony, who as consul represented legal authority, the conspirators were obliged to retreat from the city. There were many reasons why Antony, a long-time follower of Caesar, now had the best chance in the looming battle to succeed him.

## Emergence of Octavian

From the town of Velitrae, however, a nineteen-year-old, born during the consulship of Cicero on September 23, 63 BC, entered the Roman political arena – an arena he would not quit until his death on August 19, AD 14, almost 57 years later. In April 44 he had just returned to Rome from the province of Macedonia, beyond the Adriatic, where he had spent time with Caesar's troops as they prepared to go to war against the Parthians. Until then he had borne the name of his senatorial father Gaius Octavius; but shortly after his return from Macedonia he began to use the name Gaius Julius Caesar. His great-uncle Julius Caesar had adopted him in his will as his nearest male relative, the grandson of his sister Julia, and had bequeathed to him a three-quarter share of his estate. Normally an adoption was a private legal transaction, but not when it was made by a man like Julius Caesar. The decision meant that the young Caesar would also be his great-uncle's political heir. Perceptive observers would have recognized that the course to monarchy on which Julius Caesar had earlier embarked would be pursued. Indeed, they would have recognized that Octavian, as we call him after his adoption, although he himself never used the name, could do no other than pursue it. A short while later he made this intention very clear in a public speech in Rome (Cic. *ad Att.* 16, 15, 3).

Even before Octavian arrived in Rome, he had left no room for doubt that he was a force to be reckoned with. Without authorization from the senate or the people he attempted to raise an army on his own initiative. In the *Res Gestae*, the summation of his reign he wrote in AD 14, he stated this clearly: "At nineteen years of age, by my own decision and at my own expense, I raised an army, with which I freed the republic oppressed by the tyranny of a faction" (*Res Gestae* 1). It is no accident that the *Res Gestae* begin with this sentence. His association with the army was the basis not only for his initial rise to power; he also depended on it on later occasions, as did all of his successors.

All the same, in the year 44 the young Octavian was only one of the actors on the political and military stage. At first he was also one of the weakest, because his name was a reminder that he was not Caesar's blood relative, but only his adopted son. Yet he soon managed, through tactical finesse and unabashed switches of loyalty, to strengthen his position. At first the consul Antony seemed to be his main adversary. So Octavian associated himself with all those senators opposed to that man's growing power. Their leader was Cicero, who saw the opportunity to play the decisive role of his life at the

republic's helm (*rector rei publicae*). Cicero actually believed he could use Octavian to further his own ambitions against Antony. But Octavian outdid Cicero both in tactics and in ruthless determination. He had the senate assign to himself an official position that enabled him legally to raise an army and to take part in the senate and public assemblies. Together with the consuls of 43, Hirtius and Pansa, long-standing supporters of Caesar, Octavian embarked on a campaign against Antony, who was using his army to build a power-base in northern Italy. In the resulting conflict, at Mutina, in April 43 BC, Antony's army was defeated by Octavian and the consuls. The two consuls fell in the battle and, without troubling to offer a justification, Octavian took over their legions. The senate and its leader Cicero had thus lost their own military prop. Octavian grasped the initiative. A contingent of his centurions appeared in Rome and promoted his case for the consulship, the highest legal office obtainable. When the senate rejected him, Octavian returned, this time with the legions. Neither the senate nor the people (to the extent that they participated in the elections) could hold out against the might of his armies. On August 19, 43 BC, Octavian, not yet twenty years old, was elected consul for the first time. Never before had someone so young attained this position. Decades later, when he set about nominating his own successors, the similar conferment of an early consulship was a clear signal of his dynastic intentions, as will later be demonstrated by the premature advancement of his adopted sons Gaius and Lucius, and of his nephew Marcellus (see p. 00).

The first consulship proved to be only a short episode for the new young Caesar. Antony had recovered from his defeat and, with the support of the governors of the Gallic and Spanish provinces, had established himself in northern Italy. Among the notable allies of Antony were Aemilius Lepidus and Munatius Plancus, men who, like him, had had close ties to the late Caesar (they would both play an important role also in Octavian's future career). Octavian could not have held his ground against such a united military force. But he was not to be put to the test, since there was an incentive for both camps to come to an agreement, if they wanted to keep the upper hand in both the political and the military spheres. Caesar's murderers had to be defeated. They had established a stronghold in the eastern provinces, from where they threatened the Caesarians, Antony as well as Octavian. Many in the senate, especially Cicero, placed their hopes in Brutus and Cassius and their armies. It was with good purpose that these put on their coins the date of Caesar's assassination: *Eid(us) Mart(iae)* = 'the ides of March' (15 March), thus identifying themselves as the collective enemy of the Caesarians.



## Triumvirate

Antony, Lepidus, and Octavian met on an island in the Reno river, not far from Bologna. Deeply mistrustful of one another, they negotiated for three days before reaching an agreement. Their first and most important goal was to secure their own positions of power. They agreed to a triple rule, a triumvirate. Since Antony had officially abrogated the position of dictator, which would have been inappropriate in a triumvirate in any case, they chose the title of *triumviri rei publicae constituendae* (“board of three men entrusted with the organization of the state”). It seemed a harmless designation at first glance. Yet, just forty years earlier, Sulla had used the same expression, only in his case the first word had been “dictator.” This should have been a grim warning. No one had forgotten the horror of that time. Indeed, the new allies decided, just as Sulla had, to rid themselves of their enemies by proscriptions. By this means approximately 300 senators and 2,000 equestrians were identified as opponents of the regime and proscribed – effectively, sentenced to death. Whoever killed one of them received a portion of the victim’s property as compensation; the remainder was collected for the state treasury, that is, for the use of the triumvirs. Octavian apparently argued against including among the intended victims Cicero, a man who had so decisively aided the young man’s rise while so seriously underestimating his abilities. But Antony had a deep hatred for Rome’s greatest orator. After Caesar’s death Cicero seemed to have snatched away from Antony an almost guaranteed succession, and Antony insisted on including him on the list. In the end, Octavian acceded to his murder. Nor did he show mercy toward others. All these proceedings were perfectly legal. The position of the triumvirs, and the absolute power that resulted from it, was confirmed for a period of five years through a law carried in the popular assembly on November 27, 43 BC. Theirs was a legalized, albeit arbitrary, power.

The triumvirs divided among themselves the task of regaining enemy-held territories. Initially Antony seemed to be the strongest member of the coalition. He accordingly received as his province northern Italy and the part of Gaul annexed by Caesar, along with all its resources. Lepidus received the provinces of Gallia Narbonensis and Spain. Octavian was given the two islands of Sardinia and Sicily, as well as Africa. All these areas were under the direct or indirect control of anti-Caesarians, who had powerful fleets at their disposal.

Before a new state order could be initiated, the power of Caesar’s murderers had to be broken. Octavian enacted a law to have them declared enemies of the Roman people. But legal measures were insufficient. The problem had to



be finally settled by weapons. In October and November 42 BC, at Philippi in northern Greece, the republican armies, under the leadership of Brutus and Cassius, were defeated in two bloody massacres, in which both leaders died. There was no one left to mount an effective defense of the old republic. This should have opened the way to a new political order. But none of the three allies was aiming for that goal: what mattered more to them was which one would prevail in the subsequent power struggle. Neither Antony nor Octavian considered sharing power. Again, Antony was set to build up the strongest position. His mandate was to secure the east, where he was to find the means to pay for the huge armies – almost forty legions had fought at Philippi. The soldiers saw their service for the triumvirate in terms of hard cash, and many army veterans wanted to retire and settle down. The triumvirs deemed meeting these wishes a top priority, and since the soldiers were all Roman citizens with homes mainly in Italy, this inevitably meant settling them in Italy. Octavian was given this task. No matter how he carried it out, he would make enemies. There was no more free land available in Italy for settlement, so the only way to acquire it was to seize it, by whatever means necessary. The people of eighteen cities were driven from their homes and their property was handed over to the veterans. Octavian later boasted that to settle former soldiers in Italy and the provinces he paid for the land from his own funds, but in fact no such payments were made after Philippi.

The hatred felt for Octavian by the displaced populace knew no bounds. Lucius Antonius, Marc Antony's brother and one of the consuls of 41, gathered the dispossessed and attempted to eliminate him. It is difficult to imagine that Lucius did this without his brother's permission. From the outset the unity between the two key members of the triumvirate, Octavian and Antony, was very fragile; Lepidus no longer counted at all. As it turned out, Antony's strategy failed, and it was Octavian who prevailed. Perugia (modern Perugia), where his opponents had sought refuge, was forced to surrender. Lucius' life was spared, but countless other opponents were sacrificed at an altar dedicated to Caesar. Octavian never fully lost his reputation as the butcher of Perugia. Even today the theme of Perusine savagery continues to resonate in the poetry of Propertius (1. 22). That said, in the long term the thankless task of providing settlements in Italy for the veterans paid off for Octavian. In contrast to the angry dispossessed, the soldiers considered Octavian their benefactor, and gave him their loyalty, since from now on he alone could guarantee their hard-won gains. Many thought of him in the same terms as had the young Virgil, a native of Mantua, who at first was dispossessed, but later had his family property restored. "He will always be a god for me," declares a shepherd in one of Virgil's *Eclogues*, in praise of Octavian (Verg., *Ecl.* 1. 45). And it was

from Italy that, ten years later, Octavian drew his main support in his final battle against Antony.

But for the moment Octavian's position was still very precarious. He had from the outset considered his first task to be to establish a firm territorial stronghold. After the death of Antony's appointee for governor of Gaul, Octavian had taken over this province without consulting the other two members of the triumvirate. Antony could not accept this, and was even tempted to form an alliance between himself and Sextus Pompeius, son of Caesar's great foe, Pompey. With his fleet, Sextus Pompeius was still virtually unchallenged in the western Mediterranean. The Italians suffered from his attacks and from the precarious state of their supply lines, since his ships often interrupted the shipments of grain. A long-term alliance between Antony and Sextus would have proved exceptionally dangerous for Octavian. After Antony's landing at Brundisium in lower Italy, his legions, committed Caesarians, were loath to fight against Octavian's troops. Moreover, an alliance with the "republican" Sextus Pompeius was abhorrent to them. So through their troops, especially the powerful centurions, Antony and Octavian were forced to conclude the pact of Brundisium, by which the Roman world was divided more or less in two: the east fell to Antony, the west mainly to Octavian. Lepidus would have to content himself with Africa. Italy would remain open to all three, especially for the purpose of recruiting legionaries. A public display of harmony between the two rivals was created by a "dynastic" union: Octavia, younger sister of Octavian, was wed to Antony.

However, even family ties did not guarantee a lasting harmony of interests, given that the conflict with Sextus Pompeius continued. Pressed by the ever-menacing cooperation between Antony and Sextus Pompeius and public disquiet over Sextus' unfettered activities, Octavian was finally obliged to come to terms with the ruler of the seas, whose position was at last officially recognized. The most notable consequence was that those members of the senatorial aristocracy who had fled to Pompeius when threatened with elimination by the triumvirate were now permitted to return to Italy. One of them was Tiberius Claudius Nero, a man of old patrician stock. His wife Livia Drusilla, also of the old nobility, was pregnant with their second child. A little earlier Octavian had separated from his wife Scribonia, who had borne him a single daughter, Julia. Now Livia entered his life. The mutual attraction was so strong that the newly pregnant Livia left her husband and, even before the birth of her child, married Octavian. She bore her second son, Drusus, in his house. The priests had given exceptional permission for this marriage. Livia also brought her first son, Tiberius, into Octavian's home. Both stepsons would play a key role in his plans after he achieved sole rule.

Octavian never lost sight of this goal. Sextus Pompeius was operating on Italy's doorstep. If Octavian were to stabilize his power in Italy and in the western empire, this troublesome rival would have to be dealt with. This could be achieved only by a strong fleet of his own. Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, Octavian's closest ally since 44 BC, provided the fleet and, after some initial setbacks, succeeded in decisively defeating their dangerous adversary off the Sicilian town of Naulochos. Sextus was forced to retreat to the east, where he met a sordid end. To prevent this war from looking like a civil conflict, Octavian later defined it as a "slave war" (*Res Gestae* 25). He returned 30,000 slaves who had fled to Pompeius and fought at his side to their original masters to be punished; 6,000 slaves whose masters could not be located were crucified along the Appian Way. Everyone could see that the merciless triumvir upheld the traditional rights of the property owners. Human suffering of slaves meant nothing to Octavian, or to most of the population.

In the turbulent aftermath of these events Lepidus, the weakest member of the triumvirate, tried to reassert his position. His attempt led to his total eclipse. He lost his army and his provinces in Africa, retaining only the position of chief pontiff. Even this one remaining office was seen as a concession, since Octavian later claimed that Lepidus had usurped the post after Caesar's death. But priests were appointed for life, and Octavian's gesture was further proof of his respect for republican tradition, something he increasingly emphasized in his program as long as it did not conflict with his broader plan. That plan was to hold sole power in the Roman world. The only obstacle now was Antony.

### Conflict with Marc Antony

Antony's sphere was the provinces of the eastern Mediterranean, most notably Egypt. Despite his marriage to Octavian's sister Octavia, he began an intense love affair with Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, following their very first meeting in 41 BC. Their passion would serve the political goals of both. Cleopatra sought to extend her sphere of power for herself and for her children by both Caesar and Antony. For his part, Antony needed to bolster his leadership within the Roman world. He could best achieve this if he defeated the Parthians, the great power beyond the Euphrates. Caesar had already wanted to punish them for the destruction of the Roman army at Carrhae in 53 BC. The prestige Antony might gain would make up for his repeated political misjudgments. During the early years of the Roman civil war the Parthians had overrun most of the eastern provinces, thus making clear the

danger they posed for Roman dominance. Antony needed soldiers for the campaign, and could find them only in Italy. He had made significant concessions to Octavian, and had even placed 120 ships at his disposal for his final action against Sextus Pompeius. Octavian was supposed to reciprocate, with 20,000 legionnaires, as part of the deal; but he delivered only a small fraction of what had been promised, sending only 2,000 men to the east. Antony must have seen this as a profound insult. But this does not in itself explain the failure of his Parthian campaigns. The initial announcements of victory from the east proved to be little more than empty words, and handed Octavian the opportunity to undermine Antony's reputation as a great commander. More seriously, Antony had transferred to Cleopatra and her children portions of Roman provinces. Word of this spread, and was represented as a sell-out of Roman interests in the east. The charge made a powerful impact on Italy, in particular on many of the senators. This was all the more significant because a number of them had up to now felt that the distant Antony could be better trusted than Octavian to restore the republic, or at any rate to exercise a less ruthless leadership. Octavian was there, in person, and people inevitably experienced his ruthless political maneuverings at first hand, despite his efforts to present himself as a respecter of tradition and bringer of freedom. After the victory over Sextus Pompeius, Octavian even officially declared the end of the civil wars. Not everyone believed him. Antony's blunders accordingly helped Octavian to distinguish himself from his opponent, as the defender of Roman and Italian interests. All he needed was the excuse to take on Antony in open combat. But whoever took that first step would brand himself as destroyer of peace.

At the end of 34 BC Antony presented his plans for the eastern provinces in a public ceremony in Egypt. Cleopatra's children would receive various territories as personal domains, including some that had been subject to Rome for a considerable time; Cleopatra would be elevated to the rank of 'queen of queens', *regina regum*, all thanks to Antony, a Roman. This would have been seen by Romans as an attack on Rome. What must have appeared the most dangerous development of all in the struggle between the Caesarian loyalists was the fact that Antony had officially recognized Caesarion, Caesar's son by Cleopatra, and had given him a place in the new order. As a result, a natural son of the deified Caesar stood in opposition to Octavian, who was only his adopted son, even if Octavian did refer to himself as *divi filius*, "son of deified Caesar." Octavian responded to what he saw as Antony's provocations with bitter attacks in the senate. Above all, it was now clear that Antony must not set foot in Italy. Octavian would not even allow him to raise recruits. This meant, in effect, that Antony was henceforth banned from

Rome. That city, and Italy, now “belonged” exclusively to Octavian. In political if not strictly legal terms, this was a declaration of war against Antony. Sure enough, Antony then took a concrete step toward war, just as Octavian had hoped he would. Even though Antony was eyeing a new military venture in Armenia and Parthia in 33 BC, he interrupted this campaign in response to the changing general situation in Italy. He now prepared his armies and fleets for an attack on Octavian and the west.

At the beginning of 32 BC the conflict was still limited to verbal jousts in the senate. The two new consuls for that year, Gaius Sosius and Domitius Ahenobarbus, attacked Octavian in the chamber. An important issue was the question of whether the authority of the triumvirs, which had been renewed for a further five years in 37 BC, still provided a legal basis for the roles played by the two rivals. Doubts raised on this point in the senate posed a threat to Octavian, who was present, but not to the absent Antony. The imminence of this threat made Octavian respond all the more energetically. In the next session he assumed the offensive, protected by armed followers, and made it clear that he no longer thought the matter needed to be debated. He announced that at the next meeting he would present explicit charges against Antony and against Sosius. Rather than wait, Sosius and Domitius left the city and fled to Antony. More than 300 senators joined them. The issue would be now settled by weapons alone.

Antony drew closer to Italy. Athens became his military and political base, and it was there that the fugitive senators assembled. Cleopatra was also in Athens, and stood conspicuously at Antony’s side when both political and military questions were addressed in public. Many of his Roman followers found this unacceptable, partly because of their deeply felt sense that women should stay out of such matters, but more importantly because they felt that such ostentatious appearances of Antony alongside the Egyptian queen could only undermine his role, as well as their own position, in Italy, in a society that saw such behavior as a mark of social disintegration. And of course Octavian let it be known to the Romans that a queen from the east aspired to reign on the Capitol. When Antony failed to respond to the urgent concerns of his followers, many of the senators abandoned him. Two of them, Munatius Plancus and his nephew Marcus Titius, returned to Rome and crowned their shift of allegiance with a choice gift for Octavian. They had been witnesses to the sealing of Antony’s will and knew its explosive details. Also, they knew where it was kept: in the Temple of Vesta, in Rome. Although unauthorized access to a will was considered a sacrilege in Rome, as was simply entering the sacred domain of the Vestal Virgins, Octavian could not let this opportunity slip away. He forced the chief Vestal to deliver the will to him



and he read aloud in the senate those parts of it that served his purpose. Among other things, Antony had confirmed the award of eastern territories to Cleopatra's children. But most strikingly he solemnly avowed that in the event of his death he should be buried beside Cleopatra in Alexandria. He, a Roman, wanted his final resting place to be in the decadent capital of the east. Any Roman who wanted that could surely not be master of his own decisions. When Antony sent Octavia, who was still officially his wife, her divorce letter, this was the final proof that he had been bewitched by the sorceress of Egypt. Who could now still dare to support him? Thus, without any opposition in the senate, Antony's consulship for the following year was withdrawn, along with all his other public functions. Politically, he had been annihilated. By contrast, Octavian openly began the construction of his own enormous mausoleum on the Campus Martius, emphasizing beyond any possible doubt that Rome was the center of not only his political, but also his personal, world.

The threat looming over Italy was now officially blamed on Cleopatra. No one could hesitate to take up arms against her. For this reason, when war was declared it was against her, a foreign queen, not against Roman citizens. The *civil* wars had ended long ago, according to Octavian's propaganda. All Italy took an oath to Octavian as *dux*, leader in the fight against the threat from the east, as he later described it (*Res Gestae* 25). The western provinces similarly gave him their allegiance. Now Octavian reaped the rewards, especially in Italy, of his investment over the recent years. Through their oath the veterans ensured him the political backing of the Italian cities, as well as military support. In return he had to ensure that Italy would not once again suffer in the civil war, which, despite the pretence to the contrary, is what was really being fought.

In late 32 BC Antony and Cleopatra stationed a portion of their troops along the west coast of Greece and Epirus, while the main contingent ended up at Actium. In terms of nominal battle capability, their forces must have seemed superior to Octavian's. This would certainly have been the impression they created at sea, because of their enormous fleet. Thus there was a danger that an attack from the Adriatic might succeed. But this was balanced by the fact that Agrippa was by far the better strategist. Octavian succeeded in transporting his land forces from Italy without heavy casualties. At Actium, quarters were established opposite the main enemy force. In a series of sea battles, ranks of enemy flotillas were defeated, outmatched by the smaller, more mobile, ships under Agrippa's inspired tactical leadership. As a consequence, reinforcements from Egypt were cut off. On land, Antony was unable to draw Octavian into a decisive battle. The enforced idleness weakened

Antony's troops especially, since they could not be resupplied. With increasing frequency whole units deserted. In the end this meant that a major encounter on land was not an option for him, since Octavian had gained the upper hand. The battle at sea finally came to a conclusive outcome on September 2, 31 BC. Whether this was through deliberate planning or because Antony tried to flee the trap he had fallen into is an open question. In any event, for Antony the result was military disaster and flight, along with Cleopatra. After negotiations, the leaderless land forces surrendered. Octavian attributed his victory at Actium to Apollo, from now on one of the great divine protectors of the new leader. He had a magnificent temple built to the god, closely linked to his own house on the Palatine hill.

What followed Actium was little more than the closing act of the internal Roman conflict. The eastern provinces surrendered without resistance. The client kings also came over to Octavian, among them Herod of Judea, who thus not only saved his kingdom, but even managed to expand it. Octavian used the system of client rulers extensively. In many regions it was they who maintained the security of the frontiers. In the summer of 30 BC Octavian finally stood at the threshold of Egypt, where Antony had followed Cleopatra. Defeated at Actium, in his desperation Antony hoped for a final military victory before the walls of Alexandria. But most of his supporters had abandoned him, and his only escape was suicide. He died in Cleopatra's arms. She had indeed become the center of his life.

The queen may well have hoped to come to some arrangement with the victor, just as she had earlier with Caesar and Antony. But Octavian was not interested. He just wanted to preserve her as choice booty for his triumphal procession in Rome. She evaded this final humiliation with a snakebite. Thus she escaped Octavian, though Egypt and the treasures of the Ptolemaic royal household did fall to the victor. Together these spoils enabled him to provide Romans with the tangible signs of victory. Egypt was to be subject to the authority of the Roman people, as Octavian himself wrote in the *Res Gestae* (27): "the land of the Nile now became a Roman province." This arrangement would survive until the seventh century AD.

Octavian was thus the sole victor, and supreme power was now his, with no serious contender on the horizon. Immediately after the fall of Alexandria, he put to death Caesarion, Cleopatra's son by Caesar. There was to be absolutely no doubting his claim to be Caesar's political heir. Again, he was confronted with the question of how to define his own role in the future Roman state. This time he had to come up with an answer. One thing was certain: never again would he relinquish his hold on the political leadership. But the precise form this leadership should take would still need to be worked out.

## The Augustan Settlement

For three consecutive days in August, 29 BC, Octavian paraded his victories over Illyricum, over Cleopatra at Actium, and over Egypt, before the Roman people; never before had there been such a powerful display of military conquest. Even before the triple triumph he had begun to direct the political debate toward his own future role in the *res publica*. This process reached a provisional conclusion in January, 27, preceded by two carefully staged spectacular sessions of the senate, on January 13 and 16. The new form of government did not emerge through a single event, despite the common perception created by the one remaining historical narrative of this period by Cassius Dio, written early in the third century (Dio 53. 2–12). Octavian himself states in his record that, in his sixth and seventh consulships, that is, in the years 28 and 27 BC, he returned the state, the *res publica*, to the people and the senate, even though by general consensus he had been declared “in control of the entire state” (*potens rerum omnium: Res Gestae* 34).<sup>1</sup> Exactly how the details of this process were worked out we do not know. There is also uncertainty about the exact proposals and who the main players were. There is no dispute that within Octavian’s circle various models of government were discussed. Later Dio summarized these discussions in two speeches supposedly delivered to Octavian: by Agrippa, in support of a return to the republic, and by his close friend and advisor Maecenas, in support of an overtly monarchic form of rule (Dio 52, 1–40). The debates are fictitious; but no doubt thinking at the time must have wavered between these two extremes. The extremes themselves, a free republic or a direct monarchy, were both ruled out from the outset.

Throughout, Octavian adopted the fundamental premise that he would never again relinquish control of the body politic. But it was just as evident that an open monarchy, such as Caesar had begun to form, was impossible, since there would be no proper role in such a scheme for those who had hitherto wielded political power, the senators. Even now, after nearly twenty years of civil war, they would hardly be willing to be set aside completely. At the very least the appearance that they would have their appropriate share of power was a necessity. The senate (along with the people) constituted the *res publica*. It was essential for Octavian to acknowledge this without at the same time compromising his own position. The power that he sought to exercise would have to be handed over to him voluntarily by the senate and the people in a form that would be fundamentally unassailable in future. Octavian had therefore to succeed in establishing in the eyes of the public, or

at least of the senate, a degree of confidence that this restoration of power and authority was not merely symbolic. In any case he had already made known on a coin of 28 BC that he had returned *iura et leges* (“law and statutes”) to the Romans. The official institutions of the state, the courts and public meetings, would resume their traditional form, one almost forgotten during the period of civil war.

On January 13 and 16, 27 BC, the final act of the restoration of the state was played out in the senate. Perhaps Octavian had actually announced to the senators that he wanted to retire from all public duties. If so, it was of course never really his intention. Rather, he had a deliberate purpose in mind: to be urged openly to assume responsibility for the *res publica*, so that no one could accuse him of having seized power illegally. Most likely, at least some of the senators were made privy to the plan. The result was as expected. The senate urgently pressed Octavian to remain at the disposal of the state, and he finally acquiesced. It was not even necessary to transfer any new legal authority, since he was consul, together with his trusted friend Agrippa. Thus, in exact accordance with the principles of the republic, he already held the highest magisterial authority, *imperium*. It remained only to define what this position would encompass.

Octavian’s solution was brilliant. Alongside the duties of consul, based on his consular *imperium*, the senate transferred to him certain provinces of the empire to govern: both Spanish provinces, all of Gaul, Syria, Cilicia, Cyprus, and Egypt. With the provinces came control of the legions stationed in most of them. Thus the bulk of the army was under his command. Formally this corresponded to republican procedures, as long as the mandate had a specific time limit, which was until such time as the provinces could be deemed peaceful, in any case not longer than ten years. Temporary power could not be officially construed as monarchical power. To the end of his life Augustus observed this time limit, even if eventually its extension was barely a formality. Symbolically the limit was enormously significant. He could later maintain that he never had at his disposal more power than did his colleagues in office. Only in authority and influence, *auctoritas*, did he supersede everyone (*Res Gestae* 34). This was a huge oversimplification of the true terms by which he exercised power.

The official act of returning power to the senate and Roman people could be celebrated in the senate as the restoration of the *res publica*. The man who had allowed this to come about freely was rewarded for his service by expressions of universal gratitude. Special and distinctive honors had to be devised. The approach to his house on the Palatine hill was decorated with laurel; over the entrance they affixed the *corona civica*, the civic crown, granted

to a man who had rescued Roman citizens from mortal danger. Coins of this period appeared bearing this wreath and the words: *ob cives servatos* “for rescuing the citizens.” Some remembered the citizens for whom Octavian had meant not rescue, but ruin. But no one spoke openly about them. How could anyone have dared to speak up against someone honored for so many services? These were so great that only a new name could express them. At the suggestion of Munatius Plancus the senate voted to give this man at the center of the state the name Augustus, elevating him to the sphere of the gods. From this time on his full name became: Imperator Caesar divi filius Augustus. It was unique. Early on Octavian had dropped his adopted name Gaius Julius Caesar and had called himself Imperator Caesar. The first name, Imperator, expressed, at least as an ideal, the power of the military commander; out of the name Caesar he created a new family name, one that belonged to no one else. Thus the new dynasty of the Caesars had been born. Also, his claim to a deified father, *divi filius*, elevated him above all mortals. And now these names were joined by the extraordinary *cognomen* Augustus, which in itself sufficed to show how exceptional was its bearer. His qualities were publicly proclaimed on a golden shield in the chamber of the senate, the Curia: his military vigor (*virtus*), his clemency (*clementia*), his integrity (*iustitia*), and his sense of duty to gods and men (*pietas*).

This novel form of government had to prove itself. Because so many provinces had been officially handed over to Augustus to maintain peace, they clearly demanded his early attention. Soon after the new system was in place he left Rome and headed first to Gaul, then to Spain, where the north of the country still resisted Roman domination. He could have exercised direct personal command there. But Spain was not the only region transferred to him. Many others had been too. Each of them required someone to represent in person the man who had legally been given the authority to exercise governing power. To this end Augustus appointed *legati* (“legates”) as his representatives. These were men of the senatorial order and thus able to participate directly in the government of the empire, no longer mandated by the senate and people, of course, but answering to Augustus. Logically, therefore, each one held the title *legatus Augusti*, legate of this one specific man, Augustus. So that they might not seem to be ranked as equal to Augustus, who was consul, that title was further qualified as *pro praetore*, which meant that they held the rank of praetor; in the republic, the governing power of a consul, in the case of disagreement, was superior to that of a praetor. In the last years of Augustus’ life, only a minority of governors were not his representatives, but remained legally independent governors: just ten, in fact, a number that had shrunk since 27 BC. But even the disproportionately small

number of governors not directly depending on Augustus does not tell the whole story of his actual power. These governors, officially independent of him, held office with the title *proconsul*, intended ideally for provinces that were already considered at peace and in which only few, if any, legionary units were stationed. In 27 BC there were still at least three such proconsular provinces with legions: Africa, Illyricum, and Macedonia. Their governors possessed full *imperium* and nominally were equal to Augustus, but their actual power could in no way match his. Four decades later, when Augustus died in 14 AD, only the proconsul of Africa commanded troops, and then only a single legion. No one in the intervening years had introduced any official modifications to the powers of the governors; the change had evolved simply by placing a province under Augustus' authority, such as Illyricum, or by transferring troops to the provinces controlled by him in times of war. Thus the balance of power gradually redefined itself even further in Augustus' favor.

The senatorial aristocracy had to adjust to this obvious concentration of power. They still had to learn how to deal with the new legalized position of the "first man" in the state, the *princeps*, as Augustus called himself. Above all, each individual aristocrat had to determine what level of prestige and participation this new system allowed him. The first governor assigned to the rich province of Egypt in the year 30 BC, Cornelius Gallus, provided a cautionary example. Contrary to tradition he was not a senator, but an equestrian, and in command of legions. He apparently behaved in Egypt as though he himself was master of the land, rather than representative of a master in Rome. Augustus dismissed him and withdrew his friendship, which meant political death. The senate passed judgment on him, and Gallus evaded the consequences only by taking his life. Not even he, a very close friend of the *princeps*, had understood how far he could go. He provided a lesson to others.

Augustus also had to learn to compromise and agree to moderate changes, in order to strike a balance with the interests of other powerful families, and not least with the demands of his own followers, the Caesarians. The rank of an individual and his family was still measured by the standards established during the republic: participation in the *res publica* was marked by being entitled to wear the garb of the highest magistrate, the consul. During much of the period of the triumvirate several consuls had been appointed in the course of each single year (they then at least nominally belonged to this elite group and could behave as men of consular rank in public). The return to the rules of the republic after the end of the civil wars had meant a return to consulships that lasted the whole year. The consulship was the foundation

of Augustus' own position, and he held one from 31 to 23 BC without interruption. The continuous consulship was quite at variance with a *res publica* that was republican in character. Also, it meant that in any given year only one of the many aspirants could hold this coveted position as his colleague, a cause of considerable dissatisfaction.

In addition, Augustus made it clear that he wanted to pass on authority within his own family, along blood lines. The son of his sister Octavia by her first marriage, Claudius Marcellus, born 42 BC, was Augustus' closest male relative. He arranged for him to marry his only daughter, Julia. Marcellus had not yet achieved anything of significance and had held only the office of aedile, but was permitted by a senatorial decree to seek the consulship ten years before the legal term. Everyone must have seen this as a clear indication that Augustus intended Marcellus to succeed him one day. This created tension even in his own camp, with Agrippa in particular, who had always deferred to Augustus but now apparently turned his back on him and left the city. Moreover in 23 Augustus' fellow consul joined a conspiracy against the princeps and a crisis erupted that left Augustus seriously ill. Although the events are clouded in obscurity, we do know that after his recovery in June 23 BC Augustus gave up his consulship.

This was a modest retraction, but there was no change in his control of the provinces that had been assigned to him, along with their legions, in 27 BC. The *imperium* that Augustus had until then exercised as consul he exercised from 23 BC as proconsul. An edict dating to 15 BC, found at Bierzo in northern Spain, leaves no doubt on this score.<sup>2</sup> It seems further that after his resignation from the consulship, his *imperium*, which he exercised as proconsul, was extended to cover his dealings with the other provinces, so that in the event of conflict he had greater power than the governor. Agrippa also was given *imperium*, as proconsul, admittedly for only five years and at first only in the east. In this way Augustus both sidestepped conflict with his closest supporter received some compensation for the loss of the consulship. In Rome, however, his resignation from the highest republican office meant that he lost all the mechanisms for conducting business inherently associated with it. These he could not relinquish if he intended to maintain the political initiative. A partial substitute was found by bestowing on him all the legal power of the tribune of the plebeians; he had already possessed an element of the rights inherent in this office, namely personal immunity (*sacrosanctitas*), since 36 BC. He also had the *ius auxilii ferendi*, the right to offer assistance, from 30 BC; through this he could present himself as the ideological protector of the ordinary people. From now on, through possession of *tribunicia potestas*, he could exploit the full authority of the office to summon the popular

assemblies; he even had the right to convene the senate. On top of this he was granted special privileges in the senate, so that here too he was unchecked in the conduct of business. But control of the elections to the consulship, the political nerve center of the state, was not included.

The consequences of Augustus' retraction from the consulship soon became evident in Rome. The ordinary people seemed to be unhappy with the decision. When problems arose in the grain supply, they tried to force Augustus to assume the dictatorship. In a dramatic public gesture he openly rejected their demands. He did assume the task of ensuring the provision of grain (*cura annonae*), without yet defining the institutional nature of his responsibility. This would not happen until 8 AD, when he appointed a prefect (of equestrian rank) who would henceforth permanently oversee the proper delivery of grain from outside Italy. In the next three years, from 22 to 19 BC, Augustus spent time in the east dealing with the problems between Rome and Parthia, along with his stepson Tiberius. In the meantime final efforts were being made in Rome to create a political scenario where ambitious candidates might engage in genuine competition. The first experiment involved the elections to the consulship, which resulted in scenes of chaos. Over and over it proved impossible to restore order, or it proved possible for only one consul to function. To what extent the system was manipulated to ensure that Augustus could still control it we cannot know. In any case it was once again demonstrated that unless he had the powers to impose order, the survival of the restored *res publica* could be in jeopardy. This was no doubt what he had hoped for. It was therefore possible, after his return from the east in 19 BC, to effect another change in his legal position, one that led to the extension of his *imperium* to include Rome and Italy. It was the same *imperium* he had previously exercised in the provinces as proconsul, only now there was no territorial restriction on his authority. As a sign that his *imperium* was now operative in the center of his domain also, he was permitted henceforth to display the *fasces*, the bundle of rods, as a symbol of total magisterial power also in Rome, and to sit in the chair of office, the *sella curulis*, like a consul. From this point we hear no more of disturbances during consular elections. From now on Augustus exercised his power in Rome and Italy on the basis of his *imperium*, like a consul, and in the provinces on the same basis, like a proconsul.

With this new ruling, the role of the princeps had essentially reached its legal definition. There was, however, a further development in 12 BC. It was perhaps not significant in terms of political power, but it did help Augustus to present himself more than ever as the representative of the Roman state in its broadest sense. This followed the death of Aemilius Lepidus, the least

important of the triumvirs of 43 BC. Despite having been stripped of power in 36, Lepidus had retained the office of pontifex maximus, as the senior Roman official in religious matters. Now this office too passed on to Augustus. It is emphasized in the *Res Gestae* (10) that more people flocked in from all over Italy for this election than on any previous occasion. The involvement of so many people confirmed his extraordinary position as *princeps*, “leading man,” of all the citizens. As a consequence, Augustus was able to effect changes in the religious colleges, which had responsibility for the relations between gods and Romans. A visible manifestation of this was the nomination of a new sacrificial priest of Jupiter, the *flamen Dialis*. This post had been dormant for many decades, because no senator had been willing to live by its numerous restrictive rules. Augustus now intervened, in his role of pontifex maximus: in the restored *res publica* nothing must be spared in the worship of the gods.

### Legislation

Augustus’ public self-image was of someone who linked his contemporary policies to the past, and pursued them within traditional Roman guidelines. The old ways had proven their worth, and must be respected. In his *Res Gestae* he prided himself on not only maintaining but even reinforcing traditional laws. At the same time he referred to the many new laws introduced as a model for future generations (*Res Gestae* 8). Moreover, this link was emphasized in the galleries that celebrated the renowned men of the past, erected by him in the porticos of the forum that would come to be called the Forum of Augustus. Its central temple was dedicated to Mars Ultor, Mars the Avenger, preserving the memory of the victory over Caesar’s murderers. The succession of distinguished men who had made Rome great led from Romulus directly to Augustus, and confirmed that he indeed stood at the zenith of Roman history, just as Virgil had described in the *Aeneid*. Furthermore, Augustus’ image stood in the Forum on two quadrigas erected by a decree of the senate, when, with the consensus of the equestrians and the people, they honored him in 2 BC with the title *pater patriae*, father of the fatherland. This role, like that of the father of a family, encompassed contradictory traits: fatherly concern and necessary firmness. Augustus’ responsibility was the state as a whole, and he was thus obliged to take firm action when necessary. He involved himself in the daily, and the private, lives of the citizens as no leader ever had before in Roman history. These citizens no longer even had full control over decisions about their own personal behavior. He deemed it particularly crucial to preserve moral values, which



Forum of Augustus, Rome

included marriage and childbearing. The moral disintegration of the civil war period had eroded these values, especially in the higher levels of society, among senators and equestrians. Through a number of laws he established new rules that significantly affected lifestyle. Marriage was obligatory at a certain age for both men and women, as was the production of offspring. Whoever failed to meet these requirements could expect not outright punishment but considerable restrictions on the holding of office and especially on the rights of inheritance. In a society like the Roman, with a high death rate, valuable legacies were passed on quite rapidly from one generation to the next. An individual might also be bequeathed certain sums in the wills of friends. The sanctions must have been thought arduous at the time, but the legislation did not apparently enjoy long-lasting success.

Other laws addressed the emancipation of slaves, a practice that, especially in Rome proper and in Italy, had a considerable effect on the social structure. Before this time, every emancipation by a Roman citizen automatically led to the creation of new Roman citizens. Testamentary emancipations not infrequently reduced an inherited estate considerably, since slaves represented an important economic asset. Such emancipations were henceforth severely

restricted, and subjected to certain conditions. Allegedly, Augustus aimed to minimize the dilution of Roman blood by foreigners; the slaves originated from all ethnic groups, inside and outside the empire.

There was considerable opposition to many of these laws, but most of all to the law by which inheritances would, for the first time, be taxed. The revenues were to go into Augustus' newly founded military compensation fund (*aerarium militare*). The tax would consist of only 5 per cent of the value of the estate left, and would not apply to next of kin. All the same, the majority of senators in particular maintained a long and persistent protest against it. Still, Augustus won. At stake was the social welfare of the veterans, and with that the long-term maintenance of his power, and of internal peace.

After the civil wars Augustus had to discharge and find land for many tens of thousands of soldiers, not just from his own armies but also from Antony's. These settlements (*coloniae*) were established in some parts of Italy, but more extensively in the provinces: in this respect he followed the lead of Caesar. In the *Res Gestae* (28) he cites Africa, Sicily, Macedonia, the two Spanish provinces, Achaëa, Asia, Pisidia, Syria, and Gallia Narbonensis. These settlements belonged mainly to the early period of his rule, when larger military units or at least sections of legions were discharged all at once. Since an army of about twenty-six to twenty-eight legions had to be maintained to protect the borders and to support Augustus' imperial policy, he had to find a way to prevent such an army from being used in political conflicts, as it had been in the late republic. This would be best achieved if Augustus himself could guarantee that he would take care of the soldiers' central concern, which had been the key factor in the politicization of the armies: a fixed period of service, with the date of retirement clearly established, along with an appropriate settlement. Augustus guaranteed both, even if it meant drawing on his own resources (*Res Gestae* 16). But after a time, even the tremendous wealth of the princeps was insufficient to meet this commitment. That is why he needed new sources of funds, to be derived mainly from the estates of the Roman citizens. Under Augustus the majority of Romans still lived in Italy, but this region had not been subjected to any regular form of taxation since the civil wars. Romans, as masters of the world, were supposed to be free of it. On the other hand, veterans who as Roman citizens had served in the legions received compensation. Augustus evidently felt it was ideologically and economically right that the burden for the support of these soldiers after active service should fall on Roman citizens. The provinces should not be expected to take care of Roman veterans. Therefore only Romans were obliged to pay the 5 per cent inheritance tax, earmarked, as noted, for the military compensation fund.

## The Frontiers

The soldiers had definitely earned the special attention Augustus bestowed on them. Not only had they enabled him to take power; they had contributed to his policy of expanding the empire. He achieved more in this respect than any of his predecessors. On almost every frontier he extended the dominion of the Roman people and took over new provinces, all of which remained under his direct control. Contrary to the plans of Caesar and Antony, he did not extend the *imperium romanum* eastward by direct military intervention. He did, however, establish provinces. Besides Egypt, these included the kingdom of Galatia in central Anatolia, which was incorporated into the empire after the death of King Deiotarus. Judea also became a province in the year 6 AD, when the inhabitants could no longer endure the rule of Herod's son Archelaus. The prefect representing Roman authority there was not, however, a provincial governor; rather, he managed Judea as part of the province of Syria and was subordinate to its *legatus Augusti*. But, contrary to Roman expectations, Augustus did not wage war against the Parthians, despite all the tensions that could have served as grounds for war. His stepson Tiberius in 19 BC negotiated successfully to recover the legionary eagles and the surviving prisoners of war who had fallen into enemy hands at Carrhae in 53 BC and in later engagements. In Rome this achievement was fêted as a victory; a triumphal arch celebrated the return of the legionary standards. Nearly twenty years later Augustus' grandson Gaius was obliged to travel to the east on a further diplomatic mission. Yet Augustus considered it neither opportune nor necessary to widen his direct authority in the east. The early expeditions of two prefects from Egypt to Arabia and the Sudan passed without major consequence.

The focus of his expansionist strategy was directed to the Rhine and the Danube. Up to Augustus' time there were persistent security problems in those districts of northern Italy that bordered immediately on non-Roman territory. These, and the land route over the Balkans, demanded his attention, quite apart from the impulse to extend Roman (and his own) power until Rome mastered the world. He writes in his *Res Gestae* (26) that he had enlarged the territory of all the provinces that shared borders with peoples not yet under Roman rule. Virgil's famous phrase *imperium sine fine*, "empire without any limit [of time or space]," reflects similar thinking. Shortly after the consolidation of his power, Augustus launched an expedition against the independent regions in the northern Iberian peninsula. No fewer than six legions were involved in the campaign. When the conquest was completed,



in 19 BC, not all the legions were needed there. Many of these units found themselves eventually on the Rhine frontier. All our evidence suggests that Augustus and Agrippa developed the grand strategy of advancing the empire to the Danube and actually beyond the waters of the Rhine. Until this was done, the already conquered tribes under Roman control could easily rope in neighboring kinfolk who inhabited the still unsubjugated regions on the far side of the Sava and the Rhine and threatened the security of Roman territory.

The urgent need for action became even clearer when two invading Germanic tribes, the Usipeti and Tencteri, defeated Marcus Lollius in Gaul in 16 BC, with the loss of a legionary eagle. This occurred only a short time after the dramatic and widely publicized return of the captured standards from the Parthians. But the defeat was not the rationale for the plan of conquest. That policy was far more grandiose and had been in gestation for a long time. After the conquest of the entire Alpine region in 16 and 15 BC (still recalled today in the La Turbie victory monument near Monaco), a dual attack against the Danube and the Rhine was thought to promise a quick victory. Agrippa, the experienced strategist, was to defeat the Pannonians, while Augustus' two stepsons would move into action on the Rhine. The division of tasks shows that in the plan of conquest priority was given to the Balkans. When Agrippa died unexpectedly in the spring of 12 BC, Tiberius took over command in Illyricum, and his brother Drusus on the Rhine. The conquest of Pannonia seemed assured in 9 BC. In the late summer of 12 BC Drusus had begun his assault on the Germans and had in 9 BC just reached the Elbe, when he fell from his horse and met a sudden death, his mission incomplete. Tiberius took over and conquered at least as far as the Weser, and more likely even the Elbe. On January 1, 7 BC, he could celebrate victory over the Germans in Rome.

It has often been assumed that Germania on the right bank of the Rhine was never a true province for Augustus, just a place where the expansion became bogged down. But this assumption is based essentially on its later loss. Immediately after the victory of 7 BC actual settlements were established in those Germanic regions east of the Rhine that were under Roman military administration, as was proved a few years ago when surviving traces of such a settlement were discovered at Waldgirmes. Far to the east of the Rhine lead mines owned by Augustus were leased out, and in Oppidum Ubiorum, today's Cologne, a provincial cult of the *dea Roma* and Augustus was established embracing Germanic districts on both sides of the river. This all shows that Germania was regarded as a province, just as was Illyricum. Both regions were in some respects precarious possessions. Admittedly, Tiberius was able



to stamp out an uprising in Illyricum that began in AD 6, albeit with enormous effort; but only a few days after the announcement of the victory in Rome in AD 9 came the news of Quinctilius Varus' catastrophic defeat in north-west Germany. Remains of slaughtered Roman troops were found in the 1990s in the vicinity of the town of Kalkriese. A coalition of Germanic tribes, under the leadership of the Cheruscan Arminius, had virtually annihilated an essential part of the Roman army: three legions and numerous auxiliaries. The shock ran deep, but Augustus did not entertain the idea of giving up the annexed Germanic lands. Tiberius quickly stabilized the situation, and his late brother's son, Germanicus (who had inherited that honorific name from his father), achieved an immediate success over the Germans, which earned Augustus his final acclamations as victor, his twentieth and twenty-first. In the meantime the Romans had already begun reconstruction in Waldgirmes, which had been destroyed by the Germans. Germanic territory east of the Rhine was totally lost only after Augustus' successor Tiberius abandoned the idea of re-annexation in AD 16. This was the only province that was lost. It had been held for almost two decades, which made its loss more painful for the Romans.

Despite some setbacks, Augustus extended the empire further than any other Roman leader before or after him. Most notably, his generals won for him nearly the entire region of the Danube. Only in the fifth century did major population migrations bring Roman authority there to an end.

Toward the close of Augustus' life the new *imperium Romanum* created by him encompassed twenty-five distinct provinces, fifteen of which were under his direct control. The remaining ten were provinces of the Roman people (wrongly called "senatorial" provinces), governed by proconsuls. Augustus made no radical change to the system of provincial administration. It did not occur to him to introduce an administrative system that covered the whole province. The authority of the governors remained essentially the same as before. Under him the provinces flourished, thanks to almost universal peace and the protection against the excesses of individual governors that he had been able to guarantee since 30 BC. The welfare of an entire province was fundamentally more important to Augustus than the private interests of aristocratic governors. The collection of taxes was still carried out through the tax-leasing system that had aroused much resentment against the Roman government in the late republic. But the *publicani* ("tax collectors") had lost their political backing, and they now had to deal with the Master of the World. It was in his interest also that the provinces should prosper. In his own provinces Augustus created new officials to supervise tax collection, procurators, who answered to Augustus alone. Their staff consisted exclusively of slaves and freedmen. But even they did not personally collect the taxes;



they merely provided local supervision of the leasing corporations and the tax collectors appointed by the cities. When necessary, Augustus could call his procurators directly to account. His governors of senatorial rank had no involvement in tax collection.

After 27 BC Augustus spent at least twelve years in the provinces. This fact alone indicates how important they were for him, and how much attention he gave them. It is no wonder, then, that in several of them he was regarded as a savior and that cults for his worship were even established. Already in 29 BC, in the provinces of Asia and Pontus et Bithynia, a provincial cult was created in which Octavian, as he was still called then, was worshiped along with the goddess Roma. Other provinces followed, to demonstrate clearly that they too were loyal subjects. Several cities eagerly imitated this model, in the Greek east as well as the Roman west. Only in Rome itself and to some extent in Italy was the overt cult of Augustus impossible. In all the regions of Rome, nonetheless, sacrifices could be made to honor Augustus' genius. This was basically just a public manifestation of customs observed in private Roman households. But the public nature of the practice and the scale on which it was observed lent the whole tradition a new character.



## Rome and Italy



Although Augustus spent a considerable time in nearly all regions of the empire, Rome and Italy remained his undisputed focus. It was important to proclaim this through the magnificent appearance of the capital. According to Suetonius, Augustus claimed to have found Rome a city of brick, and left it a city of marble (Suet. *Aug.* 28. 3). That he adopted a deliberate policy of enhancing the physical appearance of the buildings to suit their position at the center of the world is demonstrated by the way he tallies the individual structures that he built or restored in the city (*Res Gestae* 19–21). He gave his attention to numerous temples that had been neglected in the late republic. During his sixth consulship (28 BC) alone Augustus had eighty-two temples restored, as he himself records. These were mostly smaller shrines. But in addition he rebuilt others on a more splendid scale: the temples of the Capitoline Triad, of Jupiter Feretrius, and of Jupiter Tonans on the Capitoline hill; the shrines of Minerva, of Juno Regina, and of Jupiter Libertas on the Aventine; and many more. The assembly building of the senate, the Curia, and the Theater of Pompey were renovated by him, as were many more functional structures such as the aqueducts and the extensive road network in Italy. Agrippa built other structures in line with arrangements agreed





with Augustus: not only the Pantheon, in whose entrance hall stood a monumental statue of Augustus, but also the first thermal baths for the people of Rome, and the many fountains that made access to water easier all over the city. This significantly raised the quality of life for the inhabitants. The free distribution of grain for the urban masses was continued and consolidated, and protection from the frequent fires was improved with the creation of seven fire brigades, one for every two districts of Rome. The public games also were held in ever grander style and extended by many days. Numerous occasions brought inescapable reminders of the princeps' achievement in festivals and games in the circus, amphitheater, and theater. All of this brought home to Romans how important they were to him, even if politically they now had hardly any say. Annual elections were held all the same, and Augustus ensured that the members of the voting units he belonged to could not be bribed. From the outset he paid out enough to them to discourage corruption. All the same, only those senators Augustus had recommended to the consulship were elected.

Since the end of the civil wars Augustus had represented the focal point of Roman political life. Yet there was little evidence of this in the buildings from where he exercised this power. During his lifetime there was no emperor's palace in Rome. His house on the Palatine hill was replete with symbolism, differing from ordinary residential structures in the approach lined with laurel trees and in its temple-style gable. Directly linked to the house was a temple to Apollo of Actium, built of white Carrara marble. The senate often convened in its portico, especially as Augustus grew older. But still, the buildings did not resemble those of a monarch; in fact they seemed fairly modest, relative to the power of the inhabitant. The house was one of the *res publica*. As elected pontifex maximus, Augustus should strictly have moved to the *regia*, the official residence of the chief priest, at the edge of the Forum Romanum. Since he did not wish to do so, he transferred a portion of that house to the public domain. Here his wife Livia created a sanctuary to Vesta, in which she acted as priestess. The realm of the private life of the princeps and his wife took on a public aspect. The identification of Rome and its destiny with the first man progressed considerably after 12 BC. Everything associated with him had repercussions for Rome and for the entire world.

## Succession

Augustus' early opponents often mocked his feeble physique. Indeed, he had never enjoyed a strong constitution. Few who knew him in 42 BC, as he lay





ill in his tent during the slaughter of Philippi, would have foreseen that he would survive for another fifty-five years and more. In fact he outlived nearly all those there at the time. Death was, of course, a constant threat for him as for every other citizen in Roman times. Accordingly, from an early stage he gave thought to what would happen when he was gone. In typical Roman manner, he thought of Rome and his own achievements there in familial terms. Since earliest times it had been assumed in Rome that the son would follow in his father's footsteps in the political sphere. When Octavian heard in 44 BC of his testamentary adoption by Caesar, he understood at once that accepting the inheritance and agreeing to be Caesar's son meant taking on the political aspirations of his adoptive father, despite the warnings of his mother and his stepfather, the highly regarded former consul Marcus Philippus.

Once the power struggle was over and he had been entrusted as princeps with the welfare of all Romans and the empire, Augustus had to think of the future if he wanted to avoid jeopardizing his entire achievement. What form should the direction of the state take after his death? Two basic considerations underlay all his thoughts. He did not doubt for a moment that his power should stay within his own family. All the great families of the republic had thought this way. If there was no son in the family, they had recourse to adoption, which played a highly significant role in Roman life. Augustus believed firmly in the tradition of transmitting power within the family. He himself had only one child, and that no son but only a daughter, Julia. His wife Livia had brought two sons to the marriage, first Tiberius, born in 42 BC, then Drusus, born in 38 BC. In planning for the future, however, Augustus believed strongly in the importance of the blood line where feasible, and even when it might not at first sight seem feasible. For this reason his closest male relative, Claudius Marcellus, son of his sister Octavia, was prominently marked out soon after 27 BC. When Marcellus married the only daughter of the princeps, many assumed that Augustus looked to him one day to take over his role.

How would such arrangements be presented? During the crisis of 23 BC, in order to suppress all speculation, Augustus had offered to read out his will. He most likely could have done this without creating problems. Bequeathing his official position in his will was ruled out. All his power had been transferred to him formally by the senate and the people. It was not his to pass on. In the will he could dispose only of his private wealth, which was certainly considerable and was urgently needed to finance numerous "public" ventures. The *Res Gestae* provide many examples. Whoever inherited these resources would on that basis alone be able to exercise massive influence. But the



transfer of the political leadership of the *res publica* could not be achieved in this way; Augustus had to find other means.

After the death of Marcellus it soon became clear who would “succeed” Augustus, in the case of his sudden demise. Augustus’ loyal companion Agrippa received *imperium*, as he himself had done, at first for five years; this he could exercise as proconsul, which placed him in an advantageous position should he be challenged by other holders of *imperium*. More importantly, he married Augustus’ daughter, Julia, and thus became a member of her family. When two sons Gaius and Lucius were born in 20 and 17 BC, the future looked especially bright. In 17 BC Augustus adopted his grandsons, making a political statement that could be misunderstood by no one. From then on their names were Gaius Julius Caesar and Lucius Julius Caesar. At first, being too young to play any direct role, they could represent only future hopes; hence their father Agrippa became all the more prominent. Aside from his *imperium* he had already, five years earlier, received *tribunicia potestas*, this also restricted in his case to a five-year period. His position was subordinate to that of Augustus, but all the same he had at his disposition the two most important political tools possessed by his superior: *imperium* and *tribunicia potestas*. If the princeps should die unexpectedly, the senate and people would have no choice but to entrust him with the continuation of his mission. The alternative would have been civil war. When Agrippa’s sons, legally Augustus’ sons, came of age, the question would be answered by a two-generation formula.

But before such broader considerations could come into play, Agrippa died suddenly in the spring of 12 BC. Gaius was in his eighth, Lucius in his fifth year. A third son, Agrippa Postumus, was born, as his name suggests, posthumously. All three were still too young for political life. Yet Augustus could not make political certainty his priority; he was too committed to succession by a blood relative. Livia most likely presented her oldest son Tiberius as the most appropriate heir, in that he had accumulated military and political experience: if so, Augustus certainly grasped the opportunity, but only partially. He arranged for Agrippa’s widow, his daughter Julia, to marry Tiberius, who in the following years achieved spectacular victories in the Danube and Rhine areas. But the young adopted sons were ushered into the political limelight with increasing frequency. For instance, during his last stay in Gaul in 8 BC, Augustus distributed a special payment in Gaius’ name to the armies at the Rhine, at the very time when Tiberius successfully completed his conquests. The sons were presented as “first among the [equestrian] youth” (*principes iuventutis*); everyone was obliged to acknowledge the intended parallelism with Augustus as *princeps senatus*, “the first of

the senators.” Obviously Augustus refused to acknowledge that a strong personality like Tiberius would find this unacceptable, especially given the stormy relations that quickly developed with his wife Julia. Tiberius was unwilling to wait for a long time as stop-gap for the two still very young sons of his stepfather, even though in 6 BC he was at last granted tribunician authority, similar to that of Augustus. He retired to the island of Rhodes and thus abandoned politics. Undaunted, Augustus persevered with his goal of preparing his “sons” one day to take his place. The senate granted them the right when they became twenty to seek the consulship, still the highest office in Rome. This was prominently inscribed for everyone to see on major monuments in the Forum Romanum. The young men still lacked military experience and the aura of a victorious leader (in Latin: *virtus*), which only military conquest can bestow on someone. For this reason Gaius was sent to the east, to achieve success against the Parthians through a mixture of military threats and diplomacy. Lucius was to go to the armies in Spain to gain his first experience. On the way there, however, he died, in AD 2 in Massilia. His brother died two years later in the east. Once again Augustus stood alone. He was now sixty-six years old. Time was pressing.

Finally, Augustus was prepared to accept his stepson as successor, even though by now Tiberius had already been divorced from Julia for two years. She was no longer important to her father, being too much at variance with certain aspects of his policies. She was exiled to the island of Pandateria. Augustus now adopted Tiberius, and at the same time obliged him to adopt the eighteen-year-old Germanicus, who was directly related to the princeps through his mother Antonia, Augustus’ great-granddaughter. Tiberius’ future prospects were thus burdened by an irksome condition; after all, his own son Drusus was nearly the same age as Germanicus. Augustus also adopted Agrippa Postumus, the much younger brother of Gaius and Lucius. The drive to find blood relations became a kind of obsession for him. Immediately after Tiberius’ acceptance into Augustus’ family, the senate and people bestowed on him *tribunicia potestas* and *imperium*, which he exercised as proconsul. Thus Tiberius found himself in the position once occupied by Agrippa. The senate and the people could no longer bypass him. This was how Augustus designated his successor, even though in strictly legal terms he had no authority to do so. There was no escaping the implications of Augustus’ actions.

After adopting Tiberius, Augustus remained firmly in public life, as the true focal point of Roman politics, even though his “son” exercised influence through political decisions and the selection of office-holders. Many laws were passed in the final decade of Augustus’ life. He constantly strove to strengthen the demography of the Roman people, especially of the upper

classes. This led to further dissatisfaction over the legislation of 18 BC, which had entrenched the obligation to marry. Additions to this legislation were agreed upon in the year AD 5, including new age limits for the holding of office. Finally in AD 9 important new legislation, the *lex Papia Poppaea*, was introduced, which completed and strengthened the earlier law. A reform of the elections of magistrates was also concluded in AD 5. The preliminary selection of candidates to be elected was now left to a select group of senators and equestrians. The new election committees were named after the deceased Gaius and Lucius Caesar. Thus the monarchical reality became ever more publicly evident, even if the changes still respected republican forms. In AD 13 the long established fifteen-man committee of the senate, with which Augustus used to discuss pending issues, was transformed into an inner circle of twenty. Now that he was too old to appear in the senate as often as before, Augustus could reach binding decisions with this body as if the entire senate were in agreement. This could have had serious consequences if Tiberius had not abrogated the new rule.

## Death

Augustus gave much thought to his own end and to the world that would come after him. On April 3, AD 13, he composed his will. Tiberius and Livia were named as his principal heirs, and both would carry his name Augustus (Augusta in the case of Livia). He bequeathed a large sum to the people of Rome, as well as to the Roman soldiers: to the members of the imperial guard, the praetorians, 1,000 sesterii each; to the urban cohorts, 500 each; and to the legionaries, 300 each. These Roman citizens were to remember him with gratitude. To his daughter Julia, whom he had banned through the senate to the island of Pandateria for her unconventional life choices, Augustus denied burial in the mausoleum on the Campus Martius, in which so many family members were interred (Suet. *Aug.* 101).

He also wrote of his services to the Roman people in his 'Achievements' (*Res Gestae*), an account of his deeds and his expenditures (*impensae*). We know that he was still working on it after June 26, AD 14 (*Res Gestae* 4). The report was to be displayed after his death on bronze pillars erected in front of his mausoleum, all arranged in his will. The impressions left by those pillars can still be seen today in the paving at the entrance. The inscriptions themselves have been lost, but the text through which Augustus directly addressed posterity was found in modern Ankara and two other cities in the province of Galatia, Antiochia and Apollonia. Through them, he conveys to



us today his vision of the times and especially of his own personality. Thus even beyond the grave he remains the great public communicator that he had been in life.

Shortly after finishing the *Res Gestae*, Augustus died, on the nineteenth day of August (the month named after him) in AD 14, in Nola in Campania. He had reached almost the end of his seventy-sixth year. His body was carried to Rome, at first by officials of the communities through which the procession passed, in the latter stages by members of the equestrian order. There the official funeral celebrations took place. The last part of the journey led from his house on the Palatine hill to the Forum Romanum. Once again the close link between the deceased and the Roman people and its past was made clear. The bier carrying the corpse was followed not only by members of the Julian family and their relatives, as was customary in an aristocratic burial procession, but also by all the previously deceased great figures of the Roman past, from Romulus to Augustus' own time, played by actors wearing death masks and the appropriate cloak of office. This display was intended to reinforce the idea that Augustus had brought the past to completion. Tiberius and his son Drusus gave the funeral orations in the Forum. Then the procession continued on to the Campus Martius and the mausoleum, which had been ready since 28 BC. Augustus had buried many of his hopes there. The body was cremated on a funeral pyre, from which rose an eagle as symbol of his immortality. A senior magistrate, a praetor, claimed he had seen Augustus ascend to the gods; Livia rewarded his testimony with a payment of a million sestertii. Thus the senate could, just a few days later, announce on September 17 the reception of the deceased among the gods, with the attribute *divus*. A temple was built for him and a special priesthood established. The founder of the Roman monarchy would maintain a presence in future state affairs as an official god. The political transition to Tiberius proceeded without legal problems. Augustus had planned ahead.

One of the maxims that shaped Augustus' life consisted of two words: "hasten slowly" (*festina lente*). In keeping with this injunction his driving ambition was combined with calm rationality. He followed this principle over and over again. His long-term success relied on the clever, gradual steps that allowed the people as a whole time to get accustomed to a new situation. He did not create a monarchical form of government from the outset; rather, he let it grow over the decades. This was how he ensured its stability. He made no direct or radical break with the past. Instead he emphasized continuity, which cast a softer light on what were really dramatic changes in the political system of government. He realized his clear goal to become and remain the first individual in the *res publica* albeit sometimes with brutal

effect: the substantial number, including some even from his own family, who refused to be subjected to him became victims of his ambition. He did, however, bring widespread stability and security to the government and the empire. The Augustan peace, the *pax Augusta*, was not merely a showy propaganda slogan. Rather, for the majority of people it represented a symbol of liberation after decades of civil war and military chaos. Most were willing to settle for security; even most of the Roman upper class came to terms with curtailments to their freedom, if security could be guaranteed. This was not too difficult under Augustus, in contrast to some of his later successors, since he observed a code of restraint. The principate founded and developed by him provided a solid foundation for the lengthy era of Roman imperial rule.

### Notes

- 1 *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 154 (2005), 232–3.
- 2 *AE* 2000, 760.

### Further Reading

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