

OCTAVIAN-AUGUSTUS: THE FIRST ROMAN EMPEROR

After Caesar's death, his right-hand man, Mark Antony, tried to gain control of the situation. At the same time, Octavian, who was the grand-nephew and adopted heir of Caesar, also rose to power with the support of the Senate. In 43 B.C. both generals and one of Caesar's military commanders, Lepidus, established the second Republican coalition of three dictators to rule the Roman state. This was called the *Second Triumvirate*.

Both Antony and Octavian proceeded to fight Caesar's murderers, Brutus and Cassius, and defeated them in 42 B.C. in two battles at Philippi in Macedonia. It was then decided by both leaders that Antony would control the eastern provinces and Octavian would control the western provinces.

Soon tension between the two men started to grow because Antony had abandoned his wife, who was Octavian's sister, and was having an affair with Queen Cleopatra of Egypt. Jealousy and ambition were also factors in forcing the two dictators apart. About the same time, the third dictator, Lepidus, contested Octavian's supremacy in the West and, as a result, was forced to retire and was disarmed. As the years went by, the rivalry between Antony and Octavian increased until the third and final civil war of the Republic broke out. In 31 B.C. Octavian defeated Antony and his ally, Cleopatra, at the Battle of Actium on the west coast of Greece. Both Antony and Cleopatra fled to Egypt where they committed suicide. Octavian, in turn, conquered Egypt in 30 B.C. and made it a Roman province. (See map on page 90.)

After the Battle of Actium, Octavian became the sole ruler of the Republic. He planned to restore Rome to its old glory and establish peace and stability after a century of war. In order to accomplish his goal, however, he had to form a new type of government that resembled the old Republic constitution but did not include its weaknesses. Learning from his predecessors' mistakes, he did not make himself a dictator. Instead, for his first years in power, he concealed his power behind republican traditions. In 27 B.C. he pronounced "the transfer of the state to the free disposal of the Senate and the people." This action earned him the reputation of being the restorer of the Republic, whereupon the Senate bestowed on him the title of AUGUSTUS (which means "the revered one") to define his new status as leader of the Roman state. He was known as Augustus thereafter. Augustus became the first emperor of the Roman Empire, which lasted from 27 B.C. to A.D. 476.

Thus, the outcome of the Battle of Actium was three-fold: (1) It was the end of the Roman Republic; (2) Octavian-Augustus became the master of the Graeco-Roman world; and (3) The Roman state was dominated by the West with Rome as the capital, while the East was kept in second place.

Even though Augustus retained many of the republican offices, such as the consulship and the Senate, he was the supreme ruler of the state. He embodied the roles



Octavian defeated Mark Antony at the Battle of Actium and became the sole ruler of the Republic. He was later granted the title, Augustus, and became the first emperor of the Roman Empire.

of the president of the Senate, leader of the Roman army, and chief priest. He was granted power over the senatorial governors in the provinces and power as the tribune of the people. The courts, legislation, finance, and internal and foreign policy were all in his hands.

Augustus took extensive journeys and reorganized the Roman provinces. He made Egypt into a Roman province. He added the whole Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal) to the empire, and he made Gaul into three new provinces. In the east he annexed Galatia in Asia Minor and made Judaea into a Roman province. Augustus's stepson, Tiberius, campaigned north of Italy and managed to extend the Roman territories to the Danube and Rhine Rivers, making the rivers the natural furthest boundaries of the Roman Empire. (See map on page 90.)

Augustus accomplished other deeds as well. He created a permanent bodyguard and a city police, which were stationed in Rome. He instituted a fire brigade. He founded a new military treasury from which he could pay his soldiers. He also embellished Rome with a number of public buildings, both restoring old ones and erecting new ones. This greatly pleased the people of Rome.

Augustus showed himself to be a great general and administrator in the reorganization of the government and the provinces. He transformed the shattered Republic into a new regime that was to last for many centuries. He solved the problem of governing by making the Roman state a one-man rule, accomplished in the appearance of the old republican traditions. He created a durable Roman peace, called the *Pax Romana*, that lasted for two centuries, until A.D. 180. During this period there was no major war and the economy prospered. An extensive network of roads extending throughout the empire increased the flow of trade. Trade flourished in exports such as wool, olive oil, wine, metal work, and pottery. In return, Italy received goods from the provinces, including slaves, grain, marble, and ivory. Production from agricultural goods, rather than trade, however, provided the major part of Rome's total revenue.

A year before Augustus died, he made a will that included a summary of the military and financial resources of the empire and a political testament of his achievements. This testament is called the "Res Gestae Divi Augusti" or "Acts of Achievement of the Divine Augustus" and provides historians with an important document of Augustus's life and accomplishments.

To ensure that the rule of the empire stayed in the hands of men of his choice, Augustus arranged his own successors to the throne by adopting them as his sons. As the years went by, he chose several candidates, but they either died in battle or were poisoned to death. When Augustus died, the only remaining candidate, his stepson Tiberius, succeeded him as the next emperor.

Augustus ruled Rome for 44 years and died in A.D. 14. For the next half century, the empire was ruled by four members of Augustus's family, known as the Julio-Claudian Dynasty. Augustus's successor was Tiberius (14–37). Then Caligula (37–41), Claudius (41–54), and finally, Nero (54–68) succeeded to the throne.