

The Rise of the First Roman Emperor

Throughout history many empires have risen and fallen influencing history in varying degrees.

One empire in particular that dominated Europe extending to the Middle East and North Africa was the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire greatly influenced and shaped civilization and is still felt to this day. These influences can be seen in literature, city-planning, architecture, law, languages, and politics. The one credited for the founding of The Roman Empire and self-proclaimed first emperor Augustus Caesar. Known for his controversial and effective methods, Augustus Caesar was known as the most prosperous and influential leader in European history. His reformations have lasted centuries and still affect our lives to this day.

Born on September 23, 63BC with the name Gaius Octavius and great nephew to the former dictator of Rome Julius Caesar. Although not immediately related to Julius Caesar, Augustus Still caught the eye of his great uncle who adopted him as his own and named him his heir. “On becoming the adopted son of Julius Caesar, he took the new name of Gaius Julius Caesar” (Augustus Caesar Biography: 1). However, this would change yet again to Augustus later to avoid confusion with his great uncle. He would go by many names throughout history, the most well-known and common being Augustus Caesar. “On 15 March 44 BC, Julius Caesar was murdered by Brutus and a collection of Roman senators fed up with Caesar’s dictatorship” (Augustus Caesar Biography:). This event would be known in history as the Ides of March being a key date shaping Roman History. At the time of his adoptive father’s death Augustus was abroad studying military tactics and academics. Upon learning of his assassination, he promptly returned to Italy and civil war broke out at the urging of his loyal and childhood friend Marcus Agrippa. Those loyal to Caesar set their differences aside and formed what would be known as the Second Triumvirate. “On November 27, 43 BCE, the three men were formally given a five-year dictatorial appointment as triumvirs for the reconstitution of the state (the Second Triumvirate—the first having been the informal compact between Pompey, Crassus, and Julius Caesar)”

(Grant). The Second Triumvirate was made of Mark Antony, Marcus Lepidus, and Octavian Caesar. They would hunt down and execute anyone that had wronged them political enemies, or anyone that had been associated with Julius Caesars execution, among them were Marcus Junius Brutus and Gaius Cassius Longinus his assassins. They Fled east with Octavian and Mark in pursuit with Lepidus remaining behind in Rome. After tracking down and defeating Brutus and Cassius in battle the Second Triumvirate agreed to split the Republic of Rome amongst the three. Octavian would control the west, Mark Antony to the East, and Lepidus parts of North Africa. Returning to Rome Octavian married Sextus Pomeius's aunt Scribonia seeing as Sextus controlled the Mediterranean and was viewed as a potential obstacle. This alliance would-be short-lived ending in divorce between the as she gave birth to Augustus's daughter Julia, remarrying to Livia Drusilla all in the same day. As Octavian attempted to consolidate power in the West Antony began making moves in the East going to war with the neighboring kingdom Parthia. Antony Requested reinforcements for his army in exchange for ships. However, Octavian did not honor the agreement taking the ships and not sending his legions to reinforce Antony in the East. As Antony failed in his campaign to the East, Octavian proved to be successful in his campaign defeating Sextus tipping the Roman senate in Octavius's favor.

Octavian had spent time in Rome establishing himself and gaining support from senate, while during this time Antony had failed in his war against Parthia and started a relationship with the Queen of Egypt and former lover of Julius Caesar Cleopatra who had previously conceived a child with Julius. These actions would be the beginning of his downfall as well as the rise of Rome's first emperor. During this time, the rivalry of who would conquer the Republic Rome would come to full steam. A propaganda war started to win support from the public with Octavius dominating and wining over the public. He accomplished this effortlessly with the help of Antony himself and his actions. Antony's relationship with Cleopatra was viewed negatively by Rome. Antony claimed Ptolemy XV Caesar the child of Cleopatra and Julius to be the king of kings. Antony had divorced his wife Octavia Minor the sister of Octavius, this act

enraged Octavius leading him to remove Antony will from a temple. The will contained key information that would win over the Roman senate and allow him to declare war on Antony. The will of Antony would leave the Eastern Republic entirely to Cleopatra. Understandably not wanting to leave part of the Republic of Rome to a non-Roman, war broke out between Octavius and Antony. “In 31 BC, Octavian defeated Anthony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium” (Augustus Caesar Biography:). Octavius managed to corner Antony’s fleet, both outnumbered and cut off on all sides the battle became entirely one sided in favor of Octavius. Many of his troops had deserted or surrendered in mass, while Cleopatra and Antony managed to slip through the blockade and escape. In the aftermath both Cleopatra and Antony committed suicide, and Octavius having Cleopatra’s son Caesarion executed. With the death of his Rival and Cleopatra Egypt now was under his control. This was the last major obstacle that stood between Octavius and the Roman Empire, receiving his name Augustus at that point. For his achievement, the Roman Senate granted him power over the entire Roman Empire becoming the first emperor.

During his time as Emperor of Rome Augustus was reformed the empire and set the foundation of an empire that can still be seen to this day. His reign also set the foundation for two centuries of peace, this time of peace was known as Pax Romana. “It was this Pax Romana that ensured the survival and eventual transmission of the classical heritage, Greek and Roman alike, and provided the means for the diffusion of Judaism and Christianity” (Grant). He was known as a benevolent leader giving back to the people of Rome and showing restraint with his near-absolute power. The achievements made during his time are numerous. They include reforming the financial infrastructure of Rome, especially concerning taxes. “There were two main direct taxes: a poll tax (tributum capitis), paid by all adults in most provinces but sometimes by males only, and a land tax (tributum soli)” (Anirudh et al.). These taxes helped fund other endeavors Augustus sought after. His restructuring of taxes helped ensure soldiers received pay, even developing a pension plan after soldiers served honorably for the Roman empire.

Trade was greatly expanded along with establishing trade routes and construction of roads became a higher priority. Along with the construction of roads, construction of buildings became another focus repairing aqueducts and constructing elaborate building and temples. With the reestablishment of temples Augustus helped revive religion with the public by bringing back the belief in the old gods. Another major contribution to society made under Augustus was the establishment of a Police and Fire service paid with the taxes collected by the public. With so many great accomplishments also come with some failure. His most prominent coming from an attempt to expand his empire to East Germany near the end of his life. The Roman army would be held off by the collection of Germanic tribes to the point that the expansion was completely halted. "Augustus died at Nola in 14 CE. His official last words were, "I found Rome a city of clay but left it a city of marble" which aptly describes Augustus' achievements during his reign as emperor" (Mark). In his place his adopted son Tiberius Caesar Augustus would ascend the throne, marking an end to the reign of the first citizen.

Even in death Augustus Caesar's influence and legacy still live on. To reiterate, Augustus set the foundation for one of the greatest empires in European history. He was able to avenge the death of his adoptive father and former ruler Julius Caesar, quell the civil war unfolding in the aftermath of the Ides of March, attain the title of First Emperor of Rome, reform the political and financial infrastructure of Rome, win the admiration of the public and military, and many other numerous accomplishments made throughout his lifetime. These many accomplishments overshadow his few pitfalls made throughout his reign as emperor. In conclusion no matter how people viewed his reign, may it be as a benevolent leader concerned for his people. Or a manipulative individual seeking power and fame. It can be safely assumed that Augustus Caesar set the foundation for a prosperous Rome that helped shaped European history.

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