

# AUGUSTUS

The Life of Rome's First Emperor

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Anthony Everitt



R A N D O M   H O U S E

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# AVGVSTVS

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*The Life of Rome's First Emperor*

  
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ANTHONY EVERITT

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FOR RODDY ASHWORTH

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# CHRONOLOGY

B.C.

BEFORE 70 Gaius Octavius marries Atia

? 70 Gaius Cilnius Maecenas born

69 Octavia, Octavius' second daughter, born

63 Consulship of Marcus Tullius Cicero  
Conspiracy of Lucius Sergius Catilina

*September 23* Gaius Octavius (Augustus) born

C. 62 Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa born

61 Gaius Octavius (Augustus' father) praetor

60 First Triumvirate formed

59 Julius Caesar consul

58 Gaius Octavius dies

58–49 Caesar proconsul in Gaul

BEFORE 54 Octavia marries Gaius Claudius Marcellus

53 Marcus Licinius Crassus invades Parthia; defeated and killed at Carrhae

52 Pompey the Great sole consul

49 Civil war begins. Caesar invades Italy, wins campaign in Spain, becomes dictator

48 Caesar defeats Pompey at Pharsalus in Greece  
Pompey killed in Egypt  
Caesar installs Cleopatra on Egyptian throne

46 Caesar defeats republican army in northern Africa

- 45 Caesar defeats republican army in Spain
- autumn* Octavius at Apollonia
- 44 Caesar Dictator for Life
- March 15* Caesar assassinated
- April* Octavius in Italy  
Octavius accepts adoption by Caesar; becomes Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus, or Octavian
- 43 War at Mutina; Mark Antony defeated  
Octavian consul  
Mark Antony, Octavian, and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus form Second Triumvirate; Proscription launched; Cicero put to death
- 42 Campaign at Philippi; Brutus and Cassius commit suicide  
Sextus Pompeius in control of Sicily  
Julius Caesar deified  
Octavia's son, Marcus Claudius Marcellus (Marcellus), born  
Tiberius Claudius Nero, son of Livia Drusilla and Tiberius Claudius Nero, (Tiberius) born
- 41 Lucius Antonius besieged at Perugia  
Antony meets Cleopatra, winters at Alexandria
- 40 Perugia falls  
Marcellus, Octavia's husband, dies  
Octavian marries Scribonia  
Parthians invade Syria  
Calenus dies in Gaul  
Treaty of Brundisium; Antony marries Octavia
- 39 Treaty of Misenum  
Ventidius defeats the Parthians  
Agrippa campaigns in Gaul  
Octavian's daughter, Julia, born
- 38 Triumvirate renewed  
Nero Claudius Drusus (Drusus) born
- January 17* Octavian marries Livia Drusilla  
Antony dismisses Ventidius  
Sextus Pompeius defeats Octavian off Cumae and in straits of Messana
- 37 Virgil's *Eclogues* published  
Treaty of Tarentum
- 36 After initial defeat (August), Octavian defeats Sextus Pompeius at Naulochus (September 3)  
Lepidus dropped from Triumvirate  
Antony's Parthian expedition

- 35 Sextus Pompeius killed  
Octavian campaigns in the Balkans
- 34 Antony annexes Armenia  
Donations of Alexandria
- 33 Octavian consul (2), Triumvirate lapses at end of year  
Agrippa aedile  
Tiberius Claudius Nero (father) dies
- 32 Antony divorces Octavia  
Octavian publishes Antony's will  
Consuls leave Rome for Antony  
Oath of loyalty to Octavian
- 31 Octavian consul (3)  
Battle of Actium
- 30 Octavian consul (4)  
Octavian captures Alexandria; Antony and Cleopatra commit suicide
- 29 Octavian consul (5)  
Octavian's triple triumph  
Temple of Julius Caesar and the Curia Julia dedicated  
Marcus Licinius Crassus pacifies Thrace
- 28 Octavian consul (6)  
Review of Senate  
Temple of Apollo on the Palatine dedicated  
Mausoleum of Augustus begun
- 27 Octavian consul (7)
- January* First constitutional settlement; Octavian named Augustus; granted a large *provincia* for ten years  
Agrippa builds Pantheon
- 27–24 Augustus in Gaul and Spain
- 26 Augustus consul (8)  
Dismissal and death of Gaius Cornelius Gallus  
Expedition to Arabia Felix
- 25 Augustus consul (9)  
Julia marries Marcellus  
Augustus falls ill in Spain, convalesces
- ? 24–23 Trial of Marcus Primus and conspiracy of Fannius Caepio and Aulus Terentius Varro Murena



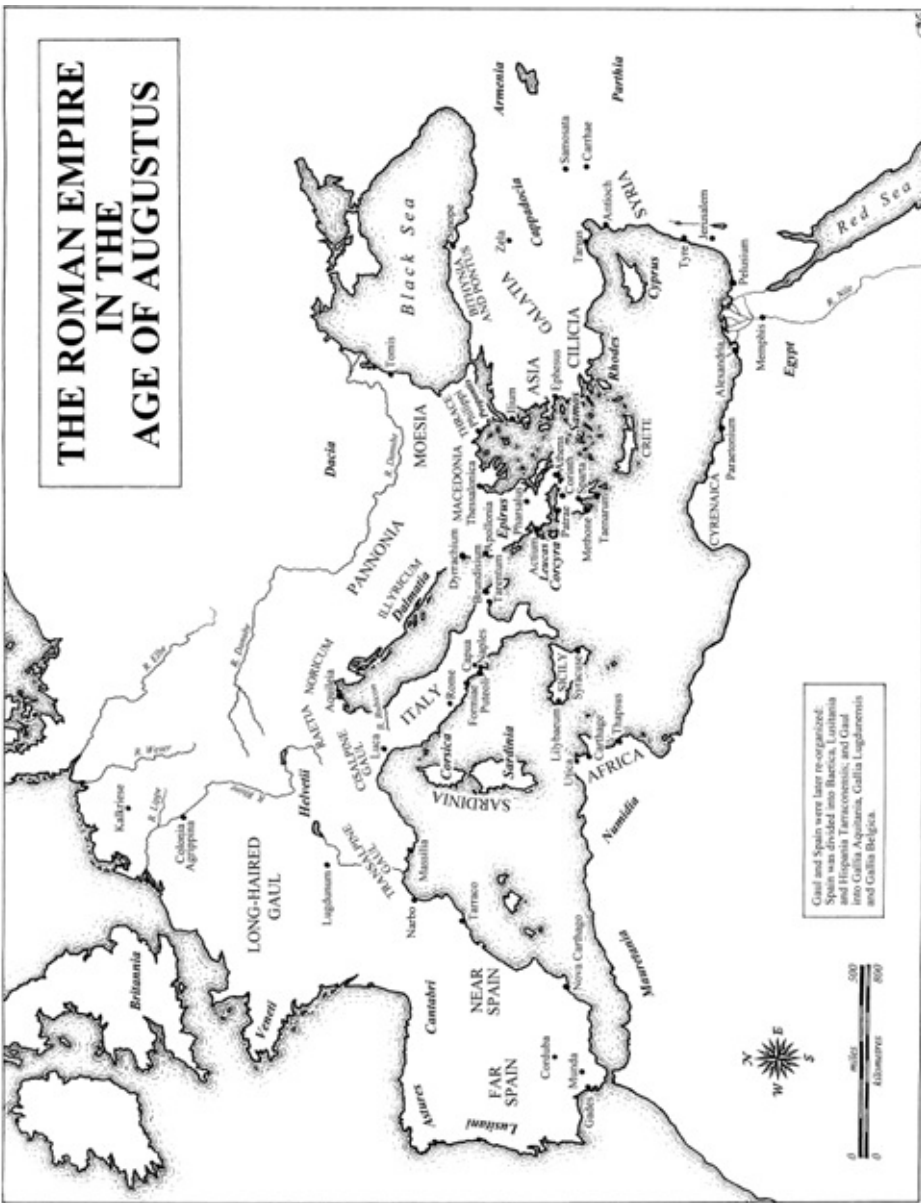
24	Augustus consul (10)
23	Augustus consul (11) Augustus at Rome, falls ill Second constitutional settlement: Augustus resigns consulship, receives <i>imperium proconsulare maius</i> and <i>tribunicia potestas</i> Death of Marcellus Horace's <i>Odes</i> (three books) published
23–21	Agrippa with enhanced <i>imperium</i> in the east
22–19	Augustus in the east
21	Agrippa marries Julia, goes to Gaul
20	Augustus negotiates entente with Parthia; Tiberius in Armenia Gaius born to Julia Rufus Egnatius praetor
c. 19	Agrippa's daughter, Julia, born
19	Egnatius bids for the consulship Virgil dies Augustus, back at Rome, receives consular powers Agrippa subdues Spanish tribes
18	Renewal of Augustus' <i>imperium maius</i> for five years Renewal of Agrippa's <i>imperium</i> for five years, plus grant of <i>tribunicia potestas</i> Review of Senate
18–17	Social and moral reforms ( <i>leges Juliae</i> )
17	Lucius born to Julia, Augustus adopts Gaius and Lucius Celebration of the Ludi Saeculares
16–13	Augustus in Gaul; Agrippa in the east
15	Tiberius and Drusus campaign in the Alps Drusus' son, Nero Claudius Drusus Germanicus(Germanicus), born
13	Tiberius consul (1) Agrippa granted <i>imperium maius</i> , and <i>tribunicia potestas</i> renewed Theater of Marcellus and Ara Pacis dedicated
13–12 winter	Agrippa in Pannonia to suppress threatened rebellion
12	Lepidus dies, Augustus succeeds him as <i>pontifex maximus</i>
March	Agrippa dies Agrippa Postumus born

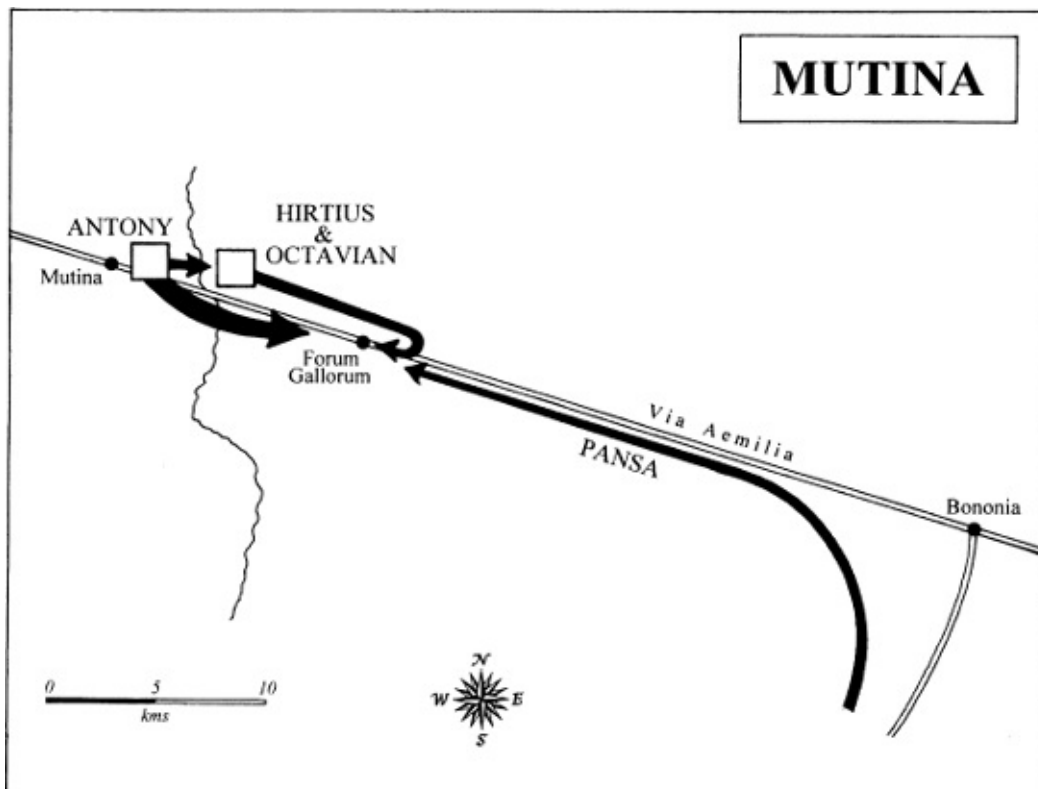
- 11 Tiberius divorces Vipsania and marries Julia
- 10 Drusus' son, Tiberius Claudius Drusus Nero Germanicus (Claudius), born
- 9 Death of Drusus
- 9-7 Tiberius campaigns in Germany
- 8 Augustus' *imperium maius* renewed  
Deaths of Maecenas and Horace
- 7 Tiberius consul (2), celebrates triumph
- 6 Armenian revolt  
Tiberius granted *tribunicia potestas* for five years  
Tiberius retires to Rhodes
- 5 Augustus consul (12)  
Gaius Caesar comes of age, appointed *princeps iuventutis*, designated consul for A.D. 1
- 2 Augustus consul (13)  
Lucius Caesar comes of age  
Disgrace of Julia  
Forum of Augustus and Temple of Mars Ultor dedicated  
King Frahâta of Parthia murdered, succeeded by Frahâtak  
Ovid publishes *Ars Amatoria*
- 1 Gaius Caesar sent to the east with *imperium*
- A.D.
- 2 Agreement between Gaius Caesar and King Frahâtak  
Tiberius returns from Rhodes  
Lucius Caesar dies at Massilia
- 2-3 Gaius Caesar wounded
- 4 Gaius Caesar resigns his duties and dies  
Augustus adopts Agrippa Postumus and Tiberius, who adopts Germanicus  
Tiberius granted *tribunicia potestas* for ten years  
Tiberius campaigns in Germany  
*lex Aelia Sentia*  
Review of Senate
- 5 Tiberius reaches the Elbe

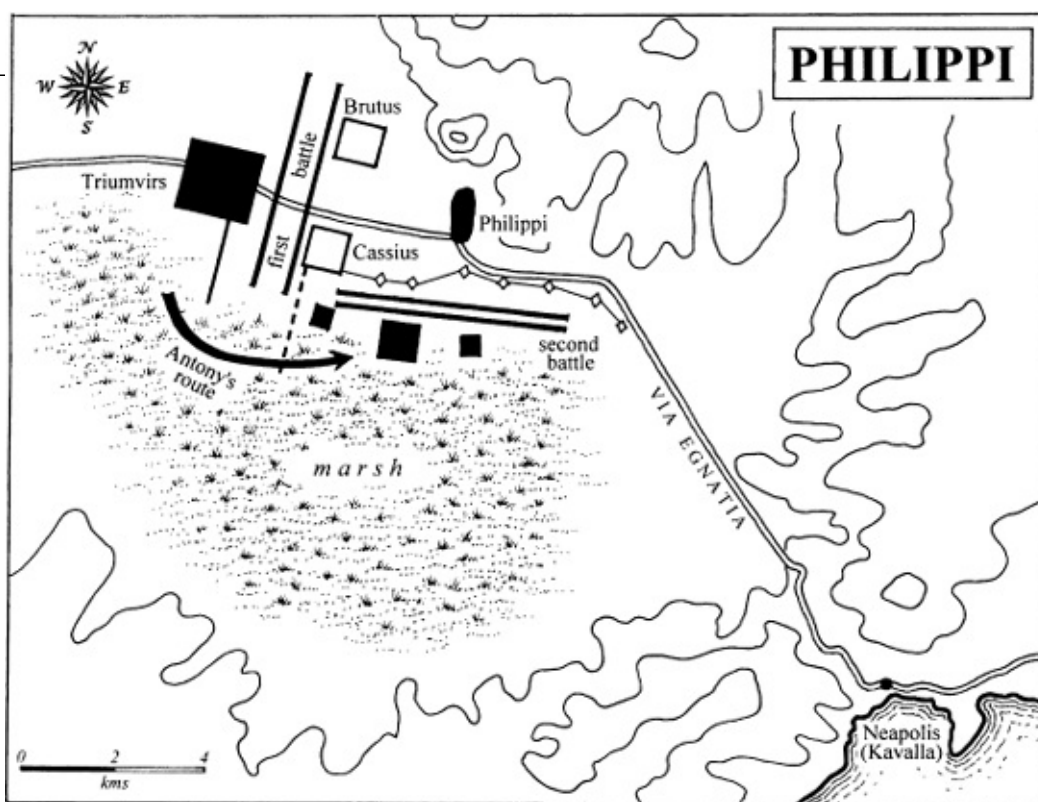
- 7 Agrippa Postumus banished to Planasia
- 8 Julia, Augustus' granddaughter, and Ovid banished  
Pannonians surrender
- 9 Dalmatia subdued  
Varus defeated in Germany; three legions lost  
*lex Papia Poppaea*
- 10–11 Tiberius campaigns in Germany
- 12 Germanicus consul  
Tiberius' triumph
- 13 Germanicus takes command in Gaul and Germany  
Tiberius' *tribunicia potestas* renewed for ten years; he receives *imperium proconsulare maius* equal to that of Augustus  
Germanicus receives proconsular *imperium*
- 14 August 19 Augustus dies  
Agrippa Postumus put to death  
Tiberius becomes *princeps*  
Julia, Augustus' daughter, dies in exile
- 15 Germanicus visits the scene of the *Variana clades*
- 17 Ovid dies in exile
- 19 Germanicus dies, perhaps poisoned
- 23 Tiberius' son, Drusus, dies, perhaps killed by Sejanus
- 28 Julia, Augustus' granddaughter, dies in exile
- 29 Julia Augusta (Livia) dies
- 37 Tiberius dies; Gaius (Caligula) succeeds
- 41 Gaius assassinated; Claudius succeeds
- 43 Claudius invades Britannia
- 54 Claudius dies, perhaps poisoned; Nero succeeds
- 68 Nero commits suicide, last member of Augustus' family to be *princeps*

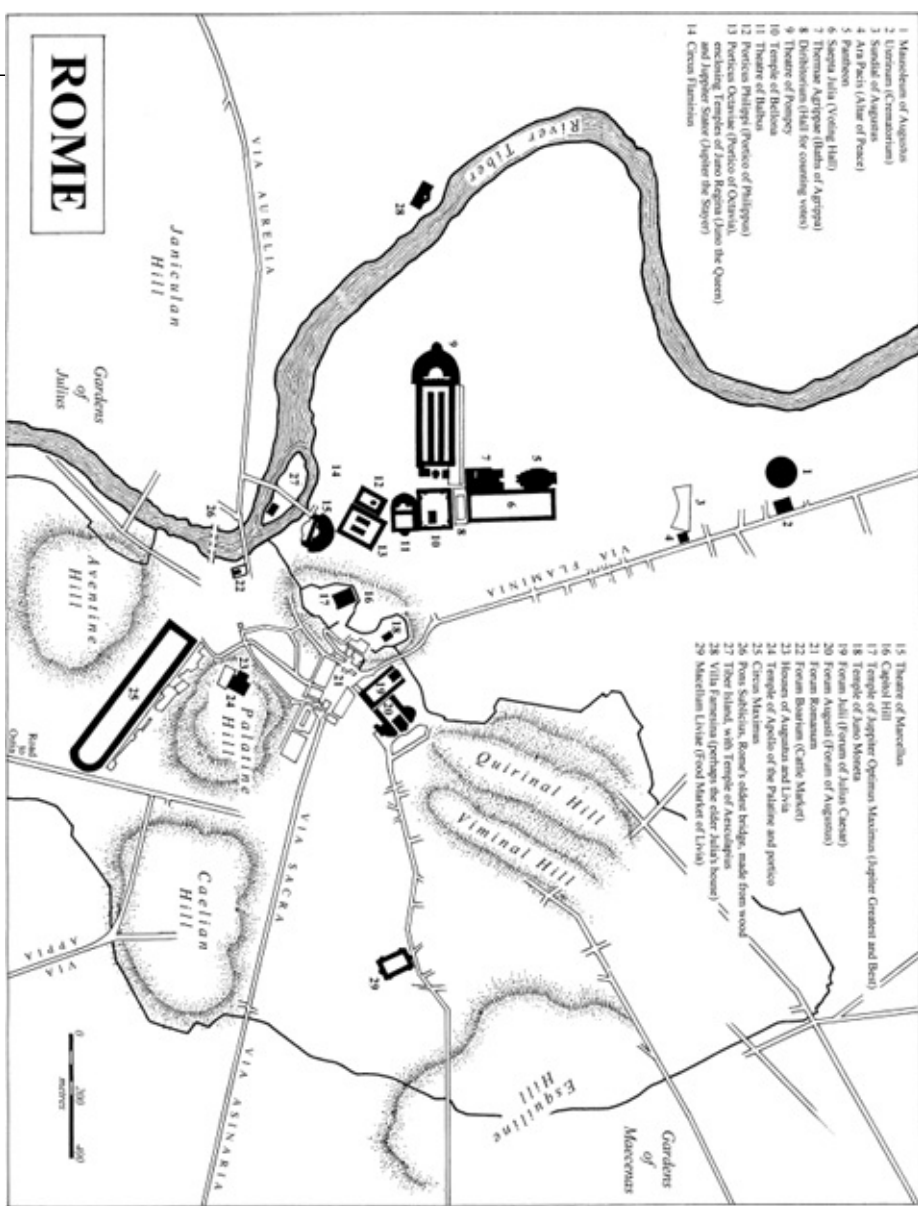


# THE ROMAN EMPIRE IN THE AGE OF AUGUSTUS



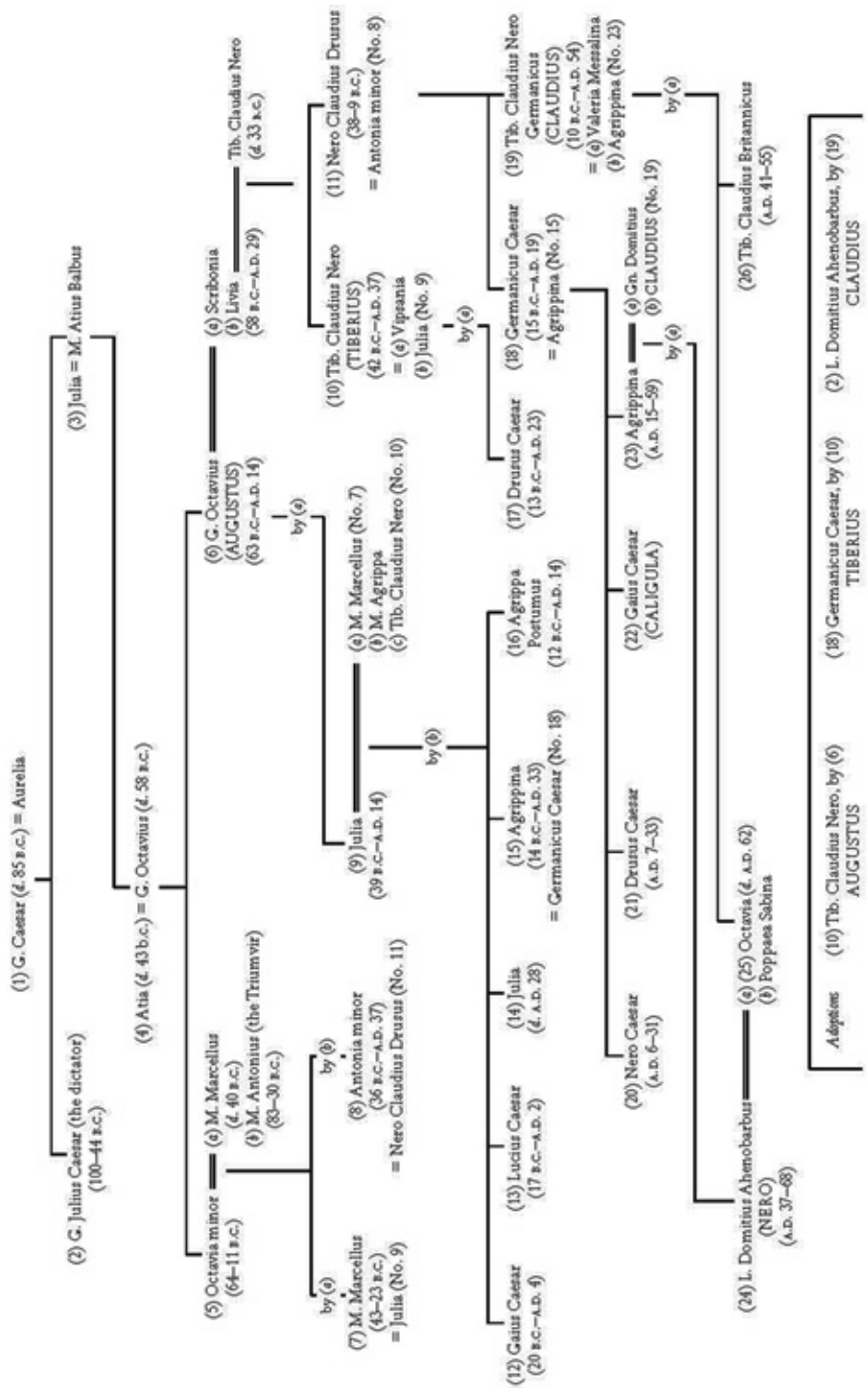








# THE JULIO-CLAUDIAN DYNASTY



Names in capital letters are those of emperors.

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## PREFACE

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His career was a masterly study in the wielding of power. He learned how to obtain it and, more important, how to keep it. As the history of the last hundred years has shown, empires are hard won and easily lost. In the first century B.C., Rome governed one of the largest empires the world had seen, but through foolish policies and bad governance risked its collapse. Augustus devised a political system that enabled the empire's survival for half a millennium. History never repeats itself exactly, but today's leaders and students of politics will find his policies and methods to be of interest.

Yet Augustus himself is a shadowy figure. Many books have been written about his achievement, but they have tended to focus on the Augustan age, rather than on the man as he was. My hope is to make Augustus come alive.

As well as narrating his own doings, I place his story in his times and describe the events and personalities that affected him. Shipwrecks, human sacrifice, hairbreadth escapes, unbridled sex, battles on land and at sea, ambushes, family scandals, and above all the unforgiving pursuit of absolute power—Augustus lived out an extraordinary and often terrifying drama.

The stage is crowded with larger-than-life personalities: the brilliant and charming Julius Caesar; the ruthless Cleopatra, who is often said to have used sex as an instrument of policy; the idealistic assassin Brutus; the intelligent drunkard Mark Antony; the dour Tiberius; the great but promiscuous lady Julia, and many more.

The incidents and actions that make up a life cannot be fully realized without also conveying a sense of place. So I have sought to evoke the main locations of Augustus' career, as they were at the time and as they appear today—among them, his house on the Palatine, the secret palace on the island of Pandateria, the low, sandy headland of Actium, and the spectacular city of Alexandria.

The Roman world is still recognizable to us who live two millennia later. The day-to-day practice of politics, the realities of urban living, the seaside resorts, the cultivation of the arts, the rising divorce rate, the misdemeanors of the younger generation: past and present have many things in common. However, certain forms of degradation—slavery, the low status of women, and the gladiatorial carnage of the arena—shock and astonish us. So, too, does the moral approval accorded to military violence and imperial expansion. Julius Caesar's largely unprovoked conquest of Gaul was hailed in Rome as a wonderful achievement, but it is estimated that one million Gauls lost their lives in the fighting.

Augustus was a very great man, but he grew gradually into greatness. He did not possess Julius

Caesar's bravura and political genius (it was that genius, of course, which killed Caesar, for it made him incapable of compromise). He was a physical coward who taught himself to be brave. He was intelligent, painstaking, and patient, but could also be cruel and ruthless. He worked extraordinarily hard. He thought in the long term, achieving his aims slowly and by trial and error.

Augustus is one of the few historical figures who improved with the passage of time. He began as a bloodthirsty adventurer, but once he had achieved power, he made a respectable man of himself. He repealed his illegal acts and took trouble to govern fairly and efficiently.

One curious aspect of Augustus' life is that many of the leading players were very young men. The adults who started Rome's civil wars fell victim to long years of fighting, leaving the baton to be picked up by the next generation. Augustus and his schoolmates Maecenas and Agrippa were in their late teens when they took charge of the state. Pompey the Great's son Sextus was probably much the same age when he set himself up as a guerrilla leader in Spain.

Augustus died old, but throughout his long reign he never hesitated to entrust great responsibility to the young men of his family: his stepsons Tiberius and Drusus, and his grandsons Gaius and Lucius. The excitement of making one's way in an adult world must have been intoxicating.

We are right to call Augustus Rome's first emperor, yet the title is anachronistic. At the time he was simply regarded as the chief man in the state. The Roman Republic had, apparently, been restored but not abolished. Augustus developed a personality cult, but he did not hold permanent authority and had to have his powers regularly renewed. Only with the accession of Tiberius did people finally realize that they were no longer citizens of a free commonwealth, but subjects living under a permanent monarchy. So nowhere in this book do I call Augustus emperor.

The task of writing a life of Augustus is complicated by the fact that many contemporary sources are lost, casualties of the Dark Ages: the autobiography down to 25 B.C. that Augustus wrote in Spain; his correspondence with Cicero; Agrippa's memoirs; the history of his times by Pollio and Messala; commentaries on the civil wars after Julius Caesar's assassination; thirty books of Livy's great history of Rome, covering the period from 44 to 9 B.C. Only fragments of the life of Augustus written by his friend of Herod the Great, Nicolaus of Damascus, have survived, and Appian's detailed study of Rome's civil wars in the first century B.C. closes with the death of Sextus Pompeius in 35 B.C.

Dio Cassius gives a reasonably complete account in his Roman History, but his style is pedestrian and he wrote three hundred years after the event. The findings of the modern archaeologist (especially inscriptions and coins) add valuable information. Neither Suetonius nor Plutarch is a historian properly speaking, but both inject some welcome anecdotes and personality assessments.

Much more is recorded about Augustus' first thirty years than about his later life and a thorough and coherent narrative of his youth can be constructed. However, important events of his maturity and old age call for the skills of the detective rather than the historian. Mysterious and incomplete narratives conceal as much they reveal, and sometimes only speculative explanations can be offered. For certain years nothing definite is known at all; between 16 and 13 B.C., we are told, Augustus was in Gaul and Germany, but we have no idea where he went or where he was at any particular time. For the second half of this book I have been obliged to switch from straightforward narrative to a more

thematic approach to my subject.

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This disjunction is not only due to the loss of texts, but also to a lack of governmental transparency. Once the imperial system had been established, Dio claims, *most events began to be kept secret and were denied to common knowledge.... Much that never materializes becomes common talk, while much that undoubtedly came to pass remains unknown, and in pretty well every instance the report which spread abroad does not correspond to what actually happened.*

That is going a little too far: intentions are often revealed through actions, and the broad thrust of history cannot easily be concealed. However, Dio has a point.

Hindsight is not open to biographers, who have a duty to tell a life as closely as possible to how it was lived. I have tried not to forget that the past was once present and the future unknown, and have done my best to hide my guilty knowledge of what fate had in store for the actors in the drama.

The plural of a family name that ends in “-us” or “-ius” I give as “-i.” Thus one Balbus becomes some Balbi, rather than the clumsy Balbuses. However, I am contentedly inconsistent; I allow “Caesar” to mutate into “Caesars” on the grounds that it is not inelegant and that the correct Latin would be the pedantic-sounding Caesares. I say “Pompey” and “Livy” rather than “Pompeius” and “Livius” because that is how the English-speaking world has termed them for many centuries. Place-names are usually given in their Latin form, except for well-known Anglicisms such as Rome and Athens. To convey the otherness of not-Rome, I have used Parthian and Armenian personal names in place of their Romanized or Hellenized versions. So Artavasdes becomes Artavâzd, Artaxes Ardashes, Orodes Urûd, Pacorus Pakûr, Phraates Frahâta, Phrataces Frahâtak, and Tigranes Dikran.

The modern-day interpretation of the ancient literary sources has reached a high level of sophistication and a skeptical eye is turned, usually wisely, on any claim made by a Latin or Greek historian. I incline to a minimalist view, often accepting what I am told unless there is an obvious or rational objection (for example, when two sources disagree). It is important to hesitate before ironing out inconsistent or surprising behavior; human beings are capable of harboring contradictory emotions, of acting against their interests, or stupidly.

So, for example, Augustus’ reported visit to see his grandson Agrippa Postumus on his island of exile may have been an odd and foolish thing for a sick old man to do, but it does not follow that the visit never took place. Even implausibility is a criterion of judgment to be applied with caution. Most of the contradictions in this story fall comfortably inside the usual bounds of human irrationality.

It is difficult to be categorical about the value of money, because the costs of providing different products and services are not the same as those of today. The basic Roman unit of account was the sesterce, very roughly worth between one and two pounds sterling.

The Romans dated their years from the supposed foundation of the city in 753 B.C., but it would confuse the reader if I placed Caesar's assassination in 709 A.U.C. (*ab urbe condita*, or "from the city foundation"), rather than the familiar 44 B.C. I use modern dating, and in so doing allude on almost every page to the one great event of Augustus' life about which he and practically everyone else in the Roman empire knew nothing: the birth of Christ.

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# INTRODUCTION

A.D. 14

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The island was mountainous and almost completely inaccessible, with precipitous cliffs, secret grottoes, and strangely shaped rocks. Endless sunshine, abundant, almost tropical flora, and clear air made it a lovely place, as did its delightful inhabitants, who were originally colonists from mainland Greece. Here he could forget business of state and relax in complete privacy and safety.

Security was an important issue, for the old man was ruler of the known world and had many enemies. He had overthrown the partly and messily democratic Republic, and for more than forty years had governed the Roman empire alone. He was known as Augustus, or “Revered One,” a name that separated him from ordinary mortals. However, he never paraded his authority; he did not like to be called *dominus*, “My Lord,” but *princeps*, “top person” or “first citizen.”

Capri was not just beautiful, it was easy to defend. Years ago Augustus had built a palatial villa here. Perched on a high promontory, it was like a ship’s prow made from stone. The building contained every luxury—extensive gardens, a bath complex with hot rooms and splash pools, and spectacular views of the sea. There were no springs in this arid, rocky spot, so cisterns gathered a supply of rainwater. Four-story apartment blocks housed the many servants, slaves, and guards needed to look after the *princeps* and his guests.

Augustus was not the only lotus-eater. He wanted his staff to have a good time, too. Some of them lived on an islet off Capri, which he nicknamed the Land of Do-Nothings because they were so lazy.

. . .

Augustus was seventy-seven and in poor health. He had noticed the first signs of terminal decline the previous spring; the end was fast approaching. So, too, was his greatest challenge. For the good of Rome (he told himself) one-man rule had to continue, so he gave careful thought to the preparations that would ensure a smooth handover of power to his chosen successor. He knew that trouble lay ahead. As soon as he died, many Romans would want to go back to the days of the free Republic. People were already talking idly of the blessings of liberty. There was irresponsible chatter of civil war.

The *princeps* set up a small succession committee, comprising a handful of trusted advisers, and gave it the task of planning the transition. The trick would be to set everything in place before anyone noticed or had time to object. He chaired the meetings himself, and he took Livia, his seventy-on-

year-old wife, into his confidence, as he always had done throughout his career; she attended some of the group's meetings.

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Augustus intended his successor to be Livia's fifty-five-year-old son, an able military commander, Tiberius Claudius Nero. Ten years ago he had formally adopted Tiberius and shared his power with him.

If only, the old man thought to himself, he did not have to leave Rome to a man he did not really care for. Competent, hardworking, experienced—yes, Tiberius was all these things, but he was also gloomy and resentful. “Poor Rome,” he muttered to himself, “doomed to be masticated by those slow moving jaws!”

There was another possible pretender. Augustus had a grandson, Agrippa Postumus, now in his mid-twenties. He had always had a soft spot for Agrippa, but the child grew up into an angry and violent young man, unsuitable for public office. Nevertheless, Augustus adopted him as his son simultaneously with Tiberius, hoping that the lad would become more mature and responsible.

He did not, and his saddened grandfather had had to disown him. A few years ago, he had sent Agrippa to cool his heels at the seaside resort of Surrentum. But the boy still managed to get into trouble, and was now languishing under military guard on Planasia, a tiny island south of Elba: out of sight but, unhappily, not out of mind.

This was because Agrippa had influential friends at Rome, people who were tired of his grandfather's cautious, patient style of governing. Augustus had received reliable reports that a plot was afoot to spring the boy from his place of exile, take him to one of the frontier armies, and march on Rome.

Any resistance during the handover of power after Augustus' death would center on Agrippa. So the succession committee's first job was to deal with the threat he posed. In May of A.D. 14 Augustus let it be known that he was in need of some peace and quiet and intended to spend a couple of weeks at his villa in the countryside south of Rome. From there, he departed, under conditions of strictest secrecy, on the long sea journey north to Planasia.

Agrippa was astonished by the sudden arrival of his grandfather, and there were tears and hugs all round. But a little conversation showed that the boy was as moody and dangerous as ever. Augustus was moved, but pitiless. Right from his entry into public life at the age of eighteen, no one who threatened his power received any quarter. The greater the threat, even if it came from his nearest and dearest, the icier the punishment.

The *princeps* put his arm around Agrippa's shoulders and reassured him that he loved him and would soon bring him home to Rome. He calculated that this would dampen any enthusiasm for plotting escape and revenge. Then Augustus boarded his ship, upset but glumly reconciled, arranging his grandson's execution.

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Everything would be much more manageable if all the main players in the succession game were of Rome. The agreed plan was that when the time came, the *princeps* would dispatch Tiberius, his established deputy and heir, to settle affairs in the troublesome province of Illyricum (today Croatia). He would be giving a clear sign to political observers that all was well, and (more to the point) that *he* was well. His own final destination would be his father's old villa at Nola, near the volcanic mountain of Vesuvius. If matters could be so arranged, he would die in the same room as Gaius Octavius had more than seventy years previously. This would be a dignified reminder of what the regime stood for: honoring the past and the old plain-living values of rural Italy.

At last, in the summer of A.D. 14, the moment of truth arrived. The *princeps* looked and felt more than ever. Neither he nor his doctors knew what was the matter with him; he seemed to be suffering from no particular illness, but felt feverish and very weak. It was clear to him as well as to Livia and Tiberius that he had, at best, only weeks to live. It was time to put the succession plan into operation.

To make sure rumor and malice did not reach the legions on the frontiers before official news came of a change of leadership in the capital, top-secret dispatches were sent by rapid courier to the commanders of the German and Danube armies and to the governors of the eastern provinces. They were warned of Augustus' failing condition, and Tiberius' succession. They advised strict discipline to reduce the risk of mutinies.

Augustus gave Tiberius his commission for Illyricum. As a very public sign of his confidence in him, he decided to accompany Tiberius for part of his journey south down the Via Appia, the great road that led to the port of Brundisium on Italy's heel. He was held up at Rome for some days by a long list of court cases that he was judging. Losing patience, he cried: "I will stay here no longer whoever tries to detain me!" It occurred to him that when he was gone, people would remember this remark as prophetic.

Eventually the two men were able to leave Rome, accompanied by a large bodyguard of soldiers and an entourage of slaves, servants, and officials. Augustus noticed that a brisk sea breeze was rising and decided on the spur of the moment that the party would take ship that evening, although he disliked night voyages. This had the advantage of avoiding the malarial Pomptine Marshes, through which they would have had to pass if traveling by road.

It was a bad idea, for the old man caught a chill, the first symptom of which was diarrhea. So, after coasting past Campania, he decided to spend a few last sunlit days at Capri. He was determined to enjoy himself. The *princeps* sat for a long time watching local youths at the open-air gymnasium, and invited them back to a banquet. He encouraged them to play practical jokes, and they scrambled about for tokens that he threw at them, entitling the holders to small prizes such as fruit and sweetmeats.

The *princeps* and his party crossed over from Capri to Neapolis (today's Naples), where, although his stomach was still weak and his diarrhea returning intermittently, he attended the athletic competition that the city staged every five years in his honor. He then set off with Tiberius and said goodbye to him at Beneventum, retracing his steps as arranged to the villa at Nola. Privately, Tiberius



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