

FROM REPUBLIC TO EMPIRE

Chapter 6: Octavian/Augustus Notes

After the assassination of Julius Caesar on March 15th 44 BCE, the Roman Republic was ravaged by Civil War. A great power struggle ensued involving Caesar's adopted son **Octavian**, **Marc Antony**, and a powerful man named **Lepidus**. The struggle was resolved when these men formed the Second Triumvirate.

They divided the Republic:

- Antony took the East
- Octavian took the West
- Lepidus took Africa



Roman Empire

This pact was sealed with the marriage of Octavian's sister (Octavia) to Marc Antony. (even though he was already involved with Cleopatra in Egypt). In 36 BCE Marc Antony decided to marry Cleopatra. Antony knew that Lepidus had lost power and had been exiled in Rome, and Octavian was only waiting to wage war against him in Egypt.

Antony & Cleopatra- had guardianship of Caesarian (Julius Caesar's son with Cleopatra) and had three children of their own. (a girl and two boys). But they knew that Octavian and the forces from the Western Republic were on their way to fight.

THE BATTLE OF ACTIUM

In 31 BCE Octavian attacked Antony's forces on the west coast of the Peloponnese, Antony was convinced he had a chance. However, Octavian's Naval Commander, Agrippa defeated Antony's ships and forced Cleopatra and the remaining boats back to Egypt. Upon their return, they tried to re-group knowing Octavian was en route.

Through a series of mis-communication, Antony readied himself for battle, but his men did not react to aid him. He believed that his wife Cleopatra had made a deal with Octavian to save her from being thrown and committed suicide by his own sword. However, this was not the case....His men rushed him back to Cleopatra who was hiding with the Egyptian treasure. When Cleopatra saw Antony, it was only moments before he died.

Cleopatra, knowing what fate lied ahead of her, refused to be captured and brought to Rome to be dragged through the streets and then death. As Octavian's men arrested her and put her in a guarded room, it is believed that she asked for an ASP snake....a deadly poisonous snake. She is believed to

have the snake bite her and was found dead in the room. Others believe she was murdered, but history claims she committed suicide like Antony.

The vast treasures of Egypt now fell to Octavian, and Egypt itself became a new Roman province upon Cleopatra's death.

Octavian's next, highly questionable act was to put to death Cleopatra's son Caesarion. Caesarion in fact was the child of Cleopatra and Julius Caesar. Octavian being the adoptive son of Caesar, he in essence ordered the death of his step-brother. Victory of Actium had given Octavian the undivided mastery of the Roman world. But this position had once been held before by Julius Caesar...and Octavian was not one to forget what fate had befallen Caesar. In order to prevent a similar demise, he needed to create a **new constitution**.

Hence on January 27 BCE Octavian in the so-called '**First Settlement**' went through a strangely orchestrated ceremony in which he 'surrendered' all his power to the senate - thus *restoring the Republic*. It was a purely symbolical sacrifice as he receiving most of the very same power right back again. The entire effort were meticulously planned and overseen by his supporters and associates. Octavian received into his personal control, for ten years, the vitally important provinces of Egypt, Cyprus, Spain, Gaul and Syria. Also he was continually re-elected as consul from 31 to 23 BC.

Further he now received the name '**Augustus**', a slightly archaic term, meaning 'sacred' or 'revered'. Augustus apparently preferred the term '***princeps***' (first citizen) which he had been granted, though he also kept the title *imperator* to point out his position as military chief of staff.



THE AGE OF THE EMPERORS BEGINS.....

How did Augustus become an Emperor?

- With the decision making power in all of Rome's religious matters, Augustus cleverly portrayed himself as quasi-divine- even as a descendent of Venus herself. Abroad and even in Italy, he linked the worship of Rome as a spiritual entity with a concept of his own supernatural being. In Italy, Julius Caesar was defied. In the Greek world, Augustus was worshiped as the 'new Zeus'. Now, the power of Augustus was enhanced by the almost godlike aura he created around himself. The Roman Empire was born and Augustus Caesar became the first Emperor of Rome.
- Augustusan Period was known as the: **Principate** (first among equals)
- He died in August 14 CE (month was named after him while still alive)
- He was the most successful of all the Roman Emperors