

Augustus and the Principate

The Transformation From Republic to Empire: The Unique Properties of the Principate

To what extent was the Roman Republic transformed into a new, different state system during Augustus' political career?



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Hand-in Date:

April 13th 2012

Course:

OZS III – Urbs Roma

Bachelor Thesis

Professor:

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*For my brother-in-law Dennis Regoort.
(Sep 8 1983 – Dec 13 2011)*

*It was not your time,
you were forced to part from us.
But know that you will always have a special place
in our hearts.*

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Introduction

Princes: From Primes Inter Pares to Pater Patriae

Ancient Rome's history is divided up into three distinct periods. The first of these periods is the era of the kings. According to legend, Romulus had founded the city and named the city in his honor after committing his infamous fratricide.¹ The regal period ended with the establishment of the republic when Brutus had thrown out the last king in 509 BC.² The transition from kingdom to republic seems a certain fact. However, pinning the transformation of Rome from republic to empire is much more problematic. The first century BC was known as a period of civil wars and chaos, where Roman generals and politicians, such as Pompey and Caesar, fought against each other in the political arena and on the battlefield.³ The century afterwards is known today as the beginning of the 'Roman empire'. The Republic did not turn into a hereditary monarchy overnight. Following the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BC, Rome was entangled in a new power struggle.⁴ Octavian, eventually known as Augustus, went down into history as the victor of that struggle. More than ten years after Caesar's murder, the Egyptian queen Cleopatra and Mark Antony had been defeated. Octavian was given the name 'Augustus' and is commemorated as Rome's first emperor by modern historians. The title of *imperator* had been continuously used during the republican era and translates roughly as 'commander'.⁵ When Octavian had received the title of Augustus from the Senate, *imperator* was added to his name, signifying his new, special position.⁶ Augustus' reign was marked as the transitional period between the Republic and the Empire, known today as the Principate.⁷

As stated above, the fall of the Roman Republic and the birth of the Roman Empire did not happen overnight. The situation was far more complex. The Romans became a republic under the

1 A. Momigliano, 'The Origins of Rome', in: F.W. Walbank and others ed., *The Cambridge Ancient History Vol. 7, Part 2 The Rise of Rome to 220 B.C.* (Cambridge 1989) *Cambridge Histories Online* (10 April 2012), pg. 57.

2 A. Drummond, 'Rome in the Fifth Century II: The Citizen Community', in: F.W. Walbank and others ed., *The Cambridge Ancient History Vol. 7, Part 2 The Rise of Rome to 220 B.C.* (Cambridge 1989) *Cambridge Histories Online* (10 April 2012), pg. 172.

3 See: T.P. Wiseman, 'Caesar, Pompey and Rome, 59-50 B.C.', in: J.A. Crook, Andrew Lintott and Elizabeth Rawson ed., *The Cambridge Ancient History Vol. 9, The Last Age of the Roman Republic, 146-43 B.C.* (Cambridge 1992) *Cambridge Histories Online* (10 April 2012).

4 Suet. *Aug.* 10, *Jul.* 82; Dio Cass. 45.3.1.

5 Frank Frost Abbott, *A History and Description of Roman Political Institutions* (New York 1963), pg. 162.

6 Matthew D.H. Clark, *Augustus, First Roman Emperor. Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival* (Exeter, 2010), pg. 6; Werner Eck, 'Senatorial Self-Representation: Developments in the Augustan Period', in: Fergus Millar, Erich Segal ed., *Caesar Augustus. Seven Aspects* (Oxford 1984), pg. 131.

7 For the purposes of this thesis, the name 'Octavian' will be used to describe the individual in events before January 13th 27 BC. The name 'Augustus' will be used to describe the individual after this date.

premise that there should never again be a single man with too much political power. The Republic was constructed to prevent a new king from returning. For every magistrate, there were restrictions as to how power was wielded that came with that office, whilst also assuring that offices were not held by one person for too long. There were extraordinary magistracies which gave certain individuals special powers, such as the office of *dictator*.⁸ However, these exceptional magistracies were meant to be temporary and for emergency situations. Most traditional offices and functions, such as the consulate, had an annual time limit. Other measures were taken to ensure that one man could never wield too much power. In almost all cases, one had to share his office with at least one colleague who was equal in all aspects. For example, there were two consuls who had the right to veto each other. This way the Republic tried to keep potential kings at bay. The *adfectio regni*, ‘striving for kingship’, was the worst of sins that one could commit in Rome.⁹

At a glance this state of affairs may seem balanced but in reality this construction had failed to stop individuals from seizing too much power. The most famous examples are the dictators Sulla and Julius Caesar. After Caesar’s murder, Octavian was proclaimed his heir through his will. This served as his entry ticket into the world of Roman politics. He wanted to gain the same power as his adoptive father, but was well aware of the risks and the implied consequences.¹⁰ How did Octavian become the most powerful individual in the Roman world? How did he create a system in which he could wield ultimate power without formally establishing a monarchy? How did he secure a position for himself as well as a position for an heir, without implying a dynasty? Augustus had created a system that historians today call the ‘Principate’. Augustus became *princeps*, which meant ‘first citizen’. In the period between the Battle of Actium in 31 BC and his death in AD 14, his role had changed from being a *primes inter pares*, ‘first among equals’, to the *pater patriae*, ‘father of his country’. What does this change signify? But other questions are also raised. How did his relationship as *princeps* with the Roman senate and people change between 29 BC and AD 14? Were his actions completely in synch with the old *res publica* and was his position not as revolutionary?¹¹ The main question to this essay will be: To what extent was Roman republic transformed into a new different state system during Augustus' political career?

8 Suet. *Jul.* 41.2, 76.

9 Walter Eder, ‘Augustus and the Power of Tradition’ (translated by Karl Galinsky), in: Karl Galinsky (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus* (Cambridge 2005), pg. 26.

10 Eder, ‘Power of Tradition’, pg. 17.

11 The Late Roman Republic is described as *res publica*, “public affairs/things”. Augustus reestablished the *res publica* as *princeps*. This did not mean he restored the republic; Eder, ‘Power of Tradition’, pg. 15.

To answer the above questions, both primary and secondary literature will be used. Cassius Dio, Cicero, Polybius and Suetonius are the main ancient sources for this essay. Cicero was a contemporary of Caesar and Octavian, and a senator at the time. Most importantly, he was murdered at the orders of the triumvirs in 43 BC.¹² Dio was a senator during the late second and early third centuries AD and had knowledge of the reigns of Caligula and Nero and might have been negative towards the Principate.¹³ Suetonius was not a senator but witnessed the reign of Domitian in the first century AD and probably shared the same anxiety towards the emperors as Dio.¹⁴

First of all, the Late Republic will be shortly assessed to show the constructs of power before 44 BC. This will be followed by a study of Octavian's rise into politics and his policies before and during 23 BC, as to understand why his special position as *princeps* was not only maintained but held in high regard by the Roman senate and people. Why this date is of particular importance will be mentioned. Afterwards, the long road for Augustus to become 'father of his country' and how Augustus managed to have Tiberius as his heir, without pointing towards hereditary monarchy, will be explained. Then finally, the Principate will be discussed and defined as a polity. Ultimately, I will have shown that Augustus' state system was genuine to a large extent, because even though it rested upon the flexible tradition of the Roman constitution, it combined a series of special positions and powers in revolutionary fashion, which was both legal and unprecedented in Rome's history.

12 Dio Cass. 47.8.1-8.5.

13 Meyer Reinhold, *From Republic to Principate. An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History Books 49-52 (36-29 B.C.)*(Oxford University Press 1988), pg. 1-3.

14 Jona Lendering, 'C. Suetonius Tranquillus', <http://www.livius.org/su-sz/suetonius/suetonius.html> (10 April 2012).

The Late Roman Republic

Polybius, Cicero and the *Res Publica*

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the constitution of the republic during the times of Polybius and Cicero. Special attention will be paid to Polybius and his description of the three key elements of the Roman constitution and its flexibility. Polybius was a Greek who expatriated to Rome and wrote about it and the wars with its neighbors during the second century BC.¹⁵ Cicero describes affairs of the Late Republic from a senator's point of view and is thus important. The Republic that existed before Octavian's rise to power must be examined in order to note the differences between the Republic and the Principate. Some questions can be raised in regards to the Roman Republic. Who was ultimately in charge? How far did the powers of magistrates go? Was the constitution of Rome both bound by tradition and still flexible? With the aid of the works of Polybius, whilst also discussing some critique on his works by Brunt, these questions will be answered in the following section.

The Roman Republic Through the Eyes of Polybius

The Roman Republic had been established in 509 BC, when Brutus and the aristocracy of Rome had sent the last king into exile and had hence turned the Roman polity into a 'republic'. Had the ascension of this new republic drastically changed the form of government? The answer to that is no: Though the kings were gone, most key roles that he fulfilled were divided among the *pontifex maximus* and the consuls.¹⁶ But what did the Roman state consist of and how were responsibilities divided in the Republic? Polybius provides an answer in his sixth book which discusses Roman politics.¹⁷ First of all, he discusses the Roman constitution.

Modern constitutions exist as documents that are binding to all citizens of a particular nation/state and which cannot easily be changed. The Roman constitution was not codified but instead was based on tradition and consent among the Roman senate, people and magistrates.¹⁸ Only civil and criminal law was written down, known as the 'Twelve Tables'.¹⁹ The continuance of the system relied on a harmonic balance of power between the consuls, the senate and the people. Polybius describes the

15 Jona Lendering, 'Polybius of Megalopolis', <http://www.livius.org/pn-po/polybius/polybius.html> (10 April 2012).

16 Frank Frost Abbott, *A History and Description of Roman Political Institutions* (New York 1963), pg. 15-16, 25-26.

17 Polyb. 6.11-18.

18 P. A. Brunt, 'The Fall of the Roman Republic', in: P.A. Brunt, *The Fall of the Roman Republic and Related Essays* (Oxford 1988), pg. 13; Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 15.

19 Abbott, *Roman Political Institutions*, pg. 30, 418.

Roman government to have been a mix of and balance between aristocratic, democratic and despotic elements.²⁰ The Romans themselves described their system to be neither an aristocracy, a democracy nor a despotism.²¹

First of all, the two consuls formed the despotic element of the polity, as they had significant authority over army preparations and were the supreme magistrates. There was no higher office to obtain for the Roman politician.²² Though consuls could interfere in the works and jurisdiction of other magistrates, this became less and less manageable due to Rome's continued expansion.²³ They had a number of functions, such as introducing foreign ambassadors to the senate, bringing important issues before the senate and to see to the execution of senatorial decrees. They also could bring forth important issues to the people's assembly.²⁴ They had the power to execute punishment on any soldier or officer under their command abroad. At home, they were only restricted by their fellow consul or vetoes of the ten tribunes, but elsewhere they held sway over the military. Polybius' perception of the office of consul to be a despotic element in the Roman constitution seems understandable when considering their military authority. Yet there was more to it, as in several ways their power was restricted when performing civil tasks, an essential part of the consulship.²⁵ Consuls were also subject to annual re-election and had to take an oath the moment that their office expired, that stated that they had obeyed the law during their term in office.²⁶ If he had not done so, he could be prosecuted and tried by the people's assemblies.

The senate formed the second element and is seen by Polybius as the aristocratic element of the Roman government.²⁷ It was aristocratic because it was filled by patricians who used to occupy the magistracies: A selective body whose number changed with time, but generally had a number of about six hundred.²⁸ The senate had important duties, such as financing the maintenance and expenditure of public buildings, issuing public investigations for important crimes, such as treason and conspiracy, settling controversies, assessing penalties and offering help to individuals or even Italian states allied to Rome.²⁹ Most decisions in relation to foreign policy, such as aiding allies, requesting aid from those allies or even to proclaim war upon a state, were also the courtesy of the senate. Thus the senate

20 Brunt, 'Fall of the Roman Republic', pg. 14; Polyb. 6.11.

21 Polyb. 6.11.

22 Abbott, *Roman Political Institutions*, pg. 175-176; Polyb. 6.12.

23 Anthony A. Barret, 'Introduction', in Anthony A. Barret ed., *Lives of the Caesars* (Oxford 2008) pg. 4; Brunt, 'Fall of the Roman Republic', pg. 15.

24 Abbott, *Roman Political Institutions*, pg. 175-181; Polyb. 6.12.

25 Abbott, *Roman Political Institutions*, pg. 177-178; Brunt, 'Fall of the Roman Republic', pg. 17; Polyb. 6.12.

26 Abbott, *Roman Political Institutions*, pg. 172; Polyb. 6.15.

27 Brunt, 'Fall of the Roman Republic', pg. 14; Polyb. 6.13.

28 Abbott, *Roman Political Institutions*, pg. 220-212; Barret, 'Introduction', pg. 3; Polyb. 6.13.

29 Abbott, *Roman Political Institutions*, pg. 238-239; Polyb. 6.13.

decided most on domestic and economic policies, and together with the consuls, dictated foreign policy.³⁰

Last but not least there was ‘the people’: Popular assemblies of the common Roman citizens. Historians still debate what ‘the people’ consisted of at these assemblies, as it is hard to imagine how in Polybius’ day over four hundred thousand men could gather to vote on issues at a single spot.³¹ It is questionable if these assemblies were even democratic at all, as they are described by Polybius.³² In any case, the people had significant powers and tools by which to prevent the consuls and the senate from oppressing the people. Polybius states the people to be “the sole fountain of honor and of punishment...”, expressing that the people decided important life-and-death issues. The main function of the assemblies, and especially that of the tribunes of the people, was to decide on matters of great proportions, such as life and death of an individual, but also on cases where the penalty was a serious sum of money. The foremost important function of the assemblies was to ratify peace treaties in order for them to be in effect.³³

How did the consuls, people and senate interact with one another and keep track of each other? There is no absolute distinction who keeps who in check. However, the relations between consuls, people and senate are stated in the works of Polybius.³⁴ A consul needed the support of both the senate and the people to be able to bring his administration to a successful conclusion. He needed the senate for distributing and sending wartime supplies to him by senatorial decree.³⁵ In order to gain prestige and celebrate a ‘triumph’, the senate had to allow it. He also needed the people, for going against their wishes could make himself subject to prosecution after his office expired. The consul needed the people for ratifying treaties as well. The senate needed to respect the wishes of the people, for they needed to ratify senatorial decrees related to penalties for offenses against the republic.³⁶ In theory, the support of the people was needed to pass any law which could reduce senatorial power. Finally, the tribunes could use their veto to stop senatorial decrees. Polybius goes as far as saying that the senate could neither convene formally or informally, if a tribune used his veto.³⁷ This gave the people the means to bend magistrates to their will.³⁸ Since the senate formed domestic and economic policies, and had control over the collection of revenue from harbors, mines and the like, most citizens of Rome had

30 Abbott, *Roman Political Institutions*, pg. 234-235, 236-239; Polyb. 6.12-13.

31 Brunt, ‘Fall of the Roman Republic’, pg. 23.

32 Brunt, ‘Fall of the Roman Republic’, pg. 25; Polyb. 6.14.

33 Abbott, *Roman Political Institutions*, pg. 235, 257; Polyb. 6.14, 6.16.

34 Polyb. 6.15-18.

35 Abbott, *Roman Political Institutions*, pg. 233-235; Brunt, ‘Fall of the Roman Republic’, pg. 17; Polyb. 6.15.

36 Polyb. 6.16.

37 Polyb. 6.16.

38 Brunt, ‘Fall of the Roman Republic’, pg. 20.

an interest in the works of the senate, either as contractor or employee.³⁹ The senate had control over interactions between the censor and the contractors, but most importantly, judges who took part in public and private trials on heavy charged cases, were members of the senate.

Combining these three factors, Polybius praised it as “a union sufficiently firm for all emergencies, and a constitution than which it is impossible to find a better.”⁴⁰ But is this system really balanced? The Late Republican era is testimony to the fact that Polybius’ remark, that “the constitution is seen to possess within itself the power of correcting abuses”, can at the very least be questioned.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the Roman constitution was both traditional and flexible, as shall be highlighted in the consecutive chapters.

The Roman Republic as a Flexible Polity

The following examines the flexibility of the Roman republic and discusses it as a political system, as this flexibility was essential for Augustus to achieve ultimate power during his career. The magistrates played an important role in the Roman world, as has been shown above. The magistracies included Consuls, praetors, quaestors and censors. But there were also aediles, who were in charge of carrying out the senate’s municipal administration.⁴² It should be noted that in the Late Republic, former consuls and praetors could be assigned to a promagistracy, such as ‘proconsul’ and ‘propraetor’. Consuls for example would by senatorial decree serve as a governor in Rome’s provinces when their term as consul had expired.⁴³ During Rome’s expansion throughout the Mediterranean, more and more governors were needed to manage the provinces.

In regard to the above, the magistrates depended heavily on the senate to do pretty much anything. Was this system really balanced? Polybius probably recognized the predominance of the senate over the two other elements of the Roman constitution.⁴⁴ It has been noted that the only office open to non-patricians, the office of tribune, was used by the senate to gain greater influence. They not only promoted the senate’s wishes but could also act a tool against magistrates who did not always obey it.⁴⁵ After 133 BC this started to change.⁴⁶ One of the most important things to understand about

39 Polyb. 6.17.

40 Polyb. 6.18.

41 Polyb. 6.18

42 Abbott, *Roman Political Institutions*, pg. 202-206; Barret, ‘Introduction’, pg. 4.

43 Abbott, *Roman Political Institutions*, pg. 180.

44 Brunt, ‘Fall of the Roman Republic’, pg. 15; Polyb. 6.51, 23.14.1.

45 Brunt, ‘Fall of the Roman Republic’, pg. 22.

46 The case of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, see C.F. Konrad, ‘From the Gracchi to the First Civil War’, in: N. Rosenstein, R. Morstein-Marx ed, *A Companion to the Roman Republic* (Malden MA, Oxford, Carlton 2006).

the Roman constitution and the polity, is that it was considerably flexible.⁴⁷ Romans honored tradition, but that tradition was flexible in the sense that the system continued to evolve over time. Brunt notes that change could be a characteristic of this system.⁴⁸ The system was not based on any legal balance, but rather a harmony between *auctoritas*, *potestas* and *libertas*. *Auctoritas* can be understood as influence; *potestas* was sheer (political) power; *libertas* was described as citizens' rights and liberty in both public and private matters, but also implied a degree of political participation.⁴⁹ However, as Brunt notes, the moment one of the three elements of the Roman constitution upset the balance and challenged the other elements, it would cause a breakdown of the system. This is what ultimately led to the civil wars of the first century BC.⁵⁰

A Design of 'Public Affairs'

What to think of the Roman constitution before the rise of Augustus? First of all, it must be noted that this system was able to survive for over four hundred years on the basis of general consent among the members of Roman society, which is astounding. However, upsetting the balance between senate, consuls and people ultimately proved disastrous for the republic. Tacitus, whom had a negative attitude towards the Principate, noted that a system based on a mix of aristocratic, democratic and despotic elements cannot last, but this does not do justice to the republic's design.⁵¹ The upset of the balance is instead probably the most significant reason for the republic's downfall. Secondly, Cicero wrote that the *res publica*, 'public affairs/things', were *res populi*, the 'affairs of the people'.⁵² As stated above, during the time of Polybius and later, the senate wielded the most political power and, as the major aristocratic element proved predominant, it appealed to the Greeks and other foreigners that it was the senate who was in control.⁵³ The civil wars and dictatorships of Sulla and Caesar would upset the balance and by the forties BC, Cicero had complained that the *res publica* was lost. But that is a mere matter of defining the term '*res publica*', as will be shown in the following chapters.

47 Brunt, 'Fall of the Roman Republic', pg. 13; Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 15-16.

48 Brunt, 'Fall of the Roman Republic', pg. 13; Cic. *Rep.* 2.2, 2.57, 30.37;

49 Brunt, 'Fall of the Roman Republic', pg. 10, 15; Cic. *Rep.* 2.57; Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 6, 14, 16; Edwin S. Ramage, *The Nature and Purpose of Augustus' "Res Gestae"* (Stuttgart 1987), pg. 39-43.

50 Brunt, 'Fall of the Roman Republic', pg. 13.

51 Tac. *Ann.* 4.33.

52 Cic. *Rep.* 39, 43, 48.

53 Polyb. 4.13.

The Rise of Octavian **From Apollonia to Actium**

This chapter will discuss the discourse of Octavian's rise to power, from Caesar's assassination in 44 BC to his victory over Mark Antony in 31 BC in order to understand how he became the most powerful man in Rome. Octavian's political character had changed over time to suit his political goals.⁵⁴ The pretext of this change will be discussed in this chapter. Octavian's rise to power was obviously not a foregone conclusion. The death of his great-uncle Caesar had elevated Octavian to the platform of Roman politics. What were Octavian's objectives? What were the greatest obstacles to asserting control over Rome? How did his early political career define him? How did he defeat Antony, who already had distinguished military and political career? These questions will be answered in this chapter

Octavian's Early Life and Entrance into Roman Politics

Octavian was born as Gaius Octavius and received the cognomen 'Thurinus' in honor of his ancestry or his father's victory over runaway slaves shortly after his birth.⁵⁵ He was born in Rome, presumably on the spot that is still marked today near the Palatine. He had lost his father at the age of four. At the age of sixteen he gained the toga, which signified that he had officially become an adult.⁵⁶ He joined Caesar on his campaigns in Iberia against the sons of Pompey, despite being severely ill when he travelled there. Upon his arrival Caesar had praised him for his efforts despite his illness. It was during Octavian's studies in Apollonia (in modern Albania) that he learned of Caesar's death.⁵⁷

Suetonius describes Caesar's murder in great detail. He reports that prior to the murder, senators gathered around his seat in the Theater of Pompey. Caesar was approached by the senator named Tillius Cimber and when Caesar had denied him an answer to his questions, he was grabbed by Cimber and consecutively stabbed in his neck by a senator called Casca.⁵⁸ The rest of the senators that stood around him then stabbed him twenty-two more times, resulting in Caesar's death at the age of

54 Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 17.

55 Suet. *Aug.* 7.

56 Suet. *Aug.* 8.

57 Dio Cass. 45.3.1; Suet. *Aug.* 10.

58 Suet. *Jul.* 79, 82.

fifty-six.⁵⁹ His demise caused quite a ruse among the populace.⁶⁰ As for the senators themselves, reportedly they wished to cast Caesar's body into the Tiber, but were refrained from doing so out of fear for Mark Antony, Caesar's lieutenant and master of horse.⁶¹ In his will, Caesar had named Octavian his heir, adopting him into his family and given him three quarters of his estate. From then on he was known as Gaius Julius Caesar, which was vital for securing military support and funds.⁶²

What were Octavian's goals when he entered Roman politics? The *dictator perpetuus* ('dictator for life') had made him his heir and Octavian was probably determined to assume this position Caesar had laid out for him. Yet, he had not only to acquire a position of ultimate personal power, but he also had to assure that he did not end up like his adoptive father.⁶³

Octavian's first moves were the same as that of any potential dictator. He recruited soldiers and spearheaded a march on Rome and found himself in a state of high treason.⁶⁴ He confiscated the taxes from the province of Asia Minor and had given no justification for it. His first speech of Rome condemned the murderers of Caesar and stated that he would "strive for the honors of my father", but claimed also that he wanted to rid the city of "Antony's tyranny".⁶⁵ How could Octavian as a "Caesar wannabe", challenge Antony, who already had a distinguished military career? Besides, Octavian had no support from any revered Republican in the senate. Cicero provided Octavian with the means. He had taken Octavian 'under his wing', to make him a useful asset against Antony.⁶⁶ First of all Cicero moved the senate to relieve Octavian of his state of high treason by granting him an official military command (*imperium pro praetore*). Cicero recommended Octavian for this honor through rhetoric in praise of past youthful heroes, and was ratified in the senate.⁶⁷ Antony had become unpopular in the senate, due to maneuvering between Caesarians and Caesar's murderers.⁶⁸ Antony had the supposed son of Marius slain after the latter had become popular after Caesar's death. Cicero hoped to stop Antony in his tracks by aiding Octavian. This military command made way for Octavian to gain the title of *imperator*, or 'commander', and posed a more serious challenge to Antony. Thus the way was opened for Octavian to enter the political arena of Rome.

59 Dio Cass. 44.19.1-21.2; Suet. *Jul.* 82, 88.

60 Suet. *Jul.* 83-85.

61 Suet. *Jul.* 82.

62 Clark, *Power, Propaganda and Politics of Survival*, pg. 6; Suet. *Jul.* 83.

63 Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 17.

64 Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 18.

65 Cic. *Att.* 16.16.3; Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 18.

66 Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 18.

67 Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 19.

68 Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 18; Suet. *Aug.* 10.

Octavian, the Triumvirate and His Victory Over Antony

Octavian's first steps had been taken, but was expected by the senate to combat Antony, not the conspirators, Decimus Brutus and Cassius. Brutus had withheld himself at Mutina and Antony had begun to besiege the city. Seeing Antony as the greater threat, Octavian marched against Antony and, with the support of consuls Hirtius and Pansa, defeated him at Mutina.⁶⁹ Having learned of the allegiance between Mark Antony and Lepidus, Octavian abandoned the cause of the aristocrats and joined them.⁷⁰ The last remaining forces of Decimus Brutus and other conspirators were defeated at the Battle of Philippi in 42 BC, which Augustus commemorated in his *Res Gestae*, 'deeds done': "I drove the men who slaughtered my father into exile with a legal order, punishing their crime, and afterwards, when they waged war on the state, I conquered them in two battles".⁷¹

Today we understand this point to be the beginning of the Second Triumvirate, when Lepidus, Mark Antony and Octavian were named by the senate as triumvirs. They declared that they would restore the republic, which none of them ever did.⁷² Prior to his nomination as triumvir, Octavian had become consul, because both Hirtius and Pansa had fallen in battle. This had greatly improved his position.⁷³ Yet he still shared power with two other triumvirs and several attempts were made to cast him out altogether. Fulvia and Lucius Antonius, Antony's wife and brother respectively, attempted "a revolution" against Octavian.⁷⁴ Lucius had tried to use the tensions between the triumvirs and his own position as consul to oust Octavian, but failed. Octavian showed no mercy upon conquering Perusia from Lucius. He had allegedly slaughtered its ruling council and three hundred senators at the altar of the divine Julius Caesar.⁷⁵ This nearly led to war between Antony and Octavian and was only stopped because their soldiers refused to fight. The Treaty of Brundisium was written by Mark Antony and Octavian in 40 BC and divided their spheres of influence. Octavian would be the supposed master of the West, Antony of the East.

In reality, Octavian had to contend with two others in the west. First of all, there was the other triumvir, Lepidus, who resided in Africa. Secondly, Sextus Pompey's navy blocked the Italian peninsula, caused a famine and through the subsequent treaty of Misenum in 39 BC, acquired Sicily, Corsica, Sardinia and the Peloponnesus in southern Greece.⁷⁶ At first, Sextus was supported by Antony

69 Dio Cass. 46.35.2-38.2; Suet. *Aug.* 10-12.

70 Dio Cass. 46.50.2; Suet. *Aug.* 12, 13.

71 Augustus, *RG* 2.

72 Augustus, *RG* 1; Suet. *Aug.* 27.

73 Suet. *Aug.* 26.

74 Suet. *Aug.* 14.

75 Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 19; Suet. *Aug.* 14, 15.

76 Dio Cass. 48.16.2-18.2, 48.36.5.

and Lepidus, but in 37 BC Antony desperately needed troops for his Parthian campaign and thus asked Octavian for support. By the Treaty of Tarentum, Antony supplied a hundred and twenty ships for Octavian's fight against Sextus, in exchange for twenty thousand soldiers.⁷⁷ Octavian did not honor this treaty, even though Antony did meet his end of the agreement. Lepidus was soon defeated afterwards, because he took up arms against Octavian in an act of hubris, as Dio reports.⁷⁸ Lepidus was *pontifex maximus* at the time and remained so during his exile until his death in 12 BC, since Octavian could not decide if he would strip Lepidus from this honor or not.⁷⁹ After settling with Lepidus, Octavian had a firmer grip over the West and only Antony remained as his chief rival.

After this point Octavian tried to hold on to the power he had gained legally. Walter Eder notes that Octavian became more aware of the flexibility of the Roman constitution when Cicero had taken him under his wing in 44 BC. What is clear is that from this point onwards Octavian began to exploit the legal system to his advantage. For instance, he sought to make the secret pact of Tarentum public and have the extension of his triumviral powers ratified by the popular assemblies.⁸⁰ Only Octavian called himself triumvir for the second time (*triumvir iterum*) after the ratification. In 36 BC, Octavian proclaimed the civil wars to be over and offered to give up his triumviral power if Antony did the same. Antony did not. Consecutively, Octavian stripped Lepidus of his powers through a *lex de imperio abrogando*, 'a repeal of the rule of law', the formal and legal procedure for doing this.⁸¹ Octavian proceeded by eliminating bandits that troubled the Italian peninsula. At the beginning of his political career he settled veterans in Italy through the hated method of confiscating property. After 36 BC he no longer did this but settled his veterans legally. Through these measures, Octavian was trying to promote himself as the protector of Rome and its ideals, in contrast to Antony and 'the wicked East'.⁸²

Antony had continued to provoke hostilities towards Octavian. As part of the agreement made at Tarentum, Antony had wedded Octavia, Octavian's sister. Despite this marriage, Antony consorted Cleopatra of Egypt in the years before Actium. Generals loyal to Antony, including Gaius Sosius, had used the spoils of their wars in the East to adorn Rome in their glory.⁸³ Antony had also celebrated a

77 Dio Cass. 48.54.1-54.7; Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 19

78 Dio Cass. 49.11.2-12.4; Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 20; Suet. *Aug.* 16.4; Meyer Reinhold, *From Republic to Principate. An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History Books 49-52 (36-29 B.C.)* (Oxford University Press, 1988) pg. 30-31.

79 It is important to note that upon Lepidus' death, Augustus was declared *pontifex maximus*; Dio Cass. 49.12.4; Suet. *Aug.* 31.

80 Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 20.

81 Dio Cass. 49.12.3-12.4; Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 20; Reinhold, *From Republic to Principate*, pg. 30-31.

82 Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 20.

83 An example is the Temple of Apollo Sosianus, near the Forum Boarium in Rome.

triumph in Alexandria, which was against Roman custom. He also named his children with Cleopatra legitimate and declared Ptolemy Caesar (also known as Caesarion) as a legitimate son of the Deified Julius Caesar, thus weakening the legitimacy of Octavian.⁸⁴

Octavian's position within the Roman polity was still very favorable. He had triumviral powers and achieved military success in Illyria. Together with his long-time friend Agrippa, whom had traded his consulship for the inferior position of aedile in 33 BC, they funded the restoration of aqueducts, organized games and distributed food to the people.⁸⁵ Why did Octavian do this? Again, he wanted to profile himself as the guardian of Roman traditions and ideals and had become more popular with the people of Rome and Italy.⁸⁶

In 32 BC Sosius, who was also consul that year, had attacked Octavian in the senate. The propaganda war that had been raging for three years was reaching its climax. Sosius used a letter from Antony to attack Octavian, while at the same time he praised Antony. Octavian demanded that Sosius read the full letter, but declined to do so.⁸⁷ The accusations made by Sosius were replied to with strong attacks on Antony's person and Octavian offered to present evidence in a consecutive gathering. Later that year, Titius and Plancus, former allies of Antony, gave Octavian information about Antony's will, which was kept by the Vestal Virgins.⁸⁸ Octavian committed a serious crime when he took Antony's will from the Vestals, but once he read it aloud to the senate, the senators were quick to condemn Antony, declared him an enemy of the state and stripped him of his powers.⁸⁹ Antony's reorganization of the East was exaggerated by Octavian to be 'donations' and because the rumor that he wished to be buried by the side of the Egyptian queen was actually true, it was interpreted as such. Many Romans also believed that if Antony would be victorious in a war against Octavian, he would deliver their city into the lap of the Egyptian throne.⁹⁰ Under the premise that a spell had been cast on Antony by Cleopatra, the war declared by the senate was formally aimed at Egypt. However, it was expected that Antony would come to Cleopatra's aid.⁹¹

The decisive battle of this war was the Battle of Actium, a defeat for Antony and Cleopatra at the hands of Octavian in 31 BC. After this defeat, Antony and Cleopatra retreated to Egypt and Octavian besieged Alexandria. Antony still tried to strike a deal with Octavian at the last moment. But instead

84 Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 21; Dio Cass. 49.41.2-4, 50.1.2.2; Reinhold, *From Republic to Principate*, pg. 91.

85 Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 21.

86 Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 20.

87 Dio Cass. 50.2.3; Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 21.

88 Dio Cass. 50.3.1; Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 21.

89 Dio Cass. 50.3.3-4.4; Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 21-22; Reinhold, *From Republic to Principate*, pg. 64, 90; Suet. *Aug.* 17.

90 Dio Cass. 50.4.2.

91 Dio Cass. 50.5.1.

he was forced to committed suicide. Shortly thereafter, Cleopatra committed suicide as well.⁹² Octavian subsequently had Caesarion killed.⁹³ Now “the boy who owed everything to his name” had no more rivals left and in 29 BC, he had the Temple of Janus closed, symbolizing that a new era of peace had begun.⁹⁴

After his victory, Octavian had the military power to become master of Rome, but so far he had shown utter ruthlessness. He betrayed his former allies and broke promises he made with them. It was only in the last few years before Actium that Octavian had actively profiled himself as protector of Rome. The next chapter will discuss how Octavian was to be called Augustus and how he achieved ultimate power.

92 Dio Cass. 51.14.1, Reinhold, *From Republic to Principate*, pg. 133, 135; Suet. *Aug.* 17.

93 Dio Cass. 51.6.2;

94 Augustus, *RG* 13; Cic. *Phil.* 13.11.24-25; Dio Cass. 51.20.5; Octavian had also closed Temple of Janus twice before he proclaimed peace yet again in 29 BC; Suet. *Aug.* 22.

Augustus and His Policies *From Primes Inter Pares...*

Now that we have discussed how Octavian became the single most powerful man in Rome, this chapter will focus on his political career after the subjugation of Egypt, till his reception of ‘tribunician power’ in 23 BC. The significance of the latter will be explained later, as it was another turning point in his career. How did he gain a position where he had supreme control over the Roman state?

Surely he needed to figure out a way how to maintain his supreme position and to hold on to it without falling prey to conspiracy like his adoptive father.⁹⁵ This chapter will discuss Octavian’s direct actions after Actium, the reasons why he received the title of ‘Augustus’ and how he gained *tribunicia potestas*, the core of his new Principate.

From Octavian to Augustus: 29 BC – 27 BC

Octavian’s triumph in Rome in 29 BC celebrated not only his victories over Cleopatra and Mark Antony, but also his successful campaigns in Illyria that he had carried out in the years before Actium.⁹⁶ As stated before, Octavian had closed the Temple of Janus, symbolizing that peace had begun at last. To add to this claim, he returned the province of Asia Minor to senatorial control and disbanded much of his troops, reducing the amount of legions under his command from sixty to twenty-eight.⁹⁷ There was no concrete peace however, for Augustus might have stopped wars within the empire, he continuously tried to expand it during his lifetime.⁹⁸ Supposedly, “he never made war on any nation without just and due cause” or so Suetonius reports.⁹⁹ But indeed, despite a few instances where he had to reassert control, there were no civil wars during his reign and afterwards until the death of the emperor Nero. During these first two years of the so-called *pax romana*, ‘peace of Rome’, Octavian was “in complete control of all affairs” and his first action was to stabilize and reconstruct Rome.

One of the first things he did was to pay a sum of four hundred sesterces a person to two hundred fifty thousand citizens and a thousand sesterces a person to a hundred and twenty thousand

95 See previous chapter ‘Rise of Octavian’.

96 Eder, ‘Power of Tradition’, pg. 23.

97 Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg.88; Eder, ‘Power of Tradition’, pg. 23.

98 Suet. *Aug.* 20, 21, 23, 49.

99 Suet. *Aug.* 21.2.

veterans that he settled in various colonies.¹⁰⁰ He spent seven hundred million sesterces by purchasing land for his veterans. By buying this land instead of confiscating it, he had once again distanced himself from his earlier practices of seizing property in the first few years after Caesar's death. He had also restored eighty-two temples and announced celebratory games in honor of his victories. Within one year, he spent over one billion sesterces in total. Why did he spend so much money on all the above? Eder believes he did this to prove that he took care of the Roman people, showed his respect for the gods and to confirm his peaceful policy through action, or perhaps even bribe him new position of *princeps*, 'first citizen'.¹⁰¹

As *princeps senatus*, he was the *primes inter pares*, 'first among equals', even though he had enough power to enforce his will from Actium onwards. Though he had the position of *princeps*, there was no Principate, in the sense that there was no office bearing the name.¹⁰² It was an honorary title, but it did not grant any powers he did not already have. The title of *imperator*, of which the modern word 'emperor' derives, was only used to describe the position of supreme power in Rome from the reign of Vespasian onwards.¹⁰³

Another significant deed was the incorporation of Egypt into the empire. This province was administered differently than other Roman provinces. It became Augustus' personal possession, senators were forbidden to enter the province and Octavian held autocratic rule, even when absent from the province. Egypt's treasury had boosted Octavian's coffers and he subsequently appointed a prefect to govern the province after his victory. Like the Persians and Alexander before him, Octavian had absolute authority in Egypt through his appointed prefect.¹⁰⁴

In 28 BC, Octavian tried to reduce his visibility. At this point his name was on ornaments and buildings and he even had over eighty silver statues of him throughout Rome. He decided to melt these down and to remove his name from the mentioned ornaments. He had also stopped using his exceptional powers. Further, he reduced the senate's number from roughly one thousand to round about eight hundred, through a *lectio senatus*, 'scrutiny of the senate'.¹⁰⁵ This enhanced the prestige of the senate as the two hundred that were emitted from it were members of inferior rank. As one of his most important acts Octavian declared any unconstitutional actions from his period as a triumvir and his emergency powers to be invalid and proclaimed that law and justice had been restored to the

100 Augustus, *RG* 15; Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 23.

101 Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 23.

102 Erich S. Gruen, 'Augustus and the Making of the Principate', in: Karl Galinsky (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus* (Cambridge 2005), pg. 33-35.

103 Reinhold, *From Republic to Principate*, pg. 169.

104 Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 87; Fergus Millar, 'State and Subject: The Impact of the Monarchy', in: Fergus Millar, Erich Segal ed., *Caesar Augustus. Seven Aspects* (Oxford 1984), pg. 39.

105 Abbott, *Roman Political Institutions*, pg. 277; Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 23.

Romans.¹⁰⁶

Why did he do this? He was already the ‘sole ruler’ of the Rome and in a sense he did not have to “play the role of staunch Roman and Republican”. Yet he did so anyway.¹⁰⁷ Eder presumes that he wanted Rome to forget the time before Actium and seemingly shared his power with the senate and people.¹⁰⁸ By January 27 BC, he had been consul for seven years in a row and claimed that he would lay down his powers.

Securing Unquestionable Authority: 27 BC – 23 BC

On the 13th of January 27 BC, Octavian stated that he wished to retire and returned all his powers to the senate.¹⁰⁹ Whether he really wished this or not, and it is likely that he did not, the effects of this move resulted greatly in his favor. The consensus in Rome was that if Octavian were to step down, there would be no strong leadership to hold the state together.¹¹⁰ Some senators protested to his decision, claiming that the state could not survive without his leadership and proposed that Octavian take on the administration of the empire’s most important military provinces. Thus Octavian received proconsular authority over the areas of Iberia, Gaul (modern France) and Syria.¹¹¹ It is important to mention that having proconsular *imperium* did not necessarily mean one occupied the position of proconsul: It implied having the powers and authority of that specific position, without actually holding the official office.¹¹² This was extremely important for Augustus’ powerbase, as will be explained at the end of this chapter. He assigned propraetors to govern his provinces, known as *legati augusti*, who were of equestrian origin.¹¹³

With proconsular authority Augustus held command over the majority of the Roman army. Only Macedonia did not answer to him directly. This proconsular authority was to be renewed every ten years.¹¹⁴ Besides the above proposals, the senator Plancus proposed to award Octavian with the title of ‘*Augustus*’, ‘the illustrious one’. Another option was the name Romulus, but Octavian had refused it

106 Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 89; Dio Cass. 53.2.5; Eder, ‘Power of Tradition’ pg. 23; Tac. *Ann.* 3.28.3.

107 Eder, ‘Power of Tradition’, pg. 22.

108 Eder, ‘Power of Tradition’, pg. 22-23.

109 Augustus, *RG* 34.1; Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 91-92; Gruen, ‘Making of the Principate’, pg. 34.

110 Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 92

111 Dio Cass. 53.12.4-13.2; Eder, ‘Power of Tradition’, pg. 24; Gruen, ‘Making of the Principate’, pg. 34.

112 Gruen, ‘Making of the Principate’, pg. 35.

113 Dio Cass. 53.13.5.

114 Dio Cass. 53.12.4-7, 53.13.1;

because it was too associated with the monarchy.¹¹⁵ Erich S. Gruen argues that whatever powers Octavian had resigned in 27 BC, he withheld their essence through his proconsular authority and his occupation of the office of consul.¹¹⁶ The republic however, was not restored and was not claimed to be restored by Augustus or anybody else. That he restored the state of law does not imply the restoration of the republic. Augustus had put emphasis on the idea that Rome was not a state where the word of the *princeps* was law, but that Augustus' *res publica* was a state governed by laws.¹¹⁷ But as long as this appearance was upheld, "one could easily imagine that one was living in a republic."¹¹⁸

His claim that he had no greater power than other magistrates was not entirely true.¹¹⁹ On paper, he only was consul and had proconsular authority over Gaul, Spain and Syria in 27 BC. Foremost however, he claimed that he had surpassed all others in terms of 'influence', or *auctoritas*. He had a basis of clients that regarded him as their *patronus*, which was far greater than any other man in Rome at the time and it was his intention to keep it that way. He had stopped others from gaining too much influence at his expense on at least two occasions.¹²⁰ He wished to appear as the leader of Rome who had his position on the basis of consent, even though the majority of Rome by 27 BC knew and accepted the fact that he was in charge.¹²¹

From 27 BC to 24 BC Augustus was on campaign in Gaul and Iberia and attempted to increase the borders of the empire.¹²² Any territory that would be added to the empire would fall under Augustus' direct control and was subject to one of his *legati*.¹²³ On his return to Rome he again spent more money on the citizens, by granting four hundred sesterces to two hundred fifty thousand for the second time and distributing grain.¹²⁴ A crucial turning point in his policy was in 23 BC, when he appointed a profound republican by the name of Piso as consul and then retired from the consulate altogether after holding it for nine years consecutively.¹²⁵

115 Augustus, *RG* 34; Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 92; Dio Cass. 53.16.8; Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg 24; Gruen, 'Making the Principate', pg. 35.

116 Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 92; Gruen, 'Making of the Principate', pg. 34.

117 Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 23-24.

118 Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 25.

119 Augustus, *RG* 34; Clark, *Power Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 93; Ronald Ridley, *The Emperor's Retrospect. Augustus' Res Gestae in Epigraphy, Historiography and Commentary*, pg. 222.

120 Marcus Licinius Crassus, the grandson of Crassus, and Cornelius Gallus; Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 91.

121 Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 93.

122 Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 25.

123 Dio Cass. 53.13.5.

124 Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 25.

125 Dio Cass. 53.32.3; Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 25; Gruen, 'Making of the Principate', pg. 36.

Tribunicia Potestas and Maius Imperium – 23 BC

Upon his resignation as consul, Augustus no longer had any official position among the magistrates, though he still had his proconsular *imperium*. Despite this, his *auctoritas* was sky-high and his word was carefully listened to. His resignation was thought to be a political setback, but studies have shown that 23 BC proved to be the opposite.¹²⁶ Why did he resign from the consulate? First of all, when holding one particular office for a long time in a row, one could suggest monarchy.¹²⁷ Secondly, he wished to have no offices linked to his person and disassociated himself with the “institutionalizing of his role” as this would risk offense and perhaps even provoke resentment and conspiracy.¹²⁸ The most important reason was that he could afford to do so. His years-long occupation of the office was a possible source of friction and by his occupation, he had personally log-jammed the chance of awarding his most loyal clients to this high office. By resigning, he opened the office to the nobility and allowed himself to award his *clientes* and extend his patronage within the senatorial class.¹²⁹ However, he had an unofficial position at the helm of the regime. How did he remain in control?

In return for his resignation he received the right to retain his *imperium* when he left and entered the city. In addition to this, he was granted *maius imperium* by the senate, which greatly enhanced his powers. Through *maius imperium*, he had the right to overrule any governor in any other provinces that did not already answer to him directly.¹³⁰ This meant that if he wanted something done outside of his own provinces, he could overrule any governor that did not do as he pleased. Secondly, he was also granted *tribunicia potestas*, or ‘powers of the tribune’ for life by senatorial decree.¹³¹ This is the most important aspect of Augustus’ rule.

Why is the *tribunicia potestas* so important? He held the traditional powers of the tribune without holding the office itself.¹³² This meant that he could summon the senate and popular assemblies, introduce legislation and veto any decree of the senate or other tribunes.¹³³ Having these powers made Augustus truly unrivaled, whether it be in the senate, popular assemblies or among the magistrates. It gave him the power to interfere in nearly all matters, especially when this is combined

126 Gruen, ‘Making of the Principate’, pg. 36.

127 Eder, ‘Augustus and the Power of Tradition’, pg. 25.

128 Gruen, ‘Making of the Principate’, pg. 35.

129 Dio Cass. 52.32.3; Eder, ‘Power of Tradition’, pg. 25; Gruen, ‘Making of the Principate’, pg. 36.

130 Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 95; Gruen, ‘Making of the Principate’, pg. 36, 41.

131 Augustus, *RG* 10; Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 95; Dio 53.32.5; Eder, ‘Power of Tradition’, pg. 26; Gruen, ‘Making of the Principate’, pg. 36; Suet. *Aug.* 27.5.

132 Gruen, ‘Making of the Principate’, pg. 36.

133 Dio Cass. 53.32.5, 54.3.3; Gruen, ‘Making the Principate’, pg. 37.

with his *maius imperium*. The nature of *tribunicia potestas* also made it impossible for other tribunes to veto Augustus: Tribunes could only veto colleagues and Augustus was not a tribune, but wielded the same power.¹³⁴ The office of tribune was only reserved for plebeians, but *tribunicia potestas* had no such restriction. From 22 BC onward, Augustus used *tribunicia potestas* in his official papers and documents to number his years ‘in power’.¹³⁵ By numbering these years he wished to show the stability of the regime.¹³⁶ In other words, the combination of being the *princeps senatus*, having *tribunicia potestas* and wielding *maius imperium*, Augustus had gained complete control over Rome by 23 BC.¹³⁷

What characterizes Augustus’ rule? He claimed that he held no office that was contradictive to the ways of the ancestors.¹³⁸ In a sense this is true, as his position as *princeps* itself was nothing out of the ordinary. A *maius imperium* was probably granted by the senate half a century earlier to Pompey the Great.¹³⁹ These three functions, which were not tied to any specific office, were combined and received upon one person, which was unprecedented.¹⁴⁰

The *tribunicia potestas* was a complete break with the republican past. Traditionally, no patrician was allowed to hold the office, as a means to protect the people from senatorial abuse. Also, an attempt to hold the office consecutively was traditionally seen as *adfectio regni*, ‘the striving for kingship’.¹⁴¹ Still, the fact remains that the *princeps* received this power from the senate itself. Why would they give Augustus such power? Gruen is skeptical about the range of the powers that Augustus received through *tribunicia potestas*, which he never exercised much at all.¹⁴² However, the fact that it was not subordinate to annual renewal is noted to be an important, if not its most important, feat.

134 Gruen, ‘Making of the Principate’, pg. 41.

135 Gruen, ‘Making of the Principate’, pg. 36.

136 Gruen, ‘Making of the Principate’, pg. 41-42.

137 Gruen, ‘Making of the Principate’, pg. 41.

138 Augustus *RG*, 6.

139 Abbott, *Roman Political Institutions*, pg. Dio Cass. 36.23.4, 36.36a, 36.37.1; Eder, ‘Power of Tradition’, pg. 25-26.

140 Gruen, ‘Making of the Principate’, pg. 34-35.

141 Eder, ‘Power of Tradition’, pg. 26.

142 Gruen, ‘Making of the Principate’, pg. 39-40.

Augustus' Dynasty **... to *Pater Patriae* and Securing an Heir**

This chapter discusses the dynastic politics of Augustus, the final honor that was bestowed upon him in 2 BC and how he 'secured an heir'. This was the proclamation of the fact that Augustus had become *pater patriae*, 'the founder of his country'. Tacitus formulates extensive criticism on the reign of Augustus, pointing out his lust for power and the use of bribery, violence, treachery of allies and hypocrisy was bound for disaster.¹⁴³ Yet Tacitus had witnessed the reigns of Caligula and Nero and blamed Augustus for the fact that bad *princeps* could rule at all.¹⁴⁴ This brings us to the topic of succession, which remained an unresolved issue for Augustus for a long period.

Augustus wanted, and even expected, his regime to survive. The next steps that he took were very significant. He acknowledged the fact that he needed a successor and heir to ensure the continuity of his new regime. How could he make way for an heir whilst still "wearing the republican mantle" and avoiding to appear as if he was setting up a monarchy? How could he secure a successor for a Principate that he claimed did not exist?¹⁴⁵

He had one daughter with Scribonia, Julia, but had no children through his second wife Livia. He had several successors in mind at different times but due to 'ill fortune' and circumstances he was forced to change his plans several times. Naming a successor had to appear like not naming a successor. Any hints to monarchy had to be avoided. Instead, Augustus appeared to award merit when he in fact was laying the foundations of a new stable regime under a new *princeps*. Dynastic politics were not unknown in the Roman world and so the following steps that Augustus took did not point to hereditary monarchy.¹⁴⁶

Crises

Before he received *tribunicia potestas*, Augustus had become severely ill in 23 BC and was close to death. In what Augustus saw as his final hour, he gave Agrippa his seal and handed his paperwork to his fellow-consul at the time, Piso.¹⁴⁷ However, one thing that he did not do, was point

143 Tac. *Ann.* 1.1, 1.3-1.5; Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 1-3.

144 Tac. *Ann.* 1.1-1.5.

145 Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 26.

146 Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 131.

147 Dio Cass. 53.30.1-2; Gruen, 'Making the Principate', pg. 38.

out a successor, to the shock and surprise of some.¹⁴⁸ Augustus' nephew Marcellus had been eyed as a possible successor as he was raised to the higher magistracies early for his age. However the core of the Principate did not exist at this point: Augustus was not granted *tribunicia potestas* or *maius imperium* until later that year, when he resigned the consulship.¹⁴⁹ Even after his recovery he still tried to avoid any hints to monarchy, volunteered to read his will aloud in the senate to prove he did not appoint any heir and silence any rumors indicating as such.¹⁵⁰ Marcellus seemed the candidate for the job, despite not being that experienced.¹⁵¹ He was favored by Augustus, rose through the ranks of the magistrates with great speed and was married to Augustus' daughter Julia. Unfortunately for Augustus, Marcellus died due to illness later that year.¹⁵²

Augustus faced two important challenges related to his position after Marcellus' death. He had to deal with a famine in 22 BC, when the people yearned for Augustus to receive the office of 'dictator'. Augustus refused the office outright and even tore his clothes and kneeled to insist that he did not want the office, because he could not persuade the people any other way.¹⁵³ He used his proconsular *imperium* to gain control over the grain supply to combat the crisis. Augustus also faced challenges from the upstart aedile Egnatius Rufus. In 19 BC, when Augustus was in the east to reorganize the area and to negotiate the recovery of the military standards lost at Carrhae to Parthia in 53 BC, Rufus became praetor and demanded the consulship from consul Saturnius, whom governed Rome on Augustus' behalf.¹⁵⁴ When this was refused, he organized riots against the state, but was put to death after being captured and tried for plotting against Augustus' life.¹⁵⁵ Augustus returned to Rome soon after this incident.

Augustus turned to Agrippa to become his partner in power and to fill Marcellus' gap. Agrippa had played an important role in Augustus' early years, was a good soldier and had played a key role at Actium seven years earlier.¹⁵⁶ Agrippa had been posted in Syria to supervise the eastern provinces of the empire and two years after the death of Marcellus, he returned to Rome and married Augustus' daughter Julia.¹⁵⁷ Agrippa received renewable *tribunicia potestas* for a five year period in 18 BC and

148 Dio Cass. 53.30.1-2, 53.31.2.

149 Dio Cass. 53.32.3; Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 25; Gruen, 'Making of the Principate', pg. 36.

150 Dio Cass. 53.31.1; Gruen, 'Making of the Principate', pg. 39.

151 Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 132; Gruen, 'Making of the Principate', pg. 43.

152 Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 132; Dio Cass. 53.30.4; Gruen, 'Making of the Principate', pg. 43; Suet. *Aug.* 63.

153 Dio Cass. 54.1.4; Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 26; Gruen, 'Making of the Principate', pg. 35; Suet. *Aug.* 52.

154 Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 95-96; Dio Cass. 53.23.4; Gruen, 'Making of the Principate', pg. 45; Zvi Yavetz, 'The *Res Gestae* and Augustus' Public Image', in: Fergus Millar, Erich Segal ed., *Caesar Augustus. Seven Aspects* (Oxford 1984), pg. 11.

155 Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 96; Dio Cass. 53.23.5-6.

156 Dio Cass. 50.11.3, 50.13.5-14.2.

157 Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 132; Dio Cass. 53.32.1; Suet. *Aug.* 63; Tac. *Ann.* 1.3.

probably *maius imperium* as well, although the latter is not a clear fact.¹⁵⁸ Agrippa ensured stability to the regime as his children with Julia would provide the heirs Augustus was looking for. At the same time, the senate had increased Augustus' power even further by granting him consular power for life, with the right to hold fasces, symbols of consular authority, and was allowed to sit on a symbolic chair in between the two consuls.¹⁵⁹ It can be argued that this specific honor did not add much to the power that Augustus already had, but it provided the last finishing touch to his unquestionable authority within the empire.

By granting the powers of *tribunicia potestas* to Agrippa as a reward for merit, Augustus secured the unique position he held for future generations. It did not provide a "dual Principate" as one might suggest, but instead a 'blueprint' was made by which Augustus could ensure the stability of his dynasty, whilst not having a formal succession policy.¹⁶⁰ Agrippa and Julia received two sons, Gaius and Lucius in 20 and 17 BC respectively, who were adopted by Augustus.¹⁶¹ These boys had a long road ahead of them if they were to succeed Augustus. In any case, Agrippa would be able to hold the empire together if Augustus' health should fail.¹⁶²

Disruption of the 'Blueprint' and Augustus as the *Pater Patriae*

Unfortunately for Augustus, Agrippa's health failed earlier than his own. Agrippa died in 12 BC just after his *tribunicia potestas* had been renewed.¹⁶³ Augustus returned to Rome from the Panathenaic festival in Greece when he heard that Agrippa had become ill and by the time he reached Campania, Agrippa had died. With Agrippa gone, Augustus held power alone again. Augustus needed a second man in the empire and was forced to turn to Livia's son, Tiberius. Though sources report that Augustus did not always have warm relations with Tiberius, in the last years of his life, he could not deny his importance.¹⁶⁴

By the time Agrippa had passed away Tiberius had already made a name for himself in Rome.¹⁶⁵ First of all, he enjoyed Claudian ancestry from two sides through his parents and was

158 Dio Cass. 54.12.4, 54.28.1; Gruen, 'Making of the Principate', pg. 44.

159 Dio Cass. 54.10.5; Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 27; Gruen, 'Making of the Principate', pg. 43.

160 Gruen, 'Making of the Principate', pg. 44.

161 Dio Cass. 54.8.5, 54.18.1; Gruen, 'Making of the Principate', pg. 44; Suet. *Aug.* 64.

162 Gruen, 'Making of the Principate', pg. 44.

163 Dio Cass. 54.28.2-3; Gruen, 'Making of the Principate', pg. 42, 44.

164 Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 138; W.K. Lacey, *Augustus and the Principate* (Leeds 1996), pg. 115.

165 Gruen, 'Making of the Principate', pg. 44.

respected among the nobles.¹⁶⁶ He had served under Augustus in Iberia from 27 to 24 BC, took part in the negotiations for the retrieval of the military standards from Parthia and had dealt with Egnatius Rufus after the riots of 19 BC.¹⁶⁷ His aid in the recovery of the standards lost by Crassus was a critical move for his popularity. He received the right to gain an office five years before the legal age and became praetor in 16 BC. After accompanying Augustus to Gaul and battling in Raetia, he gained the consulate in 13 BC.¹⁶⁸ In the year of Agrippa's death he had subdued the Pannonians as well.¹⁶⁹

Tiberius did not automatically receive *tribunicia potestas* or *maius imperium* upon Agrippa's death. Augustus took care not to provoke the senate by insinuating monarchy and thus waited until Tiberius would have earned it. After Agrippa's death Augustus forced Tiberius to divorce his wife Vipsania, daughter of Agrippa through his first wife.¹⁷⁰ Tiberius was very reluctant to do this, as he was happily married with Vipsania and there were rumors circulating Rome about Julia's adultery.¹⁷¹ Augustus meant Tiberius to safeguard the interests of his two grandsons Gaius and Lucius. Through his loyalty, Tiberius proved himself to be the second man of the empire and became commander of armies in Pannonia and Dalmatia in 11 BC and 10 BC. However, his brother Drusus had perished in Germany in 9 BC and Tiberius was particularly saddened by this tragedy.¹⁷² After he received command of the armies of the Rhine in 8 BC and received consulship in 7 BC, he was finally granted *tribunicia potestas* for five years in 6 BC as a reward for his achievements.¹⁷³ The *maius imperium* however, was still not given, as Augustus still feared insinuating monarchy.

Events turned against Augustus' wishes at this point, as Tiberius resigned from his offices and duties and retired to Rhodes in 6 BC.¹⁷⁴ Why did he do this? He enraged Augustus greatly with this move, because he had thwarted his plans. Tiberius himself claimed that he was making the way clear for Gaius and Lucius, yet they were only 14 and 11 years old at the time.¹⁷⁵ Augustus was forced by these events to advance Gaius and Lucius with greater speed, as the continuity of his regime was in peril. Yet Augustus did not want to bestow *tribunicia potestas* and *maius imperium* upon them as they were still too young and unreliable.¹⁷⁶ Gaius became designated for the office of consul five years in

166 Claudii were among Rome's respected families; Gruen, 'Making of the Principate', pg. 44-45; Suet. *Tib.* 1-3.

167 Gruen, 'Making of the Principate', pg. 44-45; Suet. *Tib.* 8-9

168 Dio Cass. 54.19.6, 54.25.1; Suet. *Tib.* 9.

169 Augustus, *RG* 30; Dio Cass. 54.31.2; Gruen, 'Making of the Principate', pg. 45; Suet. *Tib.* 9.

170 Dio Cass. 54.31.2.

171 Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 133-134.

172 Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 134.

173 Gruen, 'Making of the Principate', pg. 46.

174 Gruen, 'Making of the Principate', pg. 45.

175 Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 134-135; Gruen, 'Making of the Principate', pg. 46.

176 Dio Cass. 55.10.18.

advance in 2 BC and the same was granted to Lucius three years later.¹⁷⁷

Augustus was distinguished in 2 BC by the prestigious title of *pater patriae*, ‘father of his country’, by the senate. His opinion was from then on seen as the opinion and will of the country and any comments or criticism against him could have been dismissed as unpatriotic.¹⁷⁸ Augustus placed this title at the end of his autobiographical *Res Gestae*, or ‘deeds done’, purposing the title as the grand finale of that document. Eder argues that Augustus wanted to be remembered as the founder of the ‘fatherland’ and that he had created Roman patriotism.¹⁷⁹ He wanted to stress the idea that above the *princeps* there was the concept of the ‘fatherland’. Augustus had repurposed the term S.P.Q.R., ‘senate and people of Rome’, giving special attention to all layers of Roman society in his *Res Gestae*. This included the equestrian class which provided him with administrators of his provinces.¹⁸⁰

Augustus had sent Gaius out to Syria to supervise the province in 1 BC. Tiberius had set out to meet him, but was heavily insulted by Gaius’ entourage when he arrived in Syria.¹⁸¹ In AD 1, he asked Augustus to return to Rome, but it was denied to him, for Augustus wished the approval of Gaius for Tiberius’ return. For Tiberius this must have been humiliating.¹⁸²

After an Armenian uprising, Gaius received a fatal wound and died in Lycia in AD 4, just after Lucius had died in Massilia due to a sudden illness.¹⁸³ Augustus had to change his plans for a stable regime again and relied on Tiberius to fulfill the role of successor. Tiberius was reluctant to do this, yet he accepted it for the good of the state.¹⁸⁴ He granted Tiberius *tribunicia potestas* and adopted him the same year. Germanicus, grandson of Octavia, Augustus’ sister, was in turn adopted by Tiberius.¹⁸⁵ Germanicus was married to the daughter of Julia and Agrippa, which provided Augustus with great-grandchildren from two sides within his family. Together, Tiberius and Germanicus campaigned against the Pannonians who revolted in AD 6, which Suetonius describes as “the most serious of all foreign wars since those with Carthage”.¹⁸⁶ Immediately after the revolt was subdued, Tiberius moved to the Rhine and secured the area after Varus’ defeat in AD 9.¹⁸⁷ The campaign ended three years later and Tiberius celebrated a triumph in Rome. According to Suetonius, Augustus had assured Tiberius that he had become indispensable to him in various letters. Through consular law, Tiberius was granted

177 Augustus, *RG* 14; Dio Cass. 55.9.2-9.4, 55.9.9-10; Gruen, ‘Making the Principate’, pg. 46-47; Tac. *Ann.* 1.31.

178 Eder, ‘Power of Tradition’, pg. 29, 31-32.

179 Eder, ‘Power of Tradition’, pg. 29; Ramage, *Nature and Purpose*, pg. 104-105.

180 Augustus, *RG* 35; Eder, ‘Power of Tradition’, pg. 31.

181 Dio Cass. 55.10.19; Suet. *Tib.* 12.2-13.

182 Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 136.

183 Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 137; Dio Cass. 55.10.9-11.2.

184 Gruen, ‘Making of the Principate’, pg. 49.

185 Augustus, *RG* 14; Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 137-138; Suet. *Tib.* 16, 23; Tac. *Ann.* 1.3.

186 Suet. *Tib.* 16.

187 Suet. *Aug.* 23.

equal powers to those of Augustus in AD 14 and was recognized by the senate as the new *princeps* after Augustus' death.¹⁸⁸

Augustus died in AD 14 and his succession had only been secured in the eleventh hour. The last great honor he received was in 2 BC, when he was called *pater patriae*. Augustus had created his Principate, as explained in the above chapters and Tiberius reluctantly was ready to take over the reins in AD 14. Immediately Tiberius used his abilities to show the Roman world that he was now in control.¹⁸⁹ Through bestowing *tribunicia potestas* and *maius imperium*, the Principate could survive. This method of securing successors would continue to last until late Antiquity and even survived the reign of emperors such as Caligula and Nero.

188 Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 139.

189 Dio Cass. 57.2.1; Gruen, 'Making of the Principate', pg. 50; Suet. *Tib.* 23-24; Tac. *Ann.* 1.7.

Verdict of the Principate **A Matter of Terminology**

Now that the political history and chronology of Augustus' rise to power and the establishment of the Principate has been discussed, attention can be turned to its power structure. Why is this important? Through discussing definitions, it may be possible to determine what type of regime the Principate belongs to and if it deserves its own terminology. Ultimately, after the discussion of other scholars, the question if the Principate was a truly unique type of state, will be answered. At the end of his essay 'Augustus and the Making of the Principate', Erich Gruen wrote:

“When Augustus died, his Principate, if such it may now be termed, died with him. But Tiberius' Principate, thanks to the foresight of his step-father, was already underway.”¹⁹⁰

What is clear from this quote is that Augustus' Principate was closely tied to his person, as he had received powers which could not be transacted to any other person. Yet Augustus had provided these same powers for his successor before he died, and so Tiberius' Principate was already underway before Augustus died.

The Construction of Augustus' *Res Publica*

The Principate on paper, differs little from the *res publica* that is described by Polybius and Cicero. As the last chapters of this essay have shown, this was not true at all. Even though it might appear that the state could manage without a *princeps*, in reality, again, it could not.¹⁹¹ The constitution of the Roman republic rested upon consent and the balance between the senate, the magistrates and the people.¹⁹² The senate consisted of a body of former magistrates of patrician origins, the magistrates had specific duties, ranging from financial duties (*quaestor*) to military duties (consul).¹⁹³ The people organized themselves in popular assemblies which had the right to vote on critical issues and had tribunes who defended their rights. A *princeps*, whom held no office, was added to this formula.

The *princeps* held an honorable position as the 'first citizen' and had incredible powers as has

190 Gruen, 'Making of the Principate', pg. 50.

191 Abbott, *Roman Political Institutions*, pg. 275; Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 26.

192 Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 15.

193 Abbott, *Roman Political Institutions*, pg. 175-219.

been examined above.¹⁹⁴ The *princeps* dominated all three elements of the Roman constitution, though he did require the support of the senate and popular assemblies to make any laws. Yet, it is important to remember that the *princeps* had a vast social network and a wide range of clients that sought favor from him, their *patronus*. These favors could be provided through appointments to various magistracies, including the consulate, in exchange for support on other terrains, such as the making of laws.¹⁹⁵ The person whose opinion mattered most on the recommendation for any of the magistracies, was the *princeps*. The *auctoritas* of the *princeps* was paramount at the end of Augustus' life. Augustus had made efforts, as his *Res Gestae* shows, to present himself as the 'father of his country' but also as the father of the "whole (*universus*) Roman people".¹⁹⁶ This concept however, was not written down, nor was it ever institutionalized. It did not need to be: The Roman constitution itself was built and maintained on consent, without codification, so the addition of the *princeps* to the formula is perfectly in touch with the traditions of the ancestors in this respect. It would appear that Augustus indeed remained true to the ancestors. The only exception to this rule is perhaps his *tribunicia potestas*, although he restrained himself from exercising its power frequently.¹⁹⁷

The *princeps* was in control of Rome and his will was considered the will of the fatherland. Nothing else changed during Augustus' period; no magistracies were reduced in power, as for example under the dictatorship of Sulla.¹⁹⁸ The powers of the senate and popular assemblies remained the same as well. Augustus' rule could not be challenged as the construction did not count on the possibility of one person holding such an accumulation of various powers with approval of the senate and people.¹⁹⁹ It must be noted that the senate itself was needed for Augustus to receive these powers in the first place. Although Augustus had the military power to exercise his will by force if necessary, it can be argued that ultimately, the consent of the senate was needed. In practice however, the paramount *auctoritas* of the *princeps* would have compelled senators seeking favor to comply with his wishes.

Contemporary and Past Scholars

Theodor Mommsen had coined the Principate to be a dyarchy, a "rule by two", where two

194 *Tribunicia potestas* and *maius imperium*. See chapter 'Augustus and His Policies'.

195 Abbott, *Roman Political Institutions*, pg. 351.

196 Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 27-28.

197 Gruen, 'Making of the Principate', pg. 39-41.

198 Powers of the tribunes had been reduced so that none could challenge Sulla's rule; Abbott, *Roman Political Institutions*, pg. 104-104.

199 Eder, 'Power of Tradition', pg. 25.

independent authorities rule together.²⁰⁰ This strongly stresses the fact that Augustus shared his power with the senate and popular assemblies on an equal level. However, as discussed above, the relationship between the *princeps* and the rest of Roman society was not on an equal basis. As *pater patriae*, Augustus was revered and exalted by many and his paramount *auctoritas* moved both the senate and the people in the direction that he wished. By labeling the Principate as a dyarchy, one under-appreciates the Roman patronage system which formed an important part of Roman society, on both the social level as well as on the political level. Syme, who published his work the *Roman Revolution* in 1939 and had a major influence on the subject, argues that scholars should not try to view the Principate as a finished product or ‘system’.²⁰¹ However, the same fault is made when looking at it as a transitional period, for even though one can say that Augustus dominated Roman politics and clearly acted as the central figure, the Dominate and tetrarchy of emperor Diocletian was still a long ways away.²⁰² Although during Augustus’ reign everyone knew who was in charge, the outcome, as one could suspect, could not have been foreseen.

Why can the Principate not be called a monarchy? First of all, Augustus’ rule was autocratic in the sense that his will could be executed and that he was unrivalled within the ‘public affairs’. However, this is problematic as the magistrates carried out the *princeps*’ wishes but at the same time they had to have a degree of autonomy when performing their tasks. As has been discussed, the interference of the consuls in the work of the praetors diminished with the expansion of the empire before Augustus. It should have been impossible for Augustus to keep tabs on absolutely everything. Augustus was not king, he was *princeps* and *pater patriae*. Augustus’ Principate has little in common with the Hellenistic monarchies that it eclipsed. Claiming the Principate to be a people’s kingship is again impossible for the people saw Augustus as their champion and father of the country, but not as their monarch. Dynastic government formed a part of the Principate only to a certain degree. Augustus never pointed out a successor and did everything to prevent that from showing. Only the rule over a large territory seems to be completely in synch with the Principate, as Augustus ruled over an empire stretching from Iberia and Gaul to Syria and Egypt, larger than most Hellenistic kingdoms had been. It becomes more problematic when looking at ruler worship. Whereas in the Hellenistic world people worshiped living rulers, in the Roman world, men only worshiped apotheosized leaders, such as Julius

200 Eder, ‘Augustus and the Power of Tradition’, pg. 16;

201 Eder, ‘Augustus and the Power of Tradition’, pg. 16; see Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford 1939)

202 Fergus Millar, ‘State and Subject: The Impact of the Monarchy’, in: Fergus Millar, Erich Segal ed., *Caesar Augustus. Seven Aspects* (Oxford 1984), pg. 43; See: Alan K. Bowman, ‘Diocletian and the First Tetrarchy. A.D. 284-305’, in: Alan K. Bowman, Peter Garnsey, Averil Cameron ed., *The Cambridge Ancient History Vol. 12, The Crisis of Empire, A.D. 193-337* (Cambridge 2005) for Dominate and Tetrarchy.

Caesar and Augustus, and only after their own deaths.²⁰³

Finally, if the term constitutional monarchy could be applied, Augustus' *auctoritas* eclipsed any possibility of being restrained by constitutional limits. To call his regime a constitutional monarchy is both anachronistic and misleading. He was not a monarch and the Roman constitution gave him his power instead of limiting it. As may be observed, the Principate was a unique system with unprecedented properties. Augustus had enough power to meddle in legislation and the magistracies and he was never elected to such a powerful position, which on paper did not even exist. The people saw him as *pater patriae* and he enjoyed a large social network of clients. There was no doubt in the Roman world as to who was in charge.²⁰⁴

So what then of the Principate? It was definitely not a monarchy and it most definitely was not a republic. But was it more than a mere transitional period? Rather, as I hopefully have shown above, the Roman Principate was a truly unique system which used a flexible Roman constitutional and republican tradition in a revolutionary fashion, with approval of the senate and people. The amount of political power and authority that Augustus had accumulated was completely unprecedented and the constitution of the Roman republic allowed it. The Principate and the Republic are connected by the same constitutional basis and tradition. It survived for nearly three centuries and had survived the reigns of bad emperors as well: A testimony to its stability. By the time of the reign of Diocletian, emperors styled themselves *dominus*, or 'lord/master' instead of *princeps*.²⁰⁵ The Principate however, must be remembered as a unique period marked by interdependency between the *princeps* and the senate, the magistracies and the people to secure peace within the empire.

How did the Romans accept one man to have such a position at the end of the republican era? This question may never be precisely answered, but the Principate provided what the Republic could not: Peace among the Roman populace, a government that was beneficial for most Roman citizens, and a temporary end to the prolonged civil wars of the first century BC.²⁰⁶

203 Stefan Weinstock, *Divus Julius* (Oxford 1971), pg. 287, 304; F.W. Walbank, 'Monarchies and Monarchic Ideas', in: F.W. Walbank and others ed., *The Cambridge Ancient History Vol. 7, The Hellenistic World* (Cambridge 1984) *Cambridge Histories Online* (20 March 2012), pg. 84.

204 Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 93.

205 See: Bowman, 'Diocletian and the First Tetrarchy'.

206 Clark, *Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival*, pg. 142-143; Lacey, *Augustus and Principate*, pg. 58.

Conclusion

Augustus:

“Master of Political Manipulation in the Ancient World”

Rome got rid of its kings at the end of the sixth century BC and since then *adfectio regni* had been coined as the original sin of any Roman. Five hundred years later, Rome found itself changed from republic to Principate and was ruled by one man. But nothing had been altered to the Roman constitution. In the Augustan era, there were still consuls, praetors and other magistrates. The senate still existed and officially it appeared to have the last word in legislation and the execution of it. On paper, the polity could manage without a *princeps*. But, as I have shown, this proved far from true.

Augustus' rise to power can be marked by using the traditional flexibility of the Roman constitution to provide a stable government that put a stop to the civil wars that had been waged since the beginning of the first century BC. Earlier examples of men who seized sole power in Rome, such as Sulla and Caesar, had perhaps secured a position of great power for themselves, but with their deaths their position and their power had disappeared into thin air. Octavian's entry into Roman politics did not seem to be any different than the methods of the aforementioned dictators. He had raised an army and had tried to march on Rome, claiming that he wished to avenge his adoptive father's death and that he would strive to uphold Caesar's honor. However, he had confiscated taxes and even lands for his veterans to settle on, which had angered the populace. When he had no support among the senators, only Cicero provided a helping hand. Octavian defeated Caesar's murders and had allied himself with Mark Antony and Lepidus, initiating a triumvirate. But until the title of 'Augustus' was bestowed upon him in 27 BC, Octavian had done little to portray himself as a different man than his predecessors.

Prior to his war with Antony and Cleopatra, he styled himself as the guardian of Rome's ideals and dissociated his person from Antony, but so far he had done little to back this claim up. Though committing a serious crime by retrieving Antony's will from the Vestal Virgins, Octavian could further distance himself from Antony when he read it aloud. It was only after he had asserted himself as Rome's sole ruler that Octavian had picked up the idea of presenting himself as the staunch republican. As examined, he systematically refused to accept any office that would risk pointing out monarchy. His *Res Gestae* is not only a testament of his 'deeds done', but also a testament of what he did not do, as he had claimed that he did not accept any office which was at odds with the tradition of the Roman constitution. He also showed that he had refused the dictatorship when it was offered to him in 22 BC.

Historians such as Eder stated that Augustus wished to be remembered as *pater patriae* and a proud republican, even though he had established a powerbase which was unrivalled and even was determined to see his work continued after his death.

Through *tribunicia potestas* and *maius imperium*, along with the position of *pontifex maximus* and *princeps*, accompanied with the exaltation of his person as *pater patriae*, Augustus had created a position of power that had the ability to overrule the senate, magistracies and the people, and, most importantly, he had acquired it all through legal and constitutional means. Every power he received was given by the senate and the people. The same can be said for the man who is considered to be Augustus' successor, Tiberius, who had received the powers as mentioned above through legal means as well. He had not received these powers because he was pointed out by Augustus to be his successor, but because they had appeared to be a reward for his merit as a military commander and politician. The formula of *tribunicia potestas* and *maius imperium* would continue to be the core of the Principate for more than two and a half centuries after Augustus' death.

But the question how far Augustus had transformed the state into a genuine, new political system cannot easily be answered. Augustus had creatively used the laws and traditions of the Roman constitution to establish himself at the helm of a stable *res publica*. This was revolutionary and unprecedented, for no man had ever wielded so much political power and ruled over such a large territory in Rome's history. However, he did not necessarily create a genuinely new system, because with the exception of his own power and authority, almost nothing within Rome's political institutions had changed. One can say that he merely used the system against itself, but in doing so he created stability and provided an answer to a Roman world that was devastated by a lengthy period of civil wars. Strictly speaking, Augustus changed the republic only slightly.

But, as has been shown, the Principate as a political system, finished or unfinished it may be, had very unique qualities. It even proved strong enough to survive the reign of *princeps* such as Caligula and Nero. Ultimately, when asking the question how far Augustus had built a new system, the answer depends on how strictly one defines 'a new system'. But the role of the *princeps* had changed much in Roman politics. The position of *princeps* accumulated a large number of powers which was unprecedented and considering that Augustus had created the ability to appoint heirs to his own position by bestowing these powers upon them. He had brought forth a genuinely new system where the empire would be prevented from tearing itself apart. As long as there was a wise *princeps* at the helm of the empire, peace among Romans would continue to last.

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Image(s)

Bust of Augustus at the Ara Pacis, Rome (photo: courtesy of author, Rome, Italy, 20 February 2012).

Word Count

Word Count: 11,892.