

Caesar Augustus - the First Emperor of Rome

Augustus Caesar was the first emperor of Rome. He lived from 63 B.C. to A.D. 14, and the eighth month of our year is named after him. In 44 BC, a sickly 18-year-old boy named Gaius Octavius received two shocking pieces of news. Number one: His grandmother's brother, the Roman dictator Julius Caesar, had been murdered. Number two: In his will, Caesar had named young Octavius as his heir. Then Augustus got a lucky break. In 46 BC, Caesar won the civil war and was named dictator of Rome. To secure his position, he needed an heir. With no son of his own, he adopted Augustus.

This was a fantastic opportunity for a young man from nowhere. Almost at once, however, Caesar was dead - murdered by his own advisors. Augustus was just 19, but immediately threw himself into the backstabbing world of Roman politics .

It was dangerous for anyone, much less an inexperienced boy, to try to step into the dictator's shoes, but against the advice of his family Octavius boldly went to Rome to claim his inheritance. He met opposition from the powerful politician Mark Antony, who had seized Caesar's money and papers and was claiming that he was Caesar's heir and successor.

Nonetheless, Octavius took the name Gaius Julius Caesar, quickly won the allegiance of many of his great-uncle Julius's supporters, and assumed a role in government. (Historians usually refer to him as "Octavian" in the early part of his career, short for Octavianus, although he did not use this name himself.) He was no longer to be addressed as 'Octavian' but insisted on being called 'Caesar' and he now styled himself as '*divi filius*' - 'son of the divine'.

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.

Perhaps the highest point came in 2 BC when the senate granted Augustus a new honor. He was henceforth *pater patriae*, the father of the country.

At first Octavian worked with Mark Antony; in fact, Antony even married Octavian's sister, Octavia. But eventually the ambitious Antony joined forces with the ruler of Egypt, Cleopatra, and divorced Octavia. Seeing his chance to get rid of Antony, Octavian declared war on Cleopatra.

Octavian defeated Antony and Cleopatra's forces at the Battle of Actium in 31 BC and went on to conquer Egypt. Both Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide, and Octavian used Cleopatra's riches to consolidate his power. Within 20 years of Julius Caesar's death, Octavian was the ruler of the Roman empire. In 27 BC the Senate gave him the title Augustus, meaning "revered" or "venerated."

Who was the first person to collect coins?

Just think of the month of August, and it's easy to remember this answer. The earliest recorded coin collection belonged to Augustus Caesar, the first emperor of Rome. He lived from 63 B.C. to A.D. 14, and the eighth month of our year is named after him. Not only did Augustus keep adding coins to his collection, but he also gave them as gifts. Following his lead, many of the Roman emperors who ruled after Augustus also had large coin collections. The hobby became even more popular during the Middle Ages, when wealthy individuals and royal families built awesome collections.

Abroad, he created a standing army for the first time, and embarked upon a vigorous campaign of expansion designed to make Rome safe from the 'barbarians' beyond the frontiers, and to secure the Augustan peace.

Augustus was determined to be succeeded by someone of his own blood, but he had no sons, only a daughter, Julia, the child of his first wife. His nephew Marcellus and his beloved grandsons Gaius and Lucius pre-deceased him, so he reluctantly made Tiberius his heir.

Military disaster, the loss of his grandsons and a troubled economy clouded his last years. He became more dictatorial, exiling the poet Ovid (AD 8), who had mocked his moral reforms. He died on 19 August AD 14.

Augustus was chronically ill throughout his life. He was a short man, had poor health, was careless about his appearance, and had bad teeth. His body was covered in spots and he had many birthmarks scattered over his chest and belly. Despite all this, he was physically impressive -- graceful and very handsome, with curly blond hair, bright eyes, and a calm demeanor. He was tolerant of criticism, possessed a good sense of humor, and had a particular fondness for playing dice, but often provided his guests with money to place bets.

He married his first wife, Claudia, in order to cement a temporary alliance with her stepfather, Mark Antony. But the girl was very young and the marriage did not last long. Augustus divorced Claudia after having an argument with her mother.

His second marriage, to an older woman named Scribonia, was also made for political reasons. Augustus considered Scribonia a nag, and is said to have divorced her on the very day she gave birth to his only child, Julia.

Next he took up with a beautiful married woman, Livia Drusilla, who -- although pregnant -- left her husband to marry Augustus.

It's unclear whether Livia actually wanted to marry Augustus or was simply commanded to do so. However the marriage came about, it lasted for more than 50 years, even though Augustus and Livia had no children together and Augustus was not faithful to his wife.

Despite his scandalous personal life, the emperor was a proponent of what we would call "family values"; he penalized people who failed to marry, rewarded those who had large families, and made it more difficult to get divorced. These policies were unpopular, but in general Augustus was considered a wise and generous leader.

A Rebellious Family

Augustus brought up his daughter, Julia, very strictly and expected her to be a woman of virtue, but she rebelled by having many boyfriends, as did her daughter, Julia the Younger. The elder Julia's bad-tempered son Agrippa Postumus also displeased Augustus, and the furious emperor exiled all three sinners to distant prisons. He never forgave them, scornfully referring to them as "my three boils."

Julia had two other sons, but both died young, leaving Augustus with just one heir -- his daughter's husband, Tiberius, who also happened to be Livia's son. Augustus disliked Tiberius, and the feeling was probably mutual, since Augustus had forced Tiberius to divorce his first wife, whom he loved, in order to marry the unfaithful Julia.

Although unfaithful to his wife Livia Drusilla, he remained deeply devoted to her. His public moral attitudes were strict (he had been appointed *pontifex* (priest) at the age of fifteen or sixteen) and he exiled his daughter and his grand-daughter, both named Julia, for offending against these principles.

Augustus died in 14 AD. Legend has it that he was poisoned by Livia in order to hurry her son Tiberius onto the throne, but there is no proof of this. According to Suetonius -- who certainly had no compunction about spreading royal gossip -- the ailing emperor knew he was dying, and treated Livia lovingly to the end. On the last day of his life, he summoned some friends and told them goodbye. Then he kissed his wife, saying, "Farewell, Livia; never forget our marriage!" and quickly died.

Augustus was undoubtedly one of the most talented, energetic and skillful administrators that the world has ever known. The enormously far-reaching work of reorganization and rehabilitation which he undertook in every branch of his vast empire created a new Roman peace with unprecedented prosperity.

Following in the footsteps of Julius Caesar, he won genuine popular support by hosting games, erecting new buildings, and by other measures to the general good. Augustus himself claimed to have restored 82 temples in one year alone. But further there were grand new buildings like the Theatre of Apollo, the Horologium (a giant sun dial) and the great Mausoleum of Augustus.

Augustus' right hand man Agrippa, too, embarked on several major building projects. Among these were the Pantheon, later rebuilt by Hadrian. Agrippa also repaired the city's water system and added two new aqueducts, the Aqua Julia and the Aqua Virgo.

One building though is clearly lacking from Augustus' reign - a palace. He lived in a spacious house on the Palatine Hill, evidently avoiding any symbols of monarchy. And although he did continue to style himself '*divi filius*', son of the deified Caesar, he clearly avoided any form of worship to his own person as was the case in the eastern world, where rulers were themselves frequently worshiped as gods.

During his final years, Augustus withdrew more and more from public life. Nevertheless, Augustus clung onto power for another 10 years. When he died, in 14 AD, the Senate declared him a god. With his two grandsons already dead, power passed to his stepson, Tiberius. Intending to travel with Tiberius to Capri, and then on to Beneventum, he left Rome for the last time in AD 14. He fell ill on the way to Capri and, after four days resting on Capri, when they crossed back to the mainland Augustus at last passed away. He died at Nola on 19 August AD 14, only one month away of his 76th birthday. The body was taken to Rome and given a stately funeral and his ashes were then placed in his Mausoleum.

So what did he do?

Augustus had ended 100 years of civil war and achieved over 40 years of internal peace and prosperity. His vision and power had expanded the Roman Empire to become far more than a collection of countries. Instead, it was a diverse society and enormous marketplace in which people across Europe, north Africa and the Middle East could trade and travel under Rome's protection.

He had won over the Senate and founded a dynasty. But this would feature as many villains as heroes, and would take Rome on a roller-coaster ride into assassination, insanity and terror.

http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/special/emperor_game.html