

CLAH4006

**From Village to Empire: An
Introduction to the History of Rome**

**Octavian and the Second
Triumvirate**

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Part 1: Overview of Semester 2

Main Themes

- Periods covered range from the death of Julius Caesar (44 BC) to the fall of the western Roman Empire (late fifth century AD).
- Consider major internal events and external threats to the Roman Empire.
- Consider the development of imperial power and how is exercised, maintained, and acquired.

Examination

- Exam takes place during the May examination period.
- Exam worth 50% of the total mark of the module.
- There will be a revision, overview session in the last lecture slot.

Part 2: Octavian and the Second Triumvirate

Main Literary Sources for the Period

- Cicero (105-43 BC), *Philippics*, *Letters to Atticus*, *Letters to His Friends*
- Augustus (AD 14), *Res Gestae*
- Suetonius (ca. AD 63-after 120), *Life of Divus Augustus*
- Plutarch (ca. AD 46-120), *Life of Antony*
- Appian (c. AD 95-165), *The Civil Wars*, books 3-5
- Cassius Dio (AD 155-235?), *Roman History*, books 44-52.

Caesar's Ambitions (1)

- Caesar granted the office of Dictator several times between 49-44 BC, granted the office of Dictator for life in 44 BC.
- First man in the Republic to mint his own image on a coin.



Julius Caesar Denarius. CAESAR IMP, laureate head right, lituus and simpulum [ladel] behind / M METTIVS, Venus standing left with Victory and sceptre, shield resting on globe; control letter to left. Minted c.40s BC.

Caesar's Ambitions (2)

“On the last day of his triumph [September 26, 46 BC] after the banquet, Caesar entered his own Forum, wearing slippers and garlands of flowers...” – **Dio Cassius 43.22.1-2.**

“Caesar built a temple to Venus Genetrix which he vowed just before he defeated Pompey at Pharsalus. He surrounded it with a space intended as a forum for the Romans...” – **Appian *Civil Wars* 2.102.**

“It was the following incident that aroused the extreme and deadly hatred towards Caesar. When the entire body of the Senate approached Caesar with numerous resolutions of the highest honour, Caesar stayed seated as he received them in front of the Temple of Venus Gentrix. Some believe that he was on the verge of standing but was restrained by Cornelius Balbus, others, that not only did he not rise, but even glared at Gaius Trebatius when Trebatius suggested that he stand.” – **Suetonius *Divine Julius* 78.1.**

The Assassination of Julius Caesar

- Ides [15th] of March 44 BC.

“As soon as Caesar took his seat the conspirators crowded around him as if to pay their respects... Cimber caught hold of his shoulders... and at that moment one of the Casca brothers... stabbed him just below the throat... twenty three dagger thrusts hit him as he stood there... some say when he saw Marcus Brutus about to deliver a blow he reproached him in Greek with ‘You too, my son?’ The entire Senate then dispersed in confusion...” – **Suetonius *Divus Julius* 82.**

“Antony and Lepidus, the chief friends of Caesar, fled and took refuge in the houses of others. But Brutus and his supporters, just as they were, still warm from the slaughter, displaying their daggers bare, went all in a body out of the senate-house and marched to the Capitol, not like criminals, but with glad faces and full of confidence, summoning the mass to freedom...” – **Plutarch *Life of Caesar* 67.2.**

Aftermath (1)

- Antony convenes the Senate on the 17th of March – an amnesty granted, and a public funeral is granted for Julius Caesar.
- Octavian named heir and adopted son in Caesar's will – becomes Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus.

“As soon as the funeral was over, the people, snatching brands from the pyre, ran to burn down the houses of Brutus and Cassius, and were repelled with difficulty.” – **Suetonius *Divus Julius* 85.**

Aftermath (2)

- Strained relations between Octavian and Antony – also tensions between Antony and Cicero.
- Antony granted five year command of Cisalpine and Transalpine Gaul.
- Caesar's murderers leave for the east – mid 44 BC.
- Octavian rallies Caesar's veterans in Campania.
- Antony heads to take over from D. Brutus in Gaul before the latter's office had expired.

Main Factions

- Mark Antony and Lepidus.
- Octavian.
- Senatorial elite, including Cicero.
- The Caesaricides, led by Marcus Brutus and Crassus Longinus.

- On 20th of December 44 BC Cicero carries a resolution in the Senate in which D. Brutus was authorised to stay on in his province.

“And the things which I have said about Caesar [Octavian] and about his army, are, indeed, already well known to you. For by the admirable valour of Caesar, and by the steadfastness of the veteran soldiers, and by the admirable judgment of those legions which have followed our authority, and the liberty of the Roman people, and the valour of Caesar, Antony has been repelled from his attempts upon our lives. But these things, as I have said, happened before; but this recent edict of Decimus Brutus, which has just been issued, can certainly not be passed over in silence. For he promises to preserve the province of Gaul in obedience to the senate and people of Rome.” – **Cicero *Third Philippic* 8.**

The Battle of Mutina

- Antony sieges D. Brutus' forces in Mutina.
- The Consuls Aulus Hirtius and Gaius Vibius Pansa are sent with Octavian (made praetor) to confront Antony – two battles (March and April) in which both the Consuls die as a result.
- Octavian now left in command of army that perused Antony into Gaul.
- Antony declared a public enemy by the Senate.
- Octavian refuses to speak to D. Brutus who flees.

“At the age of twenty he usurped the consulship, marching on Rome as though it were an enemy city and sending messengers ahead in the name of his army to demand the appointment. When the Senate hesitated to obey, the centurion Cornelius, the leader of the legation, opened his military cloak, displayed the hilt of his sword, and boldly said, „If you do not make him consul, this will!“” – **Suetonius**
Divus Augustus 26.

The Second Triumvirate

- Octavian as Consul rescinds the amnesty for the murderers of Julius Caesar.
- Octavian annuls the act outlawing Antony, and these two with Lepidus meet at Bononia.
- In November 43 BC the Tribune carried a law establishing the *tresviri rei publicae constituendae consulari potestate* – for a five year period.
- Magistrates designated for the next several years, the senate packed with supporters.

The Proscriptions

- Proscription = public identification of enemies of the state, who will be subject to execution and seizure of their property.
- Notable individuals like Cicero killed.
- “For ten years Augustus [Octavian] remained a member of the triumvirate commissioned to organize the commonwealth, and though at first opposing his colleagues’ plan for a proscription, yet once this had been decided upon he carried it out more ruthlessly than either of them... Augustus alone demanded that no one be spared...” – **Suetonius *Divus Augustus* 27.**

Deification of Caesar

- The appearance of a comet in July 44 BC seen as Julius Caesar's apotheosis.
- January 42 BC, Caesar declared a god and a state-cult is instituted.
- Octavian becomes the son of a god (*divi filius*).



Octavian denarius. c36 BC. IMP CAESAR DIVI F Bare head right. / Julius Caesar standing in temple of four columns, frontal inscribed DIVO IVL, altar at left. **RSC 90.**

Brutus and Cassius in the East

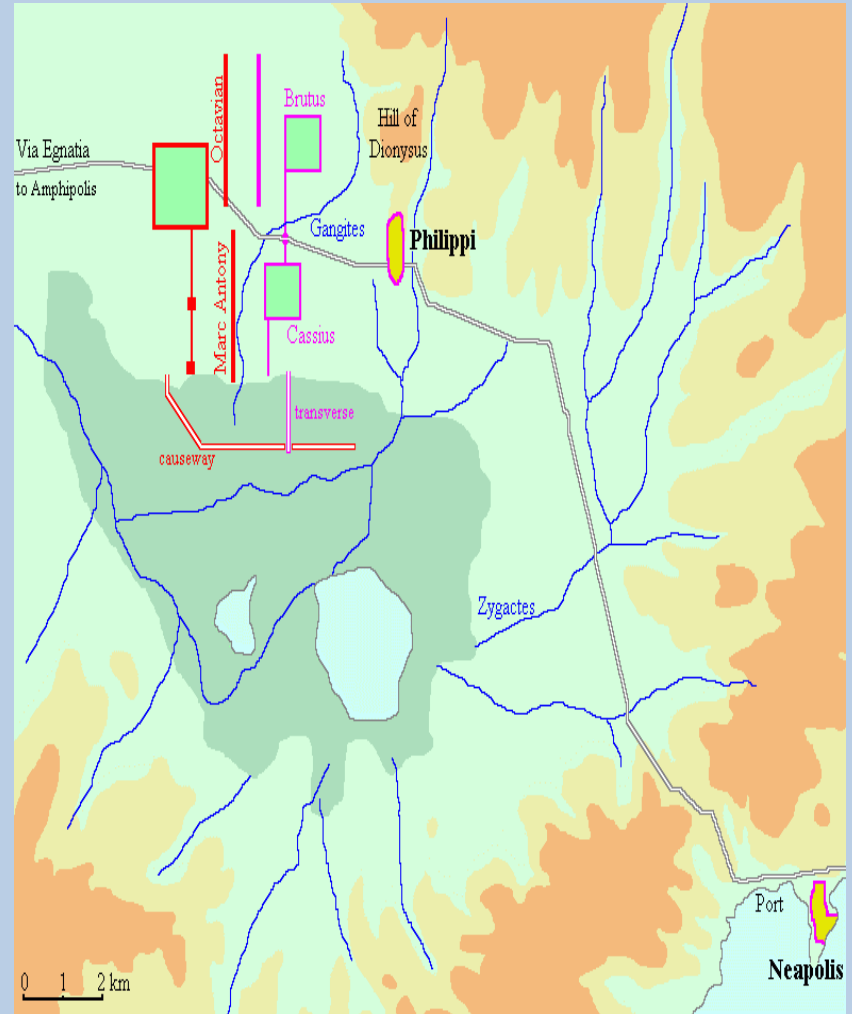
- M. Brutus won over troops in Illyricum and Macedonia.
- Cassius acquires troops in Syria, defeats Dolabella, and joins with Brutus in Asia Minor.



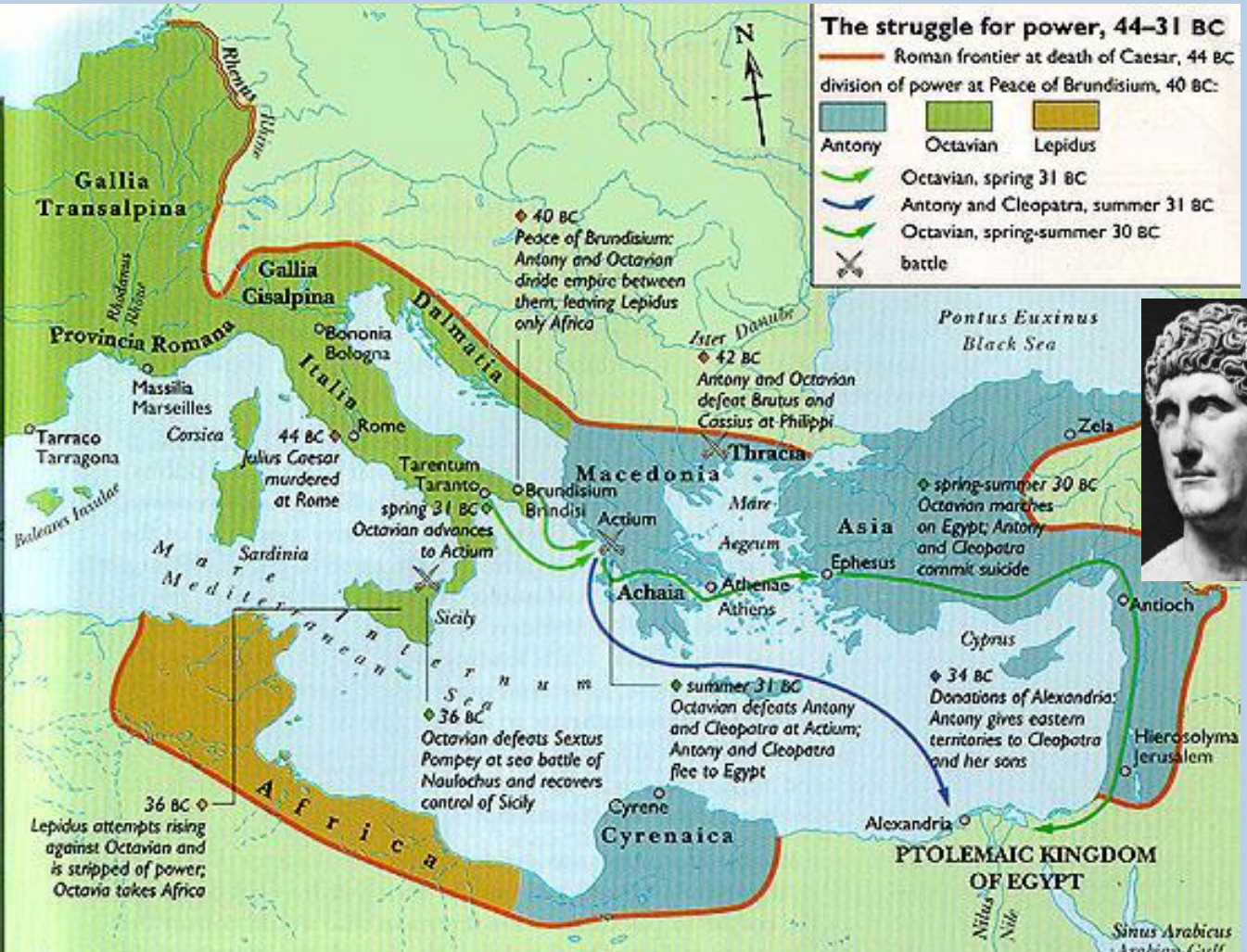
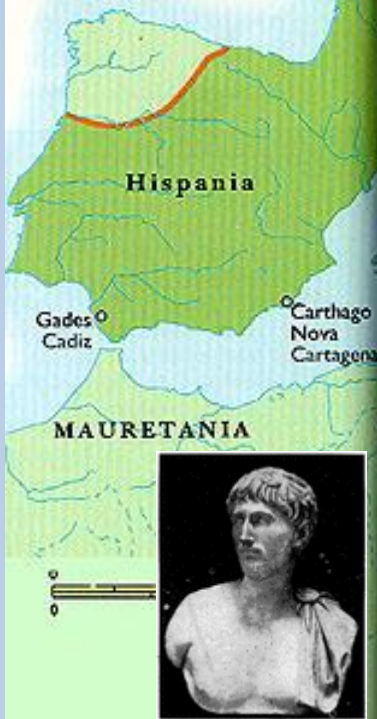
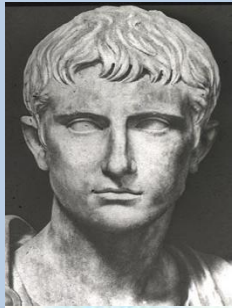
Marcus Junius Brutus denarius. LIBERTAS, bare head of Libertas right / CAEPIO BRVTVS PRO COS, Lyre between a quiver and a laurel branch **RSC 5**.

The battle of Philippi

- The forces of Antony and Octavian faced those of Brutus and Cassius in Macedonia.
- In the first engagement, Antony's forces defeat those of Cassius who commits suicide, but Brutus' forces defeat Octavian's left wing.
- Three weeks later a second engagement is fought in which the Caesarians win outright.
- Brutus commits suicide.



The Treaty of Brundisium – 40 BC



Subsequent Events

- **40 BC:** Antony marries Octavia (Octavian's sister).
- **37 BC:** Triumvirate renewed (5 years). Agrippa trains a new fleet. Antony marries Cleopatra and starts his disastrous Parthian Campaign.
- **36-35: BC:** Octavian defeats Sextus Pompeius at Naulochus in Sicily; Lepidus attempts to take over Sicily but loses his army and is sent into exile. East and West are now in complete control of two men.

Strained relations

33 BC: Donations of Alexandria.

32 BC: Antony divorces Octavia.

“As for Octavia, she was thought to have been treated with scorn... she even entreated Caesar himself, unless on other grounds he had determined to make war upon Antony, to ignore Antony's treatment of her, since it was an infamous thing even to have it said that the two greatest imperators in the world plunged the Romans into civil war, the one out of passion for, and the other out of resentment in behalf of a woman.” – **Plutarch *Antony* 54.1.**

“...in the first place he declared Cleopatra Queen of Egypt, Cyprus, Libya, and Coele Syria, and she was to share her throne with Caesarion. Caesarion was believed to be a son of the former Caesar, by whom Cleopatra was left pregnant. In the second place, he proclaimed his own sons by Cleopatra Kings of Kings, and to Alexander he allotted Armenia, Media and Parthia (when he should have subdued it), to Ptolemy Phoenicia, Syria, and Cilicia.” – **Plutarch *Antony* 54.4.**

Antony and Cleopatra



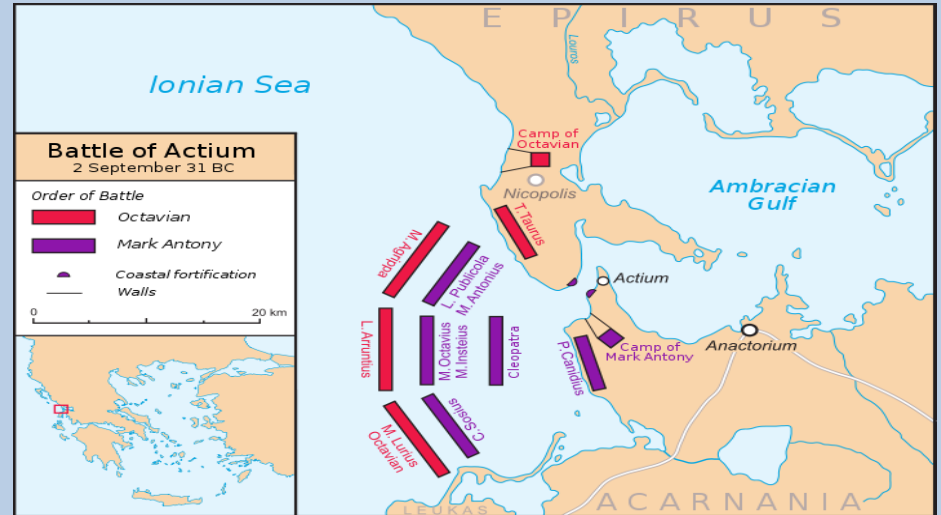
- Mark Antony & Cleopatra. 34 BC. AR Denarius. Alexandria mint. Bust of Cleopatra draped & diademed; bare head of Antony right; Armenian tiara behind – **RSC 1.**

Antony's Will

- **32 BC:** Octavian reads Antony's will in the Senate. The Senate declares war on Egypt and Cleopatra.
- “It was deposited in the hands of the vestal virgins, who refused to deliver it up, and sent word to Caesar, that if he wished he should come and seize it himself, which he did. And, reading it over to himself, he noted those places that were most for his purpose, and, having summoned the Senate, read them publicly. Many were scandalized at the proceeding, thinking it out of reason and equity to call a man to account for what was not to be until after his death. Caesar specially pressed what Antony said in his will about his burial; for he had ordered that even if he died in the city of Rome, his body, after being carried in state through the forum, should be sent to Cleopatra at Alexandria.” – **Plutarch *Life of Antony* 58.3-4.**

Battle of Actium

- 2nd of September 31 BC.
- Antony's ships bigger and sturdier – Octavian's speedier.
- Octavian attempts to encircle Antony's ships.
- Octavian's tactics ramming.
- Antony's tactics to use volleys of missiles and to use grappling hocks.
- Cleopatra prematurely retreats.
- Use of flaming missiles and jars of charcoal and pitch.



Suicide of Antony and Cleopatra - 30 BC

“[Antony] ...running himself through the belly he dropped upon the couch. But the wound did not bring a speedy death. Therefore, as the blood ceased flowing after he had lain down, he came to himself and beseeched the bystanders to give him the finishing stroke. But they fled from the chamber, and he lay writhing and crying out, until Diomedes the secretary came from Cleopatra with orders to bring him to her in the tomb.” – **Plutarch *Antony* 76.4-5.**

“It is said that the asp was brought with those figs and leaves and lay hidden beneath them... and baring her arm she held it out for the bite. But others say that the asp was kept carefully shut up in a water jar, and that while Cleopatra... irritating it with a golden distaff it sprang and fastened itself upon her arm. But the truth of the matter no one knows; for it was also said that she carried about poison in a hollow comb and kept the comb hidden in her hair.” - **Plutarch *Antony* 86.1-2.**

Post-Actium

- “Of the rest of those who had served Antony’s cause up to this time he punished some and pardoned others, in certain instances according to his own inclinations, in others for the sake of his friends.” - **Dio Cassius 51.16.**
- “After this he imposed a tribute upon Egypt and entrusted it to Cornelius Gallus to govern.” - **Dio Cassius 51.17.**
- “...Octavian founded a city on the spot where the battle had taken place...” - **Dio Cassius 51.18.**

Octavian's Triumph 29 BC

“As for Caesar's return to Italy and to Rome — the procession which met him, the enthusiasm of his reception by men of all classes, ages, and ranks, and the **magnificence of his triumphs and of the spectacles** which he gave — all this it would be impossible adequately to describe even within the compass of a formal history, to say nothing of a work so circumscribed as this. There is nothing that man can desire from the gods, nothing that the gods can grant to a man, nothing that wish can conceive or good fortune bring to pass, which Augustus on his return to the city did not bestow upon the republic, the Roman people, and the world. **The civil wars were ended after twenty years, foreign wars suppressed, peace restored**, the frenzy of arms everywhere lulled to rest; **validity was restored to the laws, authority to the courts, and dignity to the senate**; the power of the magistrates was reduced to its former limits, with the sole exception that two were added to the eight existing praetors. The old traditional form of the republic was restored.” – *Velleius Paterculus* 2.89.1-3.

Octavian's Cruelty?

“Under the triumvirate, many of Augustus’ [Octavian’s] acts won him people’s hatred... he saw a Roman knight named Pinarius transcribing his speech, and had him stabbed there and then as taking too close an interest in the proceedings... Gallius [a praetor] was tortured as if he were a slave, and though he confessed nothing, Augustus himself tore out his eyes and sentenced him to death...
Suetonius *Divine Augustus* 27.

“I undertook many civil and foreign wars by land and sea throughout the world, and as victor I spared the lives of all citizens who asked for mercy. When foreign peoples could safely be pardoned I preferred to preserve rather than to exterminate them.” ***Res Gestae Divi Augusti* 3.**

Now for the most part, the government of the triumvirate was odious to the Romans; and Antony bore most of the blame, since he was older than Caesar. – **Plutarch *Antony* 21.**

Useful Reading

- Potter, D. (2009) *Rome in the Ancient World* (London: Thames & Hudson) pages 156-165.
- Velleius Paterculus *Roman History* (transl. from Shipley, F. W. (1924) – read sections 2.85-89:
http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Velleius_Paterculus/2C*.html
- Syme, R. (1978) 'Mendacity in Velleius', *The American Journal of Philology* 99 (1): 45-63. (read pages 45, 51-52 – available on JSTOR).