

When preparing these texts, please remember source criticism! Who wrote these texts and when?
What could they have known? What is their intention...?

I. OCTAVIAN'S RISE TO POWER

44 – 28 B.C.: Octavian as cruel ruler?

SOURCE 1a – Augustus, *Res Gestae* 1-2

1. At the age of nineteen [44 BC] on my own responsibility and at my own expense I raised an army, with which I successfully championed the liberty of the republic when it was oppressed by the tyranny of a faction. 2 On that account the senate passed decrees in my honor enrolling me in its order in the consulship of Gaius Pansa and Aulus Hirtius [43 BC], assigning me the right to give my opinion among the consulars and giving me imperium. 3 It ordered me as a propraetor to provide in concert with the consuls that the *res publica* should come to no harm. 4 In the same year, when both consuls had fallen in battle, the people appointed me consul and triumvir for the organization of the republic.

2. I drove into exile the murderers of my father, avenging their crime through tribunals established by law [43 BC] ; and afterwards, when they made war on the republic, I twice defeated them in battle [42 BC].

SOURCE 1b – Suetonius *Divus Augustus* 26

26. He was advanced to public offices before the age at which he was legally qualified for them; and to some, also, of a new kind, and for life. He seized the consulship in the twentieth year of his age, quartering his legions in a threatening manner near the city, and sending deputies to demand it for him in the name of the army. When the senate demurred, a centurion, named Cornelius, who was at the head of the chief deputation, throwing back his cloak, and showing the hilt of his sword, had the presumption to say in the senate-house, 'This will make him consul, if ye will not'.

SOURCE 2a – Augustus, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* 1, 3

1 (...) In the same year, when both consuls had fallen in battle, the people appointed me consul and triumvir for the organization of the republic. (...) 4 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." (...) 7 I was triumvir for the organization of the republic for ten consecutive years.

SOURCE 2b – Plutarch *Antony* 21

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.

SOURCE 2c – Suetonius *Divus Augustus* 27

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 (...).

SOURCE 2d – Suetonius *Divine Augustus* 27

Under the triumvirate, many of Augustus' 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

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Ideal ruler or despot?

in the proceedings (...). Gallius [a praetor] was tortured as if he were a slave, and though he confused nothing, Augustus himself tore out his eyes and sentenced him to death (...)

SOURCE 3 – Cassius Dio 47.3-7

(...)So they came to Rome with all their troops, first Caesar (...).

(...)those murders by proscription which Sulla had once indulged in, were once more resorted to and the whole city was filled with corpses. Many were killed in their houses, many even in the streets and here and there in the *fora* and around the temples; the heads of the victims were once more set up on the rostra and their bodies either allowed to lie where they were, to be devoured by dogs and birds, or else cast into the river. (...) At this time [compared to Sulla], when men (...) were at any rate thoroughly acquainted with them [proscriptions] from recent descriptions, (...) had, on the one hand, been devising many additional horrors (...) Encouraged by this, men proceeded to slay, in addition to the others, also the well-to-do, even when they had no dislike for any of them. For since they stood in need of vast sums of money have had no other source from which to satisfy the desires of their soldiers, they affected a kind of common enmity against the rich. And among the many other lawless acts they committed in carrying out this policy, they took a lad and enrolled him among the youths of military age, in order that they might kill him as now classed among the grown men.

7 These acts were committed chiefly by Lepidus and Antony; for they had been honoured by the former Caesar for many years, and as they had been holding offices and governorships for a long time they had many enemies. But Caesar seems to have taken part in the business merely because of his sharing the authority, since he himself had no need at all to kill a large number; for he was not naturally cruel and had been brought up in his father's ways. Moreover, as he was still a young man and had just entered politics, he was under no necessity in any case of hating many persons violently, and, besides, he wished to be loved

SOURCE 4 – Cassius Dio 47.14

1 So much for the murders; but many strange proceedings took place also in connection with the property of persons left alive. To be sure, the triumvirs announced, as if they were indeed just and humane rulers, that they would give to the widows of the slain their dowries, and to the male children a tenth and to the female children a twentieth of the property of each one's father; 2 but these portions were not actually given save in a few cases, and the possessions of the other classes of persons were plundered with impunity even down to the last farthing. For, in the first place, they levied upon all the houses, both in the city and in the rest of Italy, a tax which was the entire amount of the annual rent in the case of dwellings which people had leased, and half of that amount in the case of such as they occupied themselves, all based on the value of the domicile; and secondly, from those who possessed lands they took away half of the revenues they produced. 3 Furthermore, they required that the soldiers should receive their support free from the cities in which they were wintering, and also distributed them throughout the country districts, pretending that they were sent to take charge of the confiscated property or that of the persons who still opposed them. For they counted the latter class as enemies, because they had not come over to the side of the triumvirs before the appointed day. Thus the whole country outside the towns was also pillaged.

II. Mark Antony as triumvir

SOURCE 5a – Cassius Dio 47.8

8 (...) Antony killed savagely and mercilessly, not only those whose names had been posted, but likewise those who had attempted to assist any of them. 2 He always viewed their heads, even if he happened to be eating, and sated himself to the fullest extent on this most unholy and pitiable sight. And even Fulvia also caused the death of many, both to satisfy her enmity and to gain their wealth, in some cases men with whom her husband was not even acquainted; 3 at any rate, when he saw the head of one man, he exclaimed: "I knew not this man!" When, however, the head of Cicero also was brought to them one day (he had been overtaken and slain in flight), Antony uttered many bitter reproaches against it and then ordered it to be exposed on the rostra more prominently than the rest, in order that it might be seen in the very place where Cicero had so often been heard declaiming against him, together with his right hand, just as it had been cut off. 4 And Fulvia took the head into her hands before it was removed, and after abusing it spitefully and spitting upon it, set it on her knees, opened the mouth, and pulled out the tongue, which she pierced with the pins that she used for her hair, at the same time uttering many brutal jests.

SOURCE 5b – Cassius Dio 47.11

(...) Popilius Laenas killed Marcus Cicero, although Cicero had once defended him as his advocate, 2 and in order that by means of optical proof as well as by report he might have the credit of having murdered him, he set up a statue of himself sitting crowned beside his victim's head, with an inscription that recorded his name and his deed. By this act he pleased Antony so much that he secured more than the price offered

33 BC: Donations of Alexandria; **32 BC:** Antony divorces Octavia:

SOURCE 6a – Plutarch *Antony* 54.1.

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."

SOURCE 6b – Plutarch *Antony* 54.4.

...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.

32 BC: Octavian reads Antony's will in the Senate. The Senate declares war on Egypt and Cleopatra.

SOURCE 6c – Plutarch *Life of Antony* 58.3-4.

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.

III. Augustus & the 'restoration' of the Republic

SOURCE 7a – Augustus, *Res Gestae* 34

34. In my sixth and seventh consulships [28-27 BC], after I had extinguished civil wars, and at a time when with universal consent I was in complete control of affairs, I transferred the republic from my power to the dominion of the senate and people of Rome. 2 For this service of mine I was named Augustus by decree of the senate, and the door-posts of my house were publicly wreathed with bay leaves and a civic crown was fixed over my door and a golden shield was set in the Curia Julia, which, as attested by the inscription thereon, was given me by the senate and people of Rome on account of my courage, clemency, justice and piety. 3 After this time I excelled all in influence [*auctoritas*], although I possessed no more official power [*potestas*] than others who were my colleagues in the several magistracies.

SOURCE 7b – Tacitus, *Annals* (Translation Loeb Classical Library, 1931)

[1.2] When the killing of Brutus and Cassius had disarmed the Republic; when Pompey¹ had been crushed in Sicily (36 BC), and, with Lepidus thrown aside and Antony slain, even the Julian party was leaderless but for the Caesar;² after laying down his triumviral title and proclaiming himself a simple consul content with tribunician authority to safeguard the commons, he first conciliated the army by gratuities, the populace by cheapened corn, the world by the amenities of peace, then step by step began to make his ascent and to unite in his own person the functions of the senate, the magistracy, and the legislature. Opposition there was none: the boldest spirits had succumbed on stricken fields or by proscription-lists; while the rest of the nobility found a cheerful acceptance of slavery the smoothest road to wealth and office, and, as they had thriven on revolution, stood now for the new order and safety in preference to the old order and adventure. Nor was the state of affairs unpopular in the provinces, where administration by the Senate and People had been discredited by the feuds of the magnates and the greed of the officials, against which there was but frail protection in a legal system for ever deranged by force, by favouritism, or (in the last resort) by gold.

[1.3] War at the time was none (...). At home all was calm. The officials carried the old names; the younger men had been born after the victory of Actium; most even of the elder generation, during the civil wars; few indeed were left who had seen the Republic.

[1.4] It was thus an altered world, and of the old, unspoilt Roman character not a trace lingered. Equality was an outworn creed, and all eyes looked to the mandate of the sovereign — with no immediate misgivings, so long as Augustus in the full vigour of his prime upheld himself, his house, and peace. But when the wearing effects of bodily sickness added themselves to advancing years, and the end was coming and new hopes dawning, a few voices began idly to discuss the blessings of freedom; more were apprehensive of war; others desired it; the great majority merely exchanged gossip derogatory to their future masters (...)

[1.7 – after Aug.'s death:] At Rome, however, consuls, senators, and knights were rushing into slavery (...)

¹ Sextus Pompey, "pirate".

² i.e. Caesar Augustus.

SOURCE 8 – Tacitus Annals I.9-10, on people reviewing the actions of Octavian/Augustus after his death:

[1.9] Then tongues became busy with Augustus himself. Most men were struck by trivial points — that one day should have been the first of his sovereignty and the last of his life — that he should have ended his days at Nola in the same house and room as his father Octavius. Much, too, was said of the number of his consulates (in which he had equalled the combined totals of Valerius Corvus and Caius Marius),³ his tribunician power unbroken for thirty-seven years, his title of emperor twenty-one times earned, and his other honours, multiplied or new.

Among men of intelligence, however, his career was praised or arraigned from varying points of view. According to some, “filial duty and the needs of a country, which at the time had no room for law, had driven him to the weapons of civil strife — weapons which could not be either forged or wielded with clean hands. He had overlooked much in Antony, much in Lepidus, for the sake of bringing to book the assassins of his father. When Lepidus grew old and indolent, and Antony succumbed to his vices, the sole remedy for his distracted country was government by one man. Yet he organized the state, not by instituting a monarchy or a dictatorship, but by creating the title of First Citizen. The empire had been fenced by the ocean or distant rivers. The legions, the provinces, the fleets, the whole administration, had been centralized. There had been law for the Roman citizen, respect for the allied communities; and the capital itself had been embellished with remarkable splendour. Very few situations had been treated by force, and then only in the interests of general tranquillity.”

SOURCE 9 – [1.10] On the other side it was argued that “filial duty and the critical position of the state had been used merely as a cloak: dome to facts, and it was from the lust of dominion that he excited the veterans by his bounties, levied an army while yet a stripling and a subject, subdued the legions of a consul, and affected a leaning to the Pompeian side. Then, following his usurpation by senatorial decree of the symbols and powers of the praetorship, had come the deaths of Hirtius and Pansa,⁴ — whether they perished by the enemy's sword, or Pansa by poison sprinkled on his wound, and Hirtius by the hands of his own soldiery, with the Caesar to plan the treason. At all events, he had possessed himself of both their armies, wrung a consulate from the unwilling senate, and turned against the commonwealth the arms which he had received for the quelling of Antony. The proscription of citizens and the assignments of land⁵ had been approved not even by those who executed them. Grant that Cassius and the Bruti were sacrificed to inherited enmities — though the moral law required that private hatreds should give way to public utility — yet Pompey was betrayed by the simulacrum of a peace,⁶ Lepidus by the shadow of a friendship: then Antony, lured by the Tarentine and Brundisian treaties and a marriage with his sister, had paid with life the penalty of that delusive connexion. After that there had been undoubtedly peace, but peace with bloodshed — the disasters of Lollius⁷ and of Varus, the execution at Rome of a Varro, an Egnatius, an Iullus.”⁸

³ i.e. 13 (6+7).

⁴ Mutina (44 B.C.). Cf. **Suetonius, Augustus 11**: “The rumour gained currency that both had perished by his agency; so that with Antony in flight and the commonwealth bereft of its consuls, he might as sole victor seize the command of three armies”.

⁵ to the soldiery: see Virg. *Ecl.* I, IX

⁶ The treaty of Misenum between Octavian, Antony, and Sextus Pompeius (39 B.C.); not kept, and followed next year by war.

⁷ Defeated with the loss of an eagle in Germany, 16 B.C.

⁸ Varro Murena and Egnatius Rufus, executed for conspiracy in 23 B.C. and 19 B.C. respectively; Iullus Antonius, son of the triumvir, compelled to suicide in 2 B.C. for adultery with Julia.

IV. Augustus – the benevolent ruler?

SOURCE 10a – Augustus, *Res Gestae*

16.1 I paid cash to the towns for the lands that I assigned to soldiers in my fourth consulship, and later in the consulship of Marcus Crassus and Gnaeus Lentulus. The sum amounted to about 600,000,000 sesterces paid for lands in Italy, and about 260,000,000 disbursed for provincial lands. Of all those who founded military colonies in Italy or the provinces I was the first and only one to have done this in the recollection of my contemporaries. 2. (...) I paid monetary rewards to soldiers whom I settled in their home towns after completion of their service, and on this account I expended about 400,000,000 sesterces.

SOURCE 10b

–17. Four times I assisted the treasury with my own money, so that I transferred to the administrators of the treasury 150,000,000 sesterces. 2 In the consulship of Marcus Lepidus and Lucius Arruntius [AD 6], when the military treasury was founded by my advice for the purpose of paying rewards to soldiers who had served for twenty years or more, I transferred to it from my own patrimony 170,000,000 sesterces. 18. From the consulship of Gnaeus and Publius Lentulus [18 BC] onwards, whenever the taxes did not suffice, I made distributions of grain and money from my own granary and patrimony, sometimes to 100,000 persons, sometimes to many more.

SOURCE 11a

–21. I built the temple of Mars the Avenger and the Forum Augustum on private ground from the proceeds of booty. I built the theatre adjacent to the temple of Apollo on ground in large part bought from private owners, and provided that it should be called after Marcus Marcellus, my son-in-law. 2 From the proceeds of booty I dedicated gifts in the Capitol and in the temples of the divine Julius, of Apollo, of Vesta and of Mars the Avenger ; this cost me about 100,000,000 sesterces. 3 In my fifth consulship [28 BC] I remitted 55,000 lb. of aurum coronarium contributed by the municipia and colonies of Italy to my triumphs.

22. I gave three gladiatorial games in my own name and five in that of my sons or grandsons ; at these games some 10,000 men took part in combat. Twice in my own name and a third time in that of my grandson I presented to the people displays by athletes summoned from all parts. (...) On behalf of the college of quindecimviri, as its president, with Marcus Agrippa as colleague, I produced the Secular Games in the consulship of Gaius Furnius and Gaius Silanus [17 BC]. (...) I gave beast-hunts of African beasts in my own name or in that of my sons and grandsons in the circus or forum or amphitheater on twenty-six occasions, on which about 3,500 beasts were destroyed.

23. I produced a naval battle as a show for the people at the place across the Tiber now occupied by the grove of the Caesars, where a site 1,800 feet long and 1,200 broad was excavated. There thirty beaked triremes or biremes and still more smaller vessels were joined in battle. About 3,000 men, besides the rowers, fought in these fleets.

24. After my victory, I replaced in the temples of all the cities of the province of Asia the ornaments which my late adversary, after despoiling the temples, had taken into his private possession. 2 Some eighty silver statues of me, on foot, on horse and in chariots had been set up in Rome ; I myself removed them, and with the money that they realized I set golden offerings in the temple of Apollo, in my own name and in the names of those who had honored me with the statues.

SOURCE 11b – Augustus, *Res Gestae*, Appendix

1. The amount of money that he gave to the treasury or to the Roman plebs or to discharged soldiers was 2,400,000,000 sesterces. (...) 3. He restored the Capitol and sacred buildings to the number of eighty-two, the theatre of Pompey, the aqueducts and the Via Flaminia. 4. The expenditure that he devoted to dramatic shows, to gladiatorial exhibitions and athletes and hunts and the sea battle, and the money granted to colonies, municipia, towns destroyed by earthquake and fire or to individual friends and senators whose property qualification he made up, was beyond counting.

V. Augustus & the Empire

SOURCE 12 – Augustus, *Res Gestae*

25. I made the sea peaceful and freed it of pirates. In that war I captured about 30,000 slaves who had escaped from their masters and taken up arms against the republic, and I handed them over to their masters for punishment. 2 The whole of Italy of its own free will swore allegiance to me and demanded me as the leader in the war in which I was victorious at Actium. The Gallic and Spanish provinces, Africa, Sicily and Sardinia swore the same oath of allegiance. 3 More than seven hundred senators served under my standards at that time, including eighty-three who previously or subsequently (down to the time of writing) were appointed consuls, and about one hundred and seventy who were appointed priests.
26. I extended the territory of all those provinces of the Roman people on whose borders lay peoples not subject to our government. 2 I brought peace to the Gallic and Spanish provinces as well as to Germany (...) 4 My fleet sailed through the ocean eastwards from the mouth of the Rhine to the territory of the Cimbri, a country which no Roman had visited before either by land or sea, and the Cimbri, Charydes, Semnones and other German peoples of that region sent ambassadors and sought my friendship and that of the Roman people. 5 At my command and under my auspices two armies were led almost at the same time into Ethiopia and Arabia (...)
27. I added Egypt to the empire of the Roman people. 2 Greater Armenia I might have made a province after its king, Artaxes had been killed, but I preferred, following the model set by our ancestors, to hand over that kingdom to Tigranes, son of King Artavasdes and grandson of King Tigranes ; (...)
28. I founded colonies of soldiers in Africa, Sicily, Macedonia, both Spanish provinces, Achaia, Asia, Syria, Gallia Narbonensis and Pisidia. 2 Italy too has twenty-eight colonies founded by my authority, which were densely populated in my lifetime.
30. The Pannonian peoples, whom the army of the Roman people never approached before I was the leading citizen, were conquered through the agency of Tiberius Nero, who was then my stepson and legate ; I brought them into the empire of the Roman people, and extended the frontier of Illyricum to the banks of the Danube. (...)
31. Embassies from kings in India were frequently sent to me never before had they been seen with any Roman commander. 2 The Bastarnae, Scythians and the kings of the Sarmatians on either side of the river Don, and the kings of the Albanians and the Iberians and the Medes sent embassies to seek our friendship.
32. 3 (...) While I was the leading citizen very many other peoples have experienced the good faith of the Roman people which had never previously exchanged embassies or had friendly relations with the Roman people.