

34.6 Rome Becomes an Empire, 44 B.C.E. to 14 C.E.

Caesar's murder plunged Rome into a series of civil wars that lasted for more than 10 years. When the fighting ended, one man stood as the absolute ruler of Rome. He was Octavian, Caesar's grandnephew and adopted son. So began the Roman Empire, and Rome's fourth period of expansion.

To gain power, Octavian had to defeat jealous rivals. One of them was Marc Antony, a popular general. Antony had married Queen Cleopatra of Egypt. In 31 B.C.E., Octavian defeated Antony and Cleopatra in a sea battle near Actium, Greece. His army chased the lovers to Egypt, where they killed themselves.

Octavian was now the supreme ruler of the Mediterranean region.

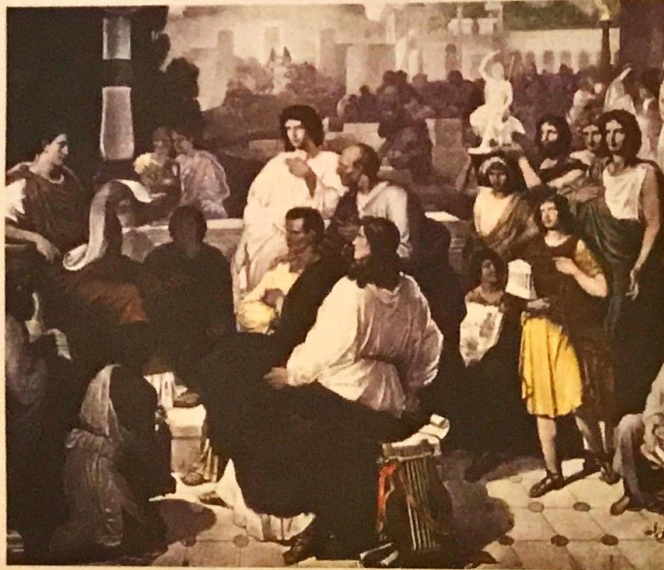
Octavian knew that the Romans prized their republic. He told them he was restoring the authority of the Senate and the Roman people. But in fact he was in complete control. The Senate gave him the title Augustus, which means "revered" (honored). Historians call him Rome's first emperor.

As ruler of Rome, Augustus encouraged education, art, and literature. He completed grand construction projects, repairing more than 80 ruined temples.

"I found Rome brick and left it marble," he boasted. He also gave Rome its first police force, firefighters, and library.

As emperor, Augustus ruled over 50 million people. He turned eastern kingdoms like Judea and Armenia into Roman provinces. To defend the empire, he pushed its borders to natural boundaries: the Rhine and Danube Rivers in the north, the Sahara Desert in the south, and the Atlantic Ocean in the west.

This vast empire needed a strong economy. The Romans improved trade routes by building harbors, canals, and roads. Goods flowed into Rome from throughout the empire and as far away as China. Roman coins made trade easier by providing a single system of currency (money).



As emperor, Augustus encouraged education and literature. Here he reads to a group of citizens. Augustus ruled for 41 years, until his death in 14 C.E.

Territory Controlled by Rome, About 117 C.E.



But Rome's final expansion brought new problems. To reform Roman morals, Augustus harshly punished people for being unfaithful to their husbands or wives. To protect the emperor, he established a private army, the Praetorian Guard. In later years, this same Guard sometimes murdered the emperors it was supposed to protect.

Under Roman rule, the Mediterranean world was mostly at peace for 200 years. This period is called the Pax Romana, or Roman Peace. But keeping the peace cost the Romans dearly. During Augustus's reign, one rebellion in the east took three years and 100,000 soldiers to put down. Before it was over, a Roman army was completely destroyed.

Later emperors added to the territory controlled by Rome. From Britain to the Red Sea, a single power ruled over the greatest empire the world had ever known. Defending this vast empire became increasingly challenging and costly as time went on.

34.7 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, you read about how Rome became a great empire. Roman power grew through four main periods of expansion. In each period, the costs of expansion were great. Yet, in the end, Rome ruled over an empire that lasted 500 years. In the next chapter, you will discover what daily life was like for Romans at the height of the empire's power.