CHAPTER 9

Augustus and the Julio-Claudians

However, Augustus had put the state in order not by making himself a king or dictator but by creating the Principate. The empire’s frontiers were on the ocean, or distance rivers. Armies, provinces, fleets, the whole system was interrelated. Roman citizens were protected by the law. Provincials were decently treated. Rome itself had been lavishly beautified.

Tacitus, The Annals of Imperial Rome, I, 8

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1 What are the main sources for Augustus and the Julio-Claudians?

2 How did Octavian come to power in Rome, and how did he come to be called Augustus?

3 What is meant by the term ‘principate’?

4 What changes did Augustus make to Rome and the empire?

5 Why was Augustus such an important figure in Roman history?

6 Who were the Julio-Claudians?

7 What were the circumstances in which each ruler came to power?

8 What were the notable aspects of each ruler’s reign?

9 What role did women play in the time of Augustus and the Julio-Claudians?

INTRODUCTION

The period from 23 BC to AD 68 is a complex one, rich in political intrigue, family feuds, murder, mayhem and madness. It also saw the extensive growth of the Roman Empire and the vast bureaucracy needed to control it. The main focus here is on the individual rulers whose personalities made an indelible impression. The young man Octavian went to Rome supposedly to take up his family inheritance, but by the end of his lifetime he had irrevocably changed the Roman political system, creating a dynasty, reviving Roman religion and traditional values, bringing peace to the world after years of civil war and changing the way that Romans regarded their rulers. Augustus realised the importance of ‘image’, and his successors also had to deal with this issue.

There is a wealth of archaeological and written evidence for this period, though students need to be aware of the bias of the writers and of the nature of the times in which they wrote. Written sources include:

• Res Gestae Divi Augusti, a primary source written by Augustus with specific purposes in mind, that is, to justify his actions and to ensure that the Roman people understood the image that he had created.
Tacitus was a senator and historian who wrote *The Annals of Imperial Rome* at the end of the first century AD. The *Annals* is a year-by-year account of the reigns of the Julio-Claudians, describing events in Rome and the provinces. Tacitus is an important source for this period, though very biased in some respects.

Suetonius was a Roman biographer who wrote in the second century AD about the lives of great men and Roman rulers from Caesar to Domitian. He is regarded by some as the ‘gutter press’ of the ancient world because he delights in relating *scurrilous* anecdotes and describing the sexual habits of the Romans. Nevertheless, Suetonius does provide some valuable information.

Cassius Dio was a historian from Bithynia in the late second and early third century AD. Much of his *History of Rome* is lost, though the text covering the years 68 BC to AD 47 has survived. Dio is important because, of the ancient writers, his work is the only comprehensive and continuous narrative of the Augustan principate.

Velleius Paterculus wrote a *History of Rome*, only fragments of which survive. He was a friend and contemporary of the emperor Tiberius and greatly admired the new regime.

Other useful sources include Appian, Nicolaus of Damascus, Josephus, Pliny the Younger, Strabo and Seneca. Horace, Virgil and Ovid were literary figures of the Augustan age and owed much to Augustus’ patronage (some useful insights into this period can be gleaned from their poetry).

Archaeological sources for this period include:
- large areas of the city of Rome e.g. The Forum of Augustus, baths, temples, palaces, circuses, aqueducts, sewers, villas and mausoleums.
- statuary and portraits
- coins (numismatic evidence)
- inscriptions (epigraphic evidence)
- the *Ara Pacis* (Altar of Peace).

For a complete understanding of Augustus and the Julio-Claudians it would be useful to read sections of the chapter on Roman society and the chapter on Agrippina.

**OCTAVIAN**

Julius Caesar was assassinated in March 44 BC. In his will he nominated his great nephew, Octavian (later to be called Augustus), as his chief heir and adopted son. The eighteen-year-old Octavian went to Rome to claim his inheritance and avenge the family murder. He showed political *astuteness* even at this early age, for en-route to Rome he presented himself to Caesar’s veterans in Italy and assured himself of their support by giving them large donations and taking the name of Caesar. On arrival in Rome he found that Mark Antony (Caesar’s second in command) had seized Caesar’s property and assumed leadership of the Caesarian party. Octavian responded to this by raising a private army from amongst Caesar’s veterans. He defeated Antony at Mutina in 43 BC.

Antony then fled to Lepidus, the governor of Gaul, and the two men prepared to march on Rome to seize power. Meeting with Octavian, they reached a settlement. Instead of prosecuting a civil war, they formed a legally *sanctioned* alliance called a *triumvirate*. They used their dictatorial powers to rid themselves of political opponents and avenge Caesar’s murder. Treating the Roman world as their personal property, they divided the empire into three parts:
- Octavian received Italy as well as Africa, Sicily, Sardinia
- Lepidus controlled Narbonese Gaul and Spain
- Antony gained Transalpine and Cisalpine Gaul.

In 42 BC the triumvirs successfully defeated Brutus and Cassius, the main instigators of Caesar’s murder. After this, they further divided the empire:
- Lepidus received only a part of Africa because he was suspected of intriguing with Sextus Pompey (pirate leader who controlled Sicily)
- Antony ruled the western part of the Mediterranean
- Antony kept watch on Italy by his control of Transalpine and Cisalpine Gaul. Additionally, he proceeded to the East to raise money for the Parthian campaign and settle the eastern provinces.

In 40 BC Antony married Octavian’s sister, Octavia, to strengthen the triumviral alliance. While Antony was in the East, he began a relationship with Queen Cleopatra VII of Egypt. He needed her military and financial support in his campaign against the Parthians. Rome was still the centre of power, and Antony’s absence lost him the political initiative in the East. By 36 BC, Octavian had defeated the pirate leader Sextus Pompey and eliminated Lepidus from the triumvirate (on the charge that he tried to undermine Octavian’s legions). Lepidus was stripped of his power and was installed as *pontifex maximus*, finally dying in 13 BC.

Antony fathered a number of children by Cleopatra and married her (while still married to Octavia). He was seduced by the power and the wealth of the East. A magnificent Roman *triumph* was held in Alexandria for Antony’s Armenian victories, at which occasion he styled himself as an Eastern king. Antony formally recognised Caesarion (Cleopatra’s son by
Julius Caesar) as the legitimate heir of Caesar and the co-ruler of Egypt. This was a direct threat to Octavian’s position.

Octavian cleverly used Antony’s behaviour to sway public opinion in Rome. He published Antony’s will, which left parts of the empire to Cleopatra and their children. In 32 BC the alliance between Antony and Octavian completely broke down when Antony formally renounced his marriage to Octavia. The Senate stripped Antony of his powers and declared war against Cleopatra.

The forces of Antony and Cleopatra were defeated at the battle of Actium in Greece in 31 BC, and Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide. Octavian was now the supreme ruler of the Roman world.

**For discussion**

- How did Antony’s behaviour undermine his position at Rome? How was Octavian able to use this to his advantage?
- How did Octavian ultimately succeed?

### Timeline: Augustus and the Julio-Claudians

**AUGUSTUS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>63 BC</td>
<td>Birth of Gaius Octavius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 BC</td>
<td>Accompanied his great uncle Julius Caesar in his triumph through Rome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44 BC</td>
<td>Caesar assassinated; Octavian nominated as Caesar’s son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43 BC</td>
<td>Given rank of senator and propraetor to engage Antony at battle of Mutina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formed Second Triumvirate with Antony and Lepidus for five years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 BC</td>
<td>Married Scribonia (relative of Sextus Pompey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Treaty of Brundisium with Antony, who marries Octavia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39 BC</td>
<td>Divorced Scribonia to marry Livia early in 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38 BC</td>
<td>War with Sextus Pompey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37 BC</td>
<td>Treaty of Tarentum—triumvirs extend their powers for five years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 BC</td>
<td>Sextus Pompey defeated; Lepidus no longer a triumvir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 BC</td>
<td>Antony divorced Octavia; Octavian declared war on Cleopatra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 BC</td>
<td>Battle of Actium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31–23 BC</td>
<td>Consul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 BC</td>
<td>Death of Antony and Cleopatra; Octavian took control of Egypt and its treasure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tribunician power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 BC</td>
<td>Celebrated triumph; closed temple of Janus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 BC</td>
<td>Held census; reduced the Senate to 800; became princeps senatus; created Praetorian Guard; reduced number of legions from 60–28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 BC</td>
<td>13 January—transferred state to the Senate and people of Rome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16 January—the Senate gave him the title ‘Augustus’; month of Sextilis renamed August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Given control of Spain, Gaul and Syria for ten years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formed the Praetorian Guard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27–25 BC</td>
<td>Campaigned; organised Spain and Gaul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 BC</td>
<td>Critically ill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 BC</td>
<td>Critically ill, resigned consulship&lt;br&gt;The Senate gave him <em>maius imperium proconsulare</em>, <em>tribunica potestas</em>, right of veto, control of the Senate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-22 BC?</td>
<td>Conspiracy of Murena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 BC</td>
<td>Charge of corn supply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 BC</td>
<td>Daughter Julia married Agrippa (Augustus’ friend)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22–19 BC</td>
<td>In the East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 BC</td>
<td>Received <em>imperium consulare</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–17 BC</td>
<td>Second purge of the Senate, Moral and religious reforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 BC</td>
<td>Officially adopted his grandsons Gaius and Lucius Caesar as sons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15–13 BC</td>
<td>Resided in province of Gaul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 BC</td>
<td>Powers of Augustus and Agrippa extended for five years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 BC</td>
<td>Became <em>pontifex maximus</em> after death of Lepidus, Death of Agrippa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 BC</td>
<td>Third purge of Senate, Step-son Tiberius married Julia (Augustus’ daughter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 BC</td>
<td>Dedicated <em>Ara Pacis</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 BC</td>
<td>Powers extended for ten years, Second census</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 BC</td>
<td>Tiberius given <em>tribunica potestas</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 BC</td>
<td>Gaius Caesar given title ‘prince of youth’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 BC</td>
<td>Given title <em>pater patriae</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Banished his daughter Julia for improper behaviour, Lucius Caesar made a ‘prince of youth’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 1</td>
<td>Gaius Caesar consul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 2</td>
<td>Death of Lucius Caesar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 3</td>
<td>Given another ten years of rule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 4</td>
<td>Death of Gaius Caesar, Fourth purge of the Senate, Tiberius given tribunician power for ten years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 6</td>
<td>Created military treasury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 9</td>
<td>Social and marriage laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 13</td>
<td>Deposited will with the Vestal Virgins, Renewed tribunician power of Tiberius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 14</td>
<td>Third census, Death of Augustus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TIBERIUS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>42 BC</td>
<td>Birth of Tiberius Claudius Nero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38 BC</td>
<td>Mother and father divorced so that Livia Drusilla (mother) could marry Octavian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33 BC</td>
<td>Delivered funeral oration for his father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>Married Vipsania Agrippina (daughter of Marcus Agrippa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 BC</td>
<td>Received the standards lost by Crassus, Restored Tigranes to Armenian throne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 BC</td>
<td>Forced to divorce Vipsania to marry Agrippa’s widow, Julia (Augustus’ daughter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12–9 BC</td>
<td>Reduced Pannonia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 BC</td>
<td>His beloved brother Drusus died on campaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9–7 BC</td>
<td>Campaigned in Germania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 BC</td>
<td>Augustus gave him tribunician power for five years, retired to Rhodes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 2</td>
<td>Returned to Rome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 4</td>
<td>Formally adopted by Augustus and recognised as Augustus’ successor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 4–6</td>
<td>Forced to adopt his nephew Germanicus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 4–6</td>
<td>Given tribunician power for ten years and imperium proconsulare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 6–9</td>
<td>Dealt with revolt in Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 10</td>
<td>Dealt with Pannonian revolt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 13</td>
<td>Tribunician power renewed for ten years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 14</td>
<td>Became ruler on Augustus’ death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 17</td>
<td>Germanicus given a triumph maius imperium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 18</td>
<td>Held a consulship with Germanicus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 19</td>
<td>Sudden death of Germanicus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 21</td>
<td>Sejanus, prefect of the Praetorian Guard, became Tiberius’ trusted aide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 23</td>
<td>Held consulship with son Drusus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 26</td>
<td>Retired to Villa Jovis on Capri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 29</td>
<td>Agrippina (Germanicus’ widow) and son Nero arrested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 30</td>
<td>Death of his mother Livia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 30</td>
<td>Germanicus’ son Drusus arrested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 31</td>
<td>Held consulship with Sejanus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 31</td>
<td>Sejanus killed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 32</td>
<td>Death of his brother Drusus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 33</td>
<td>Married to Junia Claudilla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 34</td>
<td>Became ruler on Tiberius’ death, supported by the Praetorian prefect Macro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 37</td>
<td>Declared Tiberius’ will invalid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**GAIUS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AD 12</td>
<td>Birth of Gaius Julius Caesar Germanicus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 14–19</td>
<td>Travelled to Germany and the East with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 19</td>
<td>Death of his father Germanicus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 20–28</td>
<td>Lived with his mother in Rome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 29</td>
<td>Death of his mother Agrippina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 30</td>
<td>Death of his brother Nero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 30</td>
<td>Elected as pontifex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 32–37</td>
<td>Lived with Tiberius on Capri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 33</td>
<td>Quaestor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 35</td>
<td>Death of his brother Drusus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 35</td>
<td>Married to Junia Claudilla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 37</td>
<td>Became ruler on Tiberius’ death, supported by the Praetorian prefect Macro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD 37</td>
<td>Declared Tiberius’ will invalid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Shared the consulship with his uncle Claudius
Serious illness in October
AD 38
Death of Tiberius Gemellus (Tiberius’ grandson) and Macro
Death of his sister Drusilla, whom he made a goddess
Married Lollia Paulina
AD 39
Second consulship; quarrelled with the Senate; deposed the consuls
Married Milonia Caesonia, birth of daughter Drusilla
Conspiracy against him
AD 40
Spent time in Gaul and on the Rhine
Sole consul
Conspiracies against him
AD 41
Fourth consulship
Murdered on 24 January

CLAUDIUS

10 BC
Birth of Tiberius Claudius Nero Germanicus
Physical infirmity kept him out of public office
Held an augurate at some time during Augustus’ reign
9 BC
His father Nero Drusus died in Germany
AD 37
Consul with Gaius
Death of his mother Antonia
AD 39
Married to Valeria Messalina
AD 41
Became ruler with the help of the Praetorian Guard; poor relations with the Senate throughout reign because of this
Exiles returned to Rome
Son Britannicus born
AD 42
Given title pater patriae
Unsuccessful revolt by Scribonianus—200 equestrians and thirty-five senators killed
Daughter Octavia born
Consul
Claudius
AD 43
Reorganised the imperial fleet, allowed legionaries to marry
Consul
Conquest of Britain
AD 44
Returned from Britain to celebrate triumph
Reorganised praetors and quaestors
AD 47
Celebrated Secular Games
Consul
AD 47–8
Used power of censor to curtail the Senate
AD 48
Messalina ‘married’ C. Silius and was executed with her followers
AD 49  Married his niece Agrippina
AD 50  Claudius adopts Agrippina’s son, Nero
AD 51  Afranius Burrus became commander of the Praetorian Guard
        Consul
        Grain shortage at Rome
AD 52  Fucine tunnel opened
AD 54  Death of Claudius (from mushroom poisoning?)

NERO
AD 37  Birth of Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus
AD 39  Mother Agrippina exiled
        Lived with his aunt Domitia Lepida
AD 40  Death of father
AD 41  Agrippina recalled from exile
AD 49  Claudius married Agrippina
        Seneca selected as his tutor
        Betrothed to Claudius’ daughter Octavia
AD 50  Adopted as Claudius’ son
AD 51  Assumed toga virilis (a sign of adulthood)
AD 53  Married Octavia
        First public speech
AD 54  Became the ruler after Claudius’ death
AD 55  Death of Claudius’ son Britannicus
        Agrippina removed from power
AD 59  Death of Agrippina
        Celebrated Youth Games
AD 60  Celebrated Neronian Games
AD 62  Death of Burrus
        Tigellinus and Faenius Rufus became the commanders of the Guard
        Divorced and killed Octavia
        Married Poppaea Sabina
AD 63  Birth and death of daughter, Claudia
AD 64  Great Fire at Rome—persecution of the Christians
        Began work on the Domus Aurea (Golden House)
AD 65  Conspiracy of Piso
        Deaths of Seneca and the poet Lucan
        Death of Poppaea
AD 66  Married Statilia Messalina
        Deaths of Petronius, Thrasea Paetus and Barea Soranus
        Tigrdates of Armenia visited Rome
        Tour of Greece
AD 67  Death of Corbulo
        Declared the liberation of Greece and celebrated the Greek Games
AD 68  Vindex revolted against Nero but is defeated
        Galba, governor of Spain, successfully revolted against Nero
        Death of Nero
FIGURE 9.1 The Roman world in the early empire
Understanding and using the sources

Refer to the timeline for Augustus. What actions did Augustus take between 31 and 27 BC?

ROMAN GOVERNMENT

Up to the time of Julius Caesar, the Romans had a republican form of government. Res publica means ‘public things’; to the Romans, the republic meant ‘the state’. In this period the state was governed by:

- the people: Roman citizens who met in various assemblies to elect magistrates and officials
- the magistrates: elected by the people to carry out specific duties
- the Senate: mainly drawn from the aristocratic classes of Rome and from ex-magistrates. By the late republic the Senate numbered 900. Initially, an advisory body, during the republic it became the most powerful institution, wielding legislative, economic, social and executive authority. A decree of the Senate was known as a ‘senatus consultum’, which, though framed as advice, was accepted as law. The senior member of the Senate was honoured with the title of princeps senatus, or first statesman.

THE TRIBUNE OF THE PEOPLE:
- Held tribunicia potestas
- Had power of veto over the magistrates
- Could summon the Senate and introduce legislation

THE CENSUS:
- Held census
- Regulated membership of the Senate
- Supervised moral conduct

THE CONSUL:
- Chief executive
- Commanded the army

THE PRAETOR:
- Responsible for judicial matters

THE AEDILE:
- Responsible for corn supply, public order, roads, games and buildings

THE QUAESTOR:
- Responsible for financial matters

THE ARMED FORCES:
- A young man usually began his ten years of military service at age seventeen

The cursus honorum

The holding of political office was vitally important to Roman men. A Roman was judged a success by the political heights he had reached. There was a strict
order of offices and magistracies that men were expected to undertake. This was called the ‘cursus honorum’. Magistrates were elected, and they progressed in order up this ‘ladder’ of offices, holding each position for one year only. The pinnacle of a man’s career was the office of consul. The numbers of these magistrates changed throughout the late republic. ‘Potestas’ is the general term for the power held by magistrates. This potestas gave them legal power to carry out defined tasks.

The higher-order magistrates—praetors, consuls, military tribunes and dictators—held supreme administrative power called ‘imperium’, which gave the holders authority on such matters as law, military command, policy making, life and death. After their term as consuls and praetors, men were sent to govern the provinces and were called ‘proconsuls’ and ‘propraetors’.

**Tribune of the people**

In the early republic, this office represented the needs of the ordinary people of Rome (the plebeians) against the autocratic power of the consuls. The tribunes’ right of veto meant that they could challenge any official. Their power was called the ‘tribunicia potestas’, and could be used only in the city of Rome. Part of their official function was to summon the Senate and introduce legislation.

**The ‘First Settlement’ of 27 BC**

Technically, the triumvirate ceased when Lepidus was ousted in 36 BC. After this the two most powerful men competed for control of the Roman world. Antony’s defeat at Actium ensured Octavian’s supremacy, who ruled through his triumviral powers and the consulship. It was important that Octavian legitimise his political position; therefore, in 27 BC he handed back his powers to the Senate and people of Rome. Brunt and Moore suggest that he held ‘extraordinary, dictatorial powers’, which he then relinquished.1 In chapter 34 of the *Res Gestae*, Augustus himself wrote:

> In my sixth and seventh consulships, 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.

An excerpt of Augustus’ speech to the Senate follows in Source 9.1.

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**SOURCE 9.1**

> Yet for all that, I shall lead you no longer, and nobody will be able to say that all the actions of my career to date have been undertaken for the sake of winning supreme power. On the contrary, I lay down my office in its entirety and return to you all authority absolutely—authority over the army, the laws and the provinces—not only those territories which you entrusted to me, but those which I later secured for you. Thus my deeds in themselves shall also bear witness to the fact that from the very beginning I had no desire to rule . . .

> In this way Octavian’s leadership was confirmed both by the Senate and by the people. Even so, he still wished to be regarded as a representative of the people, and hence while he undertook the whole care and supervision of public business on the ground that it demanded a special degree of attention, he announced that he would not personally govern all the provinces, and that those which he did take on, he would not continue to govern permanently . . .

> When Octavian had finally put his plans into effect, the name Augustus was conferred on him by the Senate and the people . . .

> Through this process the power both of the people and of the Senate was wholly transferred into the hands of Augustus, and it was from this time that a monarchy, strictly speaking, was established. It would certainly be most truthful to describe it as a monarchy, even if at a later date two or three men held the supreme power at the same time. It is true that the Romans hated the actual name of monarch so vehemently that they did not refer to their emperors either as dictators or kings or anything similar.


In 27 BC, the Senate voted that Octavian should receive, for a period of ten years, the command and administration of the provinces of Spain, Gaul and Syria. Egypt had been under his control since 30 BC and he continued to administer it. He was allowed to guide the administration of the senatorial provinces through his *auctoritas*. This is a vital term for the understanding of Augustus’ power. Not easily defined, it is often translated as ‘influence’ and ‘prestige’. In the *Res Gestae*, chapter 34, Augustus distinguishes between power and auctoritas. He wanted the Romans to believe that he did not rule through power or force, but rather that his every word was obeyed because of the authority that he possessed.

He was given the title ‘Augustus’. This title bore religious overtones, suggesting someone who was sacred and holy, and ‘symbolised both the gratitude felt towards him as the saviour for the state and the
pre-eminence of his position. Octavian was pleased with this title, and from 27 BC, he took it as his name. The title ‘imperator’ (military general) had been given to him in 43 BC after the victory at Mutina, but it now became part of his name, constituting an expression of unlimited imperium. He also received the civic crown that was given for saving the lives of citizens in battle and the symbolic golden shield.

Understanding and using the sources

- Why did Augustus take this action in 27 BC?
- How did the Senate and people of Rome respond?
- How did Augustus wish to be regarded?
- What was Augustus’ political position after 27 BC?

For discussion

Cassius Dio refers to Augustan rule as a ‘monarchy’. Do you agree? Consult other sources.

The ‘Second Settlement’ of 23 BC

Augustus spent time in the provinces between 27 and 23 BC, and resigned the consulship upon recovery. The consulship had been held successively by various political leaders, but a perpetual tenure of this office completely violated republican precedent. Augustus’ ongoing tenure of consular office created some ill-feeling among the nobles, who felt that their political careers were being curtailed. Augustus became aware of the nobles’ hostility on this issue and decided to deal with the matter by resigning. It is important to understand that Augustus relinquished only the consulship in 23 BC—he retained the imperium that he had received in 27 BC and therefore did not surrender military control.

Because Augustus had resigned his consulship, the Senate passed a number of decrees that gave him extra compensatory powers. As a patrician he could not be a tribune, so he received the power of the tribune. The tribunate had been a constant source of trouble in the late republic, so by separating the power from the office Augustus ensured that no one would want to use the tribunate for championing populist causes. This was the one constitutional base that could not be fully justified because no other leader had held the tribunate for life. The tribunician power gave him:

- the right to introduce measures into the Senate
- the right to intercede
- the right to summon the assembly
- the right to compel reluctant citizens to obey
- the right to speak first in the Senate.

He used the tribunician power to date the years of his reign because of its popular appeal rather than its practicality. He used it to disguise the reality of power, which depended on imperium.

The resignation of the consulship meant that Augustus no longer held any imperium within the boundary, or pomerium, of Rome. The Senate accorded Augustus a special exemption, whereby he did not forfeit his imperium when he entered the city of Rome. The Senate defined his powers as ‘imperium maius proconsulare’, giving him superior imperium to other magistrates. This meant, in effect, that other proconsuls were subject to his orders. Every five years this imperium was renewed, so that Augustus held this office for life. The effect of this power was that Augustus could interfere in any province anywhere in the Roman world. It is important to note that Augustus makes no mention of this power in the Res Gestae.

For discussion

Why do you think Augustus deliberately avoids any mention of his maius imperium?

Source 9.2

But after recovering from his illness he brought his will into the Senate, intending to read it out to prove he had appointed no successor to his power. But he did not read it, since no one allowed it . . . Augustus . . . then resigned his consulsip. From the time public affairs had stabilised, he himself and most of his colleagues had held their consulsips for a full year, and he wished to stop this practice, so that as many as possible might be consuls . . . he won praise by resigning . . . The Senate then voted that Augustus should be tribune for life with the right to bring one motion before the Senate at every meeting on any subject, even when he was not consul, and allowed him to have proconsular power once and for all, so that he did not give it up by crossing the pomerium into the city, and need not renew it, and made this power greater than the power of each governor in every province. From this time on, Augustus and the emperors after him have used not only the other powers but tribunician powers too, as a legal right, but neither Augustus nor any other emperor has held the actual title of tribune.

Cassius Dio, Roman History, cited in C. Ehrhardt, Classical Studies for Schools, pp. 18–19

Ibid., p. 10.
Understanding and using the sources

- According to Cassius Dio, why did Augustus resign the consulship in 23 BC?
- What powers did the Senate give him in return?
- How important was tribunician power to Augustus?
- What other powers was he given?

Overview of the powers and titles of Augustus

- In 22 BC Augustus was offered even more power by the Senate and people of Rome, but he refused it. In 23/22 BC, there had been a serious conspiracy against him led by Murena and a severe grain shortage in Rome. The Romans believed that only Augustus could save them in their hour of peril, and offered him the dictatorship and the consulship for life. Augustus refused these offers of power, but successfully intervened to supervise the grain supply. Cassius Dio tells us that he understood the hatred these titles would bring. It is interesting to note that in Chapter 5 of the *Res Gestae*, Augustus mentions the powers that he refused, but makes no reference to the *maius imperium*, which he accepted.

- Dio tells us that in 19 BC Augustus received the *imperium* of the consuls for life, the right to sit between the two consuls and the right to use the *fasces*, the symbols of power associated with the magistrates. Augustus used his consular prerogative when he received the names of candidates for the consular and praetorian elections.

- In 28 BC he became *princeps senatus*, which gave him the right to speak first in the Senate. Augustus chose the name *princeps civitatis*, first citizen in the Roman state, to describe his pre-eminent position. This title was merely a courtesy, expressing no defined functions. However, it cleverly implied supremacy, authority and also some form of equality. As princeps, Augustus was regarded as a super patron of the Roman state. Using this title, Augustus, for example, recommended prominent equestrians to the Senate.

- In 28 BC Augustus conducted a census with Agrippa as his colleague. The censor was an important Roman magistrate, without *imperium*, whose responsibility was to revise the citizen and Senatorial rolls. Augustus was asked in 19 BC to be the sole supervisor of laws and morals. As he notes in the *Res Gestae*, he refused to take this office with supreme power, for this would imply a dictatorship, and he was always careful to avoid any hint of dictatorial power. He did, however, take the censoorial power with a colleague on at least three other occasions.

- Augustus attained the office of *pontifex maximus* in 12 BC when Lepidus died. Using this office, he stimulated a revival of the public religion and rebuilt Roman temples.

- In 2 BC he received the crowning honour when the Senate conferred on him the title of *pater patriae*, or ‘father of his country’. Augustus concludes his account of his lifelong achievements with details of this honour.

Activity: research

- What was the *paterfamilias*? What was the importance of the father in Roman society?
- What was the significance of the title *pater patriae* for Augustus?

Augustus’ constitutional position was novel in that he held tribunician power, and was proconsul, imperator, consul and later pontifex maximus. He had no clearly defined title; instead, he had a variety of titles, which he used to great effect.

Activity: research

Draw up a chart titled ‘Augustus’ powers and honours’. In the first column, list these titles/powers: *Augustus*, pontifex maximus, *pater patriae*, consulships, tribunicia potestas, *maius imperium*, princeps, imperator. Then complete the chart as shown on p. 281.
Will the real Augustus please stand up?

You can read Suetonius’ description of Augustus’ physical appearance in his Life of Augustus, Chapters 79–81. Augustus had a few physical defects, but his public image suppressed these. An important aspect of Augustus’ leadership was this public image, which is reflected in the Res Gestae and in Augustan literature and monuments (buildings, statues).

When Augustus came to power in 27 BC he realised that because of actions in his early career—the formation of the triumvirate with Antony, the proscriptions, his lacklustre performance in battle, his treachery towards friends—he had to cultivate his public image carefully. Augustus tried to change his image from that of tyrant to that of father of his country. He wished to be remembered as:

- a triumphant general
- a saviour of citizens’ lives
- a bringer of peace
- a religious leader
- a conservative traditionalist
- the saviour of the city of Rome.

As early as 36 BC, Augustus insisted that his speeches be written down. In 13 BC, he listed his achievements thus far, and read them to the Senate. The very first sentence of the Res Gestae shows this new image of Augustus:

At the age of nineteen, on my own responsibility and at my 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.

Here he is trying to portray himself as a private citizen who had taken on the whole burden of government. He lists games and circuses and the money that he spent on Rome because he wished to prove that he was a champion of the common people.

He recognised that there were different types of propaganda for different types of people:

- art and architecture would appeal to everyone
- slogans on coins and visual representations would impress the masses
- poetry and history would influence the literate upper classes.

Augustus was also very aware of criticism, and used every means to overcome it.

Augustus was always portrayed in traditional ways, wearing either the toga, a military uniform or the garb of the pontifex maximus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>When did he gain this?</th>
<th>For how long?</th>
<th>Meaning of title</th>
<th>Explanation of power/title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Augustus</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The real significance of Augustus’ greatest honour, the conferment of his new title, was clear from the start. The young Octavian had once thought of having himself called Romulus, but by 27 BC this would not have suited his new image, since it smacked of kingship. Augustus was an adjective with a broad range of meanings, including ‘stately’, ‘dignified’ and ‘holy’. It could also be connected with the verb augere. (to increase) After all, had he not made the Empire grow? . . . As an honorific title, Augustus was a brilliant choice, for even as he officially relinquished power, it surrounded him with a special aura, ‘as if the name alone had already conferred divinity upon him’ (Florus, II, 34, 66). The Senate also wanted to rename the month Sextilis and call it Augustus, an honour which he did eventually accept. His title was thus immortalised in the Roman calendar. A new portrait of Caesar Augustus (as he was now commonly known) must have been created about this time . . . The face is now characterised by a calm, elevated expression and the spontaneous turn of the head in the youthful portrait has given way to a timeless and remote dignity. Instead of the tousled hair over the forehead, each lock has been carefully arranged according to classical principles of symmetry . . . It was reproduced in every part of the empire and fixed the visual image of Augustus for all time, although it had little to do with his actual appearance . . . The new portrait type is indeed the visual equivalent of the title ‘Augustus’ and exploits all the best possible associations of the name. Augustus’ extraordinary position in the Roman state is here defined in art.

P. Zanker, The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus, pp. 98–9

Figure 9.5 The new image of Augustus
This is a famous and important statue showing Augustus’ military image. It celebrates Augustus as the mighty conqueror of the Parthians and shows the recovery of the standards captured by the Parthians at the battle of Carrhae in 53 BC (it may also have represented auctoritas). It was placed in Livia’s villa at Prima Porta (hence the name), and was probably commissioned by the Senate or somebody close to the princeps. It depicts Augustus dressed as a general; wearing a cuirass (or breast-plate) and ceremonial cloak; holding a spear; wearing footwear associated with heroes and gods, not mortals.

The statue also shows Eros (the god of love) riding a dolphin at Augustus’ feet—this is believed to represent a link with Venus Genetrix, the patron of the Julian family. The central feature of the cuirass depicts a Parthian king handing back the insignia of the Roman legions to a military figure. Not only did the statue celebrate a victory over the Parthians but it symbolised the perfect world order brought about by Augustus who appears as ‘father of the world’.

**Source 9.4**

Although more than 200 ancient sculptural portraits of the emperor Augustus still exist, we do not know what the man really looked like. The emperor Augustus, it seems, had trouble with his image—and he fixed it just as many a politician would today: with good public relations. . . . In the sculptures of the Prima Porta type, the features are so unrealistic as to constitute an ‘artificial face’, according to Professor Paul Zanker, director of the University of Munich’s Institute of Classical Archaeology. The emperor’s motives for having his face idealised have been a focus of scholarly attention. Zanker, in a recent interview in Munich, said: ‘One should not think in the categories of modern advertising. . . . It was not advertising to be elected, or anything like that. . . . Augustus had the power already, and the self-representation did not serve directly to help retain it. . . . the portrait was supposed to show that he had ideal human qualities and, at the same time, that he stood for a culture that combined the best traditions.’ Another specialist, John Pollini of Johns Hopkins University Department of Classics, said [the Prima Porta] ‘was part of a representational program which gave Romans hope for the future under Augustus, as a divinely inspired leader. He claimed to be acting as the agent of the gods on earth.’

*Sydney Morning Herald, 1983*

**Understanding and using the sources**

- What image was Augustus trying to promote?
Coins
Augustus used coins as a concentrated propaganda tool. He used coins to promote his main themes such as:
- peace
- victory and military successes
- his family and the establishment of the dynasty
- his titles and honours
- his great generosity.

Maecenas (Gaius Maecenas 74 or 64–8 BC)
- friend and adviser of Augustus (unofficial minister for propaganda)
- greatest literary patron of the age
- friend and patron of Horace, Virgil and Propertius.

Horace (Quintus Horatius Flaccus 65–8 BC)
- one of the most famous Latin poets
- through Maecenas, offered the post of secretary to Augustus
- his works include Epodes, Satires, Odes, Epistles and Ars Poetica
- his ode Carmen Saeculare of 17 BC honours his imperial patron, Augustus.

Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro 70–19 BC)
- considered to be the greatest of all Roman poets
- client of Asinius Pollio, and came under the patronage of Maecenas
- friend of the poet Horace
- enjoyed imperial patronage from 29 BC until his death
- his most famous works are the Bucolics, Georgics, and the Aeneid
- His work is regarded as the epitome of the golden age of literature.

Propertius (50–15 BC)
- client of Maecenas
- wrote elegies and erotic poetry.

Ovid (Publius Ovidius Naso 43 BC–AD 17 or 18)
- successful poet with a vast body of work
- his main patron was Augustus
- exiled in AD 8—possibly because hisArs Amatoria (Art of Love) offended Augustus
- his pleas for forgiveness were ignored and he died in exile
- his main works include Amores, Ars Amatoria, Metamorphoses and Epistulae Heroidum Fasti.

Tibullus (Albius 54–19 BC)
- client of Messalla
- friend of Horace and Ovid
- wrote mainly elegies and panegyrics.

Livy (Titus Livius 64 or 59 BC–AD 12 or 17)
- Roman historian
- enjoyed the patronage of Augustus
- his main work was the history of Rome called Ab Urbe Conditi (From the Foundation of the City), a narrative of the period from Rome’s earliest days to the death of Drusus in 9 BC (142 books in all).
Upon this shield the fire-god, with knowledge of things to come,  
Being versed in the prophets, had wrought events from Italian history  
And Roman triumphs . . .  
Centrally were displayed two fleets of bronze, engaged in the battle of Actium; all about Cape Leucas you saw brisk movement of naval formations; the sea was a blaze of gold.  
On one side Augustus Caesar, high up on the poop, is leading the Italians into battle, the Senate and people with him, his home-gods and the great gods: two flames shoot up from his helmet in jubilant light, and his father’s star dawns over its crest. Elsewhere in the scene is Agrippa—the gods and the winds fight for him.

Virgil, Aeneid, cited in K. Chisholm & J. Ferguson, Rome: The Augustan Age (eds), pp. 222–3

Understanding and using the sources

What is the impression of Augustus given in Source 9.5?

Can you remember when he was given the title Augustus? Does this create a problem for Virgil?

Activity: research

Find out about Agrippa’s role in the battle of Actium.

How did Maecenas contribute to Augustus’ success.

For discussion

The Augustan poets have been called ‘purchased propagandists’. Do you agree with this comment?

The Augustan building program

Augustus maintained a major building program throughout his rule. This gave his reign an aura of respectability, promoted his image and connected him with the heroes of the past. He built or renovated temples, the Forum Augustum, porticoes, arches, parks and gardens, baths, theatres, a great library, markets, granaries, and docks and warehouses.

Augustus was notable for his avoidance of luxury. ‘His new house’, writes Suetonius, ‘stood out neither for size nor for elegance. It had only short colonnades with columns of Alban stone and its rooms had neither marble decorations nor handsome pavements. For more than forty years, too, he used the same bedroom for winter and summer.’ The details of this description are highly significant. The pillars of Augustus’ house were not of exotic imported marble but of local Italian stone. His colonnades did not stretch for miles. The interior decoration was modest—here, too, no marble was used. Augustus did not pursue novelty in his living arrangements but was content with the same ones for forty years.


Understanding and using the sources


What can be learnt from these sources about Augustus’ wealth?

How did the building program enhance Augustus’ image?

How does this contrast with Source 9.6?

For further investigation

Either in groups or individually, investigate other examples of the Augustan building program in Rome and the provinces. Find a variety of sources in your school and local library. You might like to present this as a lecturette or a collage or a series of posters.

Money

How could Augustus afford such an extensive building program? Augustus was personally wealthy, receiving money from the inheritance of his father, the proscriptions in 42 BC, war booty, the treasury of Egypt. It became a feature of Roman life that wealthy Romans would leave in their wills a significant portion of their estate to Augustus. In the last twenty years of his life he received 1400 million sesterces from legacies. Augustus not only used this money to beautify Rome, but he also spent lavishly on:

- dedications to temples
A mausoleum is a stately or magnificent tomb, usually associated with royalty. The Mausoleum of Augustus was built in 28 BC in the Campus Martius and was unusual because it was built largely of concrete. It was four storeys high, eighty-eight metres in diameter and designed to resemble an ancient burial mound. From the outset, Augustus envisaged it as the burial place of his family and heirs. Julius Caesar had been buried at the Campus Martius and Augustus was continuing the family tradition.

Inside the mausoleum was a central circular corridor in which were stocked funerary urns containing the ashes of the dead. It is known from the archaeological excavations of 1935 that the following were interred in the Mausoleum: Augustus, Livia, Drusus (Augustus’ step-son); Marcellus (Augustus’ nephew), Lucius and Gaius (Augustus’ grandsons), Agrippa (Augustus’ friend and son-in-law), Octavia (Augustus’ sister), Tiberius and his first wife Vipsania, Germanicus, Gaius (Caligula) and Claudius. The two members of Augustus’ family that were forbidden to be placed there were the two Julias (his daughter and grand-daughter). Some later Roman rulers, including Vespasian and Nerva, also had their ashes placed there.

**Augustus’ financial measures**

- In 15 BC Augustus established an imperial mint for gold and silver coinage at Lugdumum in Gaul
- the Senate minted bronze and copper coinage
- Augustus exercised control over both the imperial and senatorial coin types
- Augustus wielded great influence over public finances as the state depended on his generosity
- In AD 6 Augustus established a military treasury (aerarium militare) to provide for retired soldiers; this was financed partly from his personal fortune and two special taxes—death duties (of 5 per cent) and a sales tax
- After conducting the censuses in the provinces, Augustus introduced a poll tax (tributum capitis) and a land tax (tributum soli) which were collected by the provincial authorities
- Augustus also introduced frontier customs dues of 25 per cent and a provincial tax of 2.5 per cent.
  
  It is interesting to note that ancient Romans complained about the tax system just as we do today. As the taxes were based on land, lawyers and doctors who

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**Figure 9.8 Reconstruction of the Mausoleum of Augustus**

- the army
- buying land for veterans
- the corn dole and handouts of money for the urban poor
- circuses and shows for the entertainment of the people of Rome
- donations to the treasury of Rome (aerarium), on numerous occasions when it was bankrupt.
  
made their living from collecting fees paid little tax. Wealthy merchants also paid little tax, for their assets were ships and goods, not land.

For discussion

‘Augustus used money as another means to control Rome’. To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Augustus used every means at his disposal—finances, literature, art and architecture, coinage—to promote himself, his policies and his family. His motives have been hotly debated by historians for many years. ‘Rarely’, according to Zanker, ‘has art been pressed into the service of political power so directly as in the age of Augustus. Poetry and art are filled with the imagery of a blessed world, an empire at peace, under the sway of a great ruler.’

THE RELIGIOUS REFORMS OF AUGUSTUS

When Augustus returned to Rome in 29 BC after the success at Actium, he immediately began a religious revival:

He exploited the conviction that a revival of traditional religious customs and observances was necessary for the recovery of peace and harmony in the Roman world. There was a widespread expectation current through much of the earlier part of the century that a new era which would be a second golden age was about to begin.™


He restored old shrines and temples and revived old priesthoods and cults. Horace explains, ‘you will continue to pay for the sins of your father, O Roman, until you restore the ruined temples of the gods, and their images filthy with black smoke.’ (Odes, III, 6.1).

- Throughout his reign Augustus paid particular homage to the gods—Venus Genetrix, Mars Ultor, Apollo, Jupiter to name a few.
- In 27 BC he received the title ‘Augustus’ which bore significant religious overtones.
- In 19 BC his name was added to the hymns of the gods.
- In 17 BC the Secular Games were held.
- He renewed the cult of Lares; his genius (spirit) was linked with this cult. The people were encouraged to worship the cult of Lares Augusti and to regard him not as a god but as the guardian of the state.
- Augustus would not allow the worship of himself as a god in Rome or Italy, but it was allowed throughout the provinces. There were temples to Roma and Augustus set up in such places as Pergamum, Nicomedia, Lugdunum and Cologne. Augustus encouraged this as a way of promoting unity in the empire.

SOURCE 9.7

He restored several rituals from ancient ceremonies which had gradually died away, for example the Augury of Safety, the official priesthood of Jupiter, the rites of the Lupercals, the Secular Games and the Compitalia festival . . . He established the custom that the Lares Compitales should be adorned twice a year with spring and summer flowers.

Suetonius, cited in C. Ehrhardt, Classical Studies for Schools, pp. 43-4

PROFILE

THE ARA PACIS

The Altar of Augustan Peace or Ara Pacis Augustae was built on the Field of Mars from 13–9 BC. It was commissioned by the Senate to give thanks for Augustus’ safe return from the provinces of Spain and Gaul. It was reconstructed by archaeologists in the 1930s. This is an important Augustan monument because it is a visual representation of the values of the reign—pax (peace), gravitas (authority), humanitas (humane character), familia (family). (Such values were esteemed by the Romans.) It is a significant piece of Augustan propaganda because it depicts the moral and religious tenets of Augustus’ reign. It was also a clear indication of Augustus’ dynastic hopes.

The altar, a copy of a smaller altar in the Athenian Agora, is a U-shaped stepped platform with the open end facing out to the Campus Martius. The altar itself is surrounded by panelled
walls on which are carved scenes both mythical and historical. The altar is reached by two doors in the walls. The panels depict:
- a full-breasted woman holding two babies in her lap—thought to be a mother goddess (perhaps Venus, Pax, Italia or Tellus). She is surrounded by livestock, fruit and flowers. This scene is thought to represent the new golden age brought by Augustus and the fertility that was renewed through peace.
- Aeneas sacrificing to the gods upon his arrival in Italy—this connects Aeneas with Augustus.
- A similar scene of Augustus sacrificing to the gods. This forms part of a larger panel on the south side showing an actual procession and sacrifice held in 13 BC to give thanks for Augustus’ safe return from the provinces. His whole family is in attendance.
- The north panel shows magistrates and their families attending the same procession.

**SOURCE 9.8**

My song has led to the Altar of Peace
one day from the month’s end
Peace, be present with the wreath of Actium on your head
and stay in kindness through the world
Let there be no reason for a triumph—and no enemies:
you will bring more glory than war!
Let the soldier carry arms only to repress arms.
Let the trumpet sound only for ceremony.

Let the ends of the earth stand in awe of the men of Rome:
if not fear, let there be love.
Priests, add incense to the flames of Peace,
strike down the white victim.
May the house which guarantees peace, in peace last forever—
be that your prayer to the gods who love piety.


**Understanding and using the sources**

- List all the objects in Figure 9.9 dealing with fertility and the products of the earth.
- The nymphs on either side of the mother goddess represent winds of land and sea. How are they depicted in this scene?
- Why would Augustus approve a scene like this on his monument? What overall purpose does it serve?
- In Source 9.8, what does the line beginning ‘Let the soldier carry arms’ suggest about Rome’s military policy?
- What does the line beginning ‘Let the ends of the earth’ suggest about Rome’s position in the world?
- What do you think the ‘white victim’ might be?
- What is the theme of this passage from Ovid?
SOCIAL VALUES AND REFORMS

Women of the imperial family

The women of Augustus’ family were raised in the palace under the strict supervision of Augustus. Their education was traditional. These women had to set a positive example to society and were important in the formation of dynastic marriages.

Part of the Augustan program of reform was to restore traditional Roman values such as the importance of marriage and family. Females were expected to be modest, to marry young, have large families and, as Roman matrons, exhibit the feminine form of gravitas.

Augustus tried to legislate on Roman morality. When he came to power he found himself faced with many social problems: declining birth rate among the upper ruling classes, decay in family life and values, many wealthy Romans engaged in riotous living and disinclined to marry. His purpose was to redress these social ills.

The Julian laws

In 19/18 BC Augustus introduced a series of bills before the Senate designed to encourage the upper classes, in particular, to marry and procreate. The lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus penalised those who did not marry, while the ius trium liberorum enabled those men of senatorial rank who did marry and fathered three or more children to have their careers rapidly promoted. The lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis restrained adultery and defined the circumstances under which Romans could be divorced. Harsh penalties, such as banishment and loss of property, were prescribed for those found guilty of adultery. Wealthy Romans were spending fortunes on banquets and houses and forgetting the simplicitas that had made Rome great. Legislation was passed to curtail the excesses of the upper classes and to limit how much could be spent on houses and food. Augustus had to set a good example, so when he inherited the luxurious house of Veditus Pollio, a man who had helped him in his rise to power, he had it razed to the ground because it contravened the sumptuary laws. Members of the Senate had criticised this legislation; Augustus replied by ‘practising what he preached’.

In 17 BC Rome celebrated the Secular Games—three days and nights of games and sacrifices followed by seven days of entertainment. These games illustrated Augustus’ restoration of religion and traditional values. As part of the celebration, there was a parade by 110 matrons and separate choirs of boys and girls who sang Horace’s Ode composed for this occasion.

The lex Papia Poppaea

The lex Papia Poppaea, passed in AD 9, supplemented the previous laws. Not everything that Augustus did was successful. This moral and social legislation was not popular and rebounded on Augustus himself. Ulpian, the 3rd-century jurist, comments on this legislation, ‘lex Julia allows women a respite from its requirements for one year after the death of a husband, and for six months after a divorce; but the lex Papia allows a respite for two years after the death of a husband and for a year and six months after a divorce.’

It is important to note that Augustus was changing the functions of the state. Instead of permitting families and individuals to be responsible for their private behaviour he was making such behaviour answerable to the state.

Other reforms

Augustus wanted to maintain the value of Roman citizenship. He therefore restricted the number of freedmen. Under a law of 17 BC, freedmen were given Latin status and their children were allowed to have Roman citizenship. A law of 2 BC limited the number of slaves that could be freed. Freedmen played an important role in Augustus’ administration, but he barred them from holding public office or serving in the legions. Freedmen were to play an increasingly important role throughout the Julio-Claudian period.

For discussion

- What do you think Augustus hoped to achieve by the Secular Games?
- Why did Augustus have difficulty enforcing morality?

Julia exposed

Julia was the only daughter of Augustus and Scribonia. In 25 BC, at age fourteen, she was married to her cousin, Marcellus. Marcellus died in 23, and two years later Julia was married to Agrippa (in his 40s) and bore him five children, the last of whom was born after his father’s death. Augustus was justly proud of his daughter, who epitomised his new legislation. Agrippa died in 12, and Augustus immediately married Julia to his step-son Tiberius. (Tiberius was forced to divorce his wife, Vipsania, in order to marry Julia.)

The marriage of Julia and Tiberius was not a happy one, for Julia thought that she had married beneath her rank. It is thought that Augustus decided that the children needed a step-father. Augustus became absorbed in the task of introducing his grandsons into public life. While Tiberius served in the East and Augustus involved himself with her children, Julia went ‘raging’—committing adultery, indulging in drunken revels in the Forum and on the rostra and indulging in indecent behaviour.

In 2 BC, encouraged by the Julian laws, informers told Augustus about his daughter’s scandalous behaviour. Augustus could not believe that Julia was anything but a faithful wife and, at first, refused to believe the rumours. Seneca (a 1st-century senator, writer and philosopher) wrote that Augustus afterwards went into a rage, ignored his own legislation and divorced Julia on behalf of Tiberius. Augustus wrote to the Senate and detailed Julia’s crimes. Given no chance to defend herself, Julia was banished to the island of Pandateria. Her elderly mother Scribonia (a model of Roman womanhood) went into exile with her daughter. In AD 4 she moved from the island to Rhegium where she died in 14.

Augustus’ behaviour was out of proportion with the crimes committed by Julia. It would have been more appropriate to have banished her quietly. When one examines the names of the men with whom Julia had been associating, a more sinister picture emerges. They were men of great importance in Rome, including Cornelius Scipio Sempionius Gracchus and Julius Antonius. Writers such as Seneca have suggested that Julia’s liaisons constituted a serious conspiracy against Augustus led by his daughter.

For discussion

- To what extent was Augustus responsible for Julia’s behaviour?
- Why were Julia’s actions such an affront to Augustus?

For further investigation

Other women that played a role in the time of Augustus and the Julio-Claudian rulers were Scribonia, Octavia, Antonia the Younger, Antonia the Elder, Vipsania Agrippina, Messalina, Agrippina the Elder and Agrippina the Younger (see Chapter 6). Poppaea Sabina. In groups or individually, find out what you can about each of these women. Try to find primary and secondary sources on them. Present your information in either written or oral form.

Livia

Livia played an important symbolic role in the Augustan age. Symbolism was very important in Rome—the fasces were the symbols of power; the closing of the gates of the temple of Janus symbolised peace; Livia symbolised womanhood. As Augustus was pater patriae, so Livia was the imperial mother. She was ‘depicted as the benefactor of family life, first wife and mother of the state, symbol of chaste and old-fashioned Roman womanhood’. There are, however, contradictory images of Livia: the promoter of family unity and the destroyer of the imperial family.

Livia’s background

- Livia Drusilla (58 BC–29 AD).
- Married Tiberius Claudius Nero in 43 or 42 BC.
- In November 42 BC, her son Tiberius was born; the family fled Italy because of their Antonian sympathies, but an amnesty permitted their return in 40.

Early in 38 BC Octavian married Livia. This required a special dispensation from the Pontifical College—both Scribonia and Livia were pregnant.

In 35 BC Livia was granted the sacrosanctity of a tribune. This was the first time it had been given to a woman who was not a Vestal Virgin.

She was exempted from the lex Voconia, which limited the amount that women could inherit. Livia's significant personal wealth included financial interests in Italy, mines in Gaul and estates in Asia Minor and Egypt.

Her one child by Augustus died. In 9 BC she was exempted from Augustus’ guardianship (tutela) because she had three children (though one had died).

After Augustus’ death in AD 14, she was given the title 'Julia Augusta' and adopted into the Julian family.

She died in AD 29, aged 86.

In AD 42 she was deified by Claudius—women could then take oaths in the name of Livia.

Livia and religion

Livia ably assisted Augustus in his plans to revitalise Roman religion and society. Augustus was associated with the chief god Jupiter and Livia was associated with Juno, the wife of Jupiter. She was also associated with all the female deities and cults connected with women—chastity, marriage, childbirth, family life. From Ovid we learn that Livia restored the Temple of Bona Dea Subsaxana. An inscription on the Temple of Fortuna Muliebris presents her as sponsor of the female cults Pudicitia Plebeia and Pudicitia Patricia (plebeian and patrician chastity). Livia dedicated a shrine on 11 June, a day dedicated to the festival of Matralia, which honoured Fortuna Virgo and Mater Matuta. These deities were connected with the traditional child-bearing and domestic roles of women. Livia also honoured Concordia as goddess of married love.

In a significant way, Livia was giving religious justification for the Augustan ideals. She was trying to encourage women to take up the old Roman values by honouring childbirth and marriage. Following the moral legislation, Augustus and Livia tried to show by their example that marriage was beneficial for the life of Rome. Livia built temples and other monuments, such as the Porticus of Livia, which had an interior garden, art collection and trellised walkways.

Political activity

Livia had an active role advising Augustus and interceding on behalf of others, such as Cinna Magnus (conspirator). She also received entreaties from people such as the exiled Ovid, and acted on behalf of foreign cities and embassies. In addition, she asserted significant influence over all members of the imperial family. The following sources offer an insight into Livia’s interests and activities.

**Source 9.11**

There is a well-known story about Haterius. He went into the palace to apologise, and, as Tiberius walked by, grovelled at his feet. Thereupon Tiberius crashed to the ground, either by accident or because he was brought down by the grip of Haterius—who was then all but killed by the guards. However, the emperor’s feelings were not softened by the dangerous predicament of the senator, until Haterius appealed to the Augusta—as Livia was now called—and, at her urgent entreaty, was saved.

Tacitus, Annals, trans. by M. Grant, p. 41

**Source 9.12**

When Livia made the same request [for citizenship] for a Gaul from a tributary province, Augustus turned it down, saying that he would do no more than exempt the fellow from tribute—'I would far rather forfeit whatever he may owe the Privy Purse, than cheapen the value of the Roman citizenship.

Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars, trans. by R. Graves, p. 72

**Source 9.13**

Livia dedicated a magnificent temple to Concord, and gave it to her husband, generations to come must learn that on the site of Livia's columns was once a huge palace, comparable to a city, fully as large as many towns.

It was razed, not for high treason. Its extravagance was dangerous.

Caesar undertook the overthrow of that vastness and the loss of his inheritance.

The act of a censor, an example to others, the judge obeying his own laws.

Ovid, cited in K. Chisholm & J. Ferguson, Rome: The Augustan Age, p. 204
They furthermore voted an arch in her honour—a distinction conferred upon no other woman—because she had saved the lives of not a few of them, had reared the children of many and had helped many to pay their daughters’ dowries, in consequence of all which some were calling her mother of her country. She was buried in the mausoleum of Augustus.


The aged Augusta died. By her own Claudian family, and her adoption into the Livii and Julii, she was of the highest nobility. Her first husband, and the father of her children, had been Tiberius Claudius Nero . . . The future Augustus, fascinated by her beauty, removed her from him . . .

Her private life was of traditional strictness. But her graciousness exceeded old-fashioned standards. She was a compliant wife, but an overbearing mother. Neither her husband’s diplomacy nor her son’s insincerity could outmanoeuvre her.

*Tacitus*, *Annals*, trans. by M. Grant, p. 195

But Livia was a real catastrophe, to the nation, as a mother and to the house of the Caesars as a stepmother.

*Tacitus*, *Annals*, trans. by M. Grant, p. 39

For she occupied a very exalted station, far above all women of former days, so that she could at any time receive the Senate and such of the people as wished to greet her in her house; and this fact was entered in the public records. The letters of Tiberius bore for a time her name also, and communications were addressed to both alike. Except that she never ventured to enter the Senate chamber or the camps or the public assemblies, she undertook to manage everything as if she were sole ruler. For in the time of Augustus she had possessed the greatest influence and she always declared that it was she who had made Tiberius emperor; consequently she was not satisfied to rule on equal terms with him, but wished to take precedence over him . . . For instance, she had once dedicated in her house an image to Augustus, and in honour of the event wished to give a banquet to the Senate and knights together with their wives, but he would not permit her to carry out any part of this program until the senate had so voted, and not even then to receive the men at dinner; instead, he entertained the men and she the women. Finally he removed her entirely from public affairs, but allowed her to direct matters at home.


See how Fortune has raised you high, and commanded you to occupy a place of great honour; so, Livia, bear up that load. You draw our eyes and ears to you, we notice all your actions, and the word of a princeps, once spoken, cannot be concealed. Stay upright, rise above your woes, keep your spirit unbent—in so far as you can. Our search for models of virtue, certainly, will be better when you take on the role of first lady (Romana princeps).

‘Consolation to Livia’, written on the death of her son Drusus, cited in N. Purcell, ‘Livia and the Womanhood of Rome’, p. 78

Understanding and using the sources

- Using these sources, what role did Livia play in the reign of Augustus? What can be learnt about Augustus’ personality?
- Describe the relationship between Livia and her son Tiberius.
- How was Livia regarded by the Romans?
- Do you agree with Tacitus’ statement that Livia was a catastrophe? Why?
- What was the importance and influence of Livia in this period?

Activity: essay

Explain the importance of two of the following members of the imperial family: Livia, Julia (daughter of Augustus), Messalina, Agrippina the Younger.
THE PRINCIPATE

Problems of succession: who will follow Augustus?

Under the republic it was not a normal part of Roman tradition for influential citizens to pass on political positions and powers to their descendants. However, families obviously encouraged and actively helped their male offspring to reach the political heights. Augustus, almost from the beginning of his reign, was concerned about the future of Rome after his death. Time and again he pinned his hopes on an heir, only to have his plans thwarted by the untimely deaths of those he wished to succeed him. He was adamant that only someone of the Julian bloodline should follow him, and to this end he promoted Julians and ignored the Claudians, the most unhappy example being his step-son Tiberius, who finally did succeed him. Unfortunately, Augustus had no sons by either of his wives. His marriage to Livia provided him with two step-sons: Drusus and Tiberius. His only child was a daughter, Julia. So, from the outset, the succession presented difficulties to be solved by marriage alliances and adoptions, and foiled by premature deaths. Julia was a ‘dynastic pawn’, destined to be married to chosen regents and to produce children.

SOURCE 9.19

To safeguard his domination Augustus made his sister’s son Marcellus a priest and a curule aedile—in spite of his extreme youth—and single out Marcus Agrippa, a commoner but a first-rate soldier who had helped to win his victories, by the award of two consecutive consulships; after the death of Marcellus, Agrippa was chosen by Augustus as his son-in-law. Next the emperor had his step-sons Tiberius and Nero Drusus hailed publicly as victorious generals. When he did this, however, there was no lack of heirs of his own blood: there were Agrippa’s sons Gaius Caesar and Lucius Caesar. Augustus had adopted them into the imperial family. He had also, despite pretended reluctance, been passionately eager that, even as minors, they should be entitled princes of youth and have the consulships reserved for them. After Agrippa had died, first Lucius Caesar and then Gaius Caesar met with premature natural deaths—unless their step-mother Livia had a secret hand in them. Lucius died on his way to the armies in Spain, Gaius while returning from Armenia, incapacitated by a wound.

Nero Drusus was long dead. Tiberius was the only surviving step-son; and everything pointed in his direction. He was adopted as the emperor’s son and as partner in his powers (with civil and military authority and the powers of a tribune) and displayed to all the armies.

Tacitus, Annals, trans. by M. Grant, pp. 32–3

For further investigation

- Who are the main contenders to succeed Augustus?
- What role did marriage alliances play in the organisation of the succession?
- What role did adoption play?
- How did Augustus groom his prospective heirs?
- What powers did he give them?

The changing nature of the principate

By the time Augustus died in AD 14, the political power base had changed. When Augustus described his regime he called it a ‘principate’—rule by the first citizen—implying that he did not rule alone. This term cleverly suggests supremacy and equality at the same time. Augustus held a firm control over the Roman Empire, making significant changes to all areas of Roman life. Throughout his life he was at great pains to avoid accepting any powers or offices that might appear dictatorial. He wanted to be seen and remembered as first amongst equals, with all power given to him legally. The Senate was still operational but no longer held supreme authority. They now waited on the word of one man.

SOURCE 9.20

Augustus . . . not only had control of the funds, but also commanded the army: nominally the public revenues had been separated from his own, but in practice the former, too, were spent as he saw fit. At any rate, when his ten-year period of office expired, another five years was voted to him, then another five, after that ten, and then ten for a fifth time. Thus through this succession of ten-year periods, he remained sole ruler for life . . .

The entire conduct and direction of affairs depend upon the wishes of the one man who holds power at the time. And yet in order to maintain the impression that this authority is derived from the laws and not from their own supremacy, the emperors have arrogated to themselves all the functions, together with their actual titles, attached to those offices in which power resided and which were held with the free consent of the people, with the single exception of the dictatorship . . .

. . . the emperors are very often created consuls, and
AUGUSTUS AND THE JULIO-CLAUDIANS

they are referred to as proconsuls whenever they are outside the city limits. They . . . raise troops, collect funds, declare war, conclude peace, rule foreigners and citizens alike, at all times and in all places, and even to put to death both knights and senators within the city limits, and . . . act in all other capacities once entrusted to the consuls and the other officials who possessed imperium . . .

. . . by virtue of being consecrated in all the priesthoods . . . they exercise supreme jurisdiction in all matters both profane and sacred.

The so-called tribunician power . . . gives them the right to veto the consequences of any measure taken by any other official, should they disapprove of any such, and protects them against insult or abuse. Moreover, if they appear to have suffered, even to the most trivial extent, not only by deed, but even by word, they may destroy the perpetrator as one guilty of sacrilege, without a trial. The emperors, it should be explained, do not see fit to become tribunes, since they belong entirely to the patrician class. But they assume tribunician power to the full as this existed when the office was at the height of its political influence, and they use it to number the years of their own rule . . .

But besides this status they have acquired another, which was granted to none of the ancient Romans outright and absolutely . . . They have been set free from the laws . . . that is, they are exempted from all binding tradition, and are not liable to any of the written provisions of the laws. Thus, by means of these democratic rules, they have vested in themselves all the authority of the government to such an extent that they actually possess everything that kings possessed except their paltry title.

Cassius Dio, Roman History, trans. by I. Scott-Kilvert, pp. 139–42

SOURCE 9.21

Then he gradually pushed ahead and absorbed the functions of the Senate, the officials and even the law. Opposition did not exist. War or judicial murder had disposed of all men of spirit. Upper-class survivors found that slavish obedience was the way to succeed both politically and financially . . .

The country had been transformed, and there was nothing left of the fine old Roman character. Political equality was a thing of the past; all eyes watched for imperial commands.

Tacitus, Annals, trans. by M. Grant, pp. 32–3

Understanding and using the sources

- List all the powers that Augustus held throughout his principate.
- What had the Senate and the people lost?
- Can you detect any bias in these sources? Give examples.
- Do you think the principate introduced by Augustus was a positive or negative change? Provide arguments to support your view.

Activity: debate

Augustus was a clever but hypocritical politician.

THE JULIO-CLAUDIANS

The Roman rulers from Tiberius to Nero are known as ‘Julio-Claudians’. Study Figure 9.2, the genealogical table of the Julio-Claudians.

For further investigation

- How and why did these two names come to be used?
- What is a dynasty? How long did the Julio-Claudian dynasty last?

Tiberius

Augustus died in AD 14 and was succeeded by his step-son Tiberius Claudius Nero Caesar (known as Tiberius).

Activity: research

- Using the timeline on pp. 272–3, what do you consider to be the significant events in Tiberius’ career that led him to become princeps?
- Explain how Tiberius finally succeeded Augustus.

For discussion

Imagine that you are Tiberius. You are fifty-six years old and have been a successful military leader. Time and again you have been ‘used’ by Augustus. You know that you are his fourth choice as heir—in the end there is nobody else left! Augustus is dead after a rule of forty-four years. Rome and the empire are yours!

(i) How do you feel about the situation?
(ii) What problems have you inherited?
(iii) How should you proceed?
According to Suetonius, Tiberius:

was a large, strong man of above average height, with broad shoulders and chest and well-proportioned all the way from head to toe. He was left-handed, and his joints were so strong that he could bore through an apple with one finger, and break open a boy’s or even a teenager’s head with a mere rap of the knuckle. He wore his white hair long at the back, covering his neck . . . He had a handsome face, which would, however, suddenly erupt into a fierce rash.\(^7\)


\[\text{SOURCE 9.22}\]
**Character**

While he was a private citizen or holding commands under Augustus, his life was blameless; and so was his reputation. While Germanicus and Drusus still lived, he concealed his real self, cunningly affecting virtuous qualities. However, until his mother died there was good in Tiberius as well as evil.

*Tacitus, Annals*, trans. by M. Grant, pp. 226–7

\[\text{SOURCE 9.23}\]
**Removal of Agrippa Postumus**

Tiberius revealed Augustus’ death only after getting rid of young Agrippa Posthumus, whom the colonel appointed to guard him in the prison island had received a written order to execute. So much is known, but some doubt remains whether this order was left by Augustus to be acted on when he died; or whether Livia wrote it in his name; or whether, if so, Tiberius knew anything of the matter.

*Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars*, trans. by R. Graves, p. 113

\[\text{SOURCE 9.24}\]
**Tiberius and the Senate**

The Senate now wallowed in the most abject appeals. Tiberius remarked incidentally that, although he did not feel himself capable of the whole burden of government, he was nevertheless prepared to take on any branch of it that might be entrusted to him . . . Gaius Asinius Gallus [asked], ‘which branch do you desire to have handed over to you?’ . . . Tiberius [said nothing . . .]

*Tacitus, Annals*, trans. by M. Grant, p. 89

\[\text{SOURCE 9.25}\]
**Relationship with Germanicus**

When Germanicus asked for another year to complete the conquest of Germany, Tiberius subjected his unpretentious adoptive son to even stronger pressure by offering him the prize of a second consulship—to be occupied personally at Rome . . . Germanicus knew that this was hypocritical and that jealousy was the reason why Tiberius denied him a victory that was already won. But he acquiesced without further delay.

*Tacitus, Annals*, trans. by M. Grant, p. 40

\[\text{SOURCE 9.26}\]
**The influence of Sejanus**

The emperor himself became tyrannical—or gave tyrannical men power. The cause and beginning of the change lay with Lucius Aelius Sejanus, commander of the Guard . . .

To Sejanus alone the otherwise cryptic emperor spoke freely and unguardedly . . .

Tiberius was readily amenable, praising him in conversation—and even in the Senate and Assembly—as ‘the partner of my labours’ . . . Yet Sejanus’ ambitions were impeded by a well-stocked imperial house . . .

*Tacitus, Annals*, trans. by M. Grant, pp. 157–8

\[\text{SOURCE 9.27}\]
**Tiberius and maestas**

[Tiberius] revived the treason law. The ancients had employed the same name, but had applied it to other offences—to official misconduct damaging the Roman state, such as betrayal of an army or incitement to sedition. Action had to be taken against deeds, words went unpunished. The first to employ this law to investigate written libel was Augustus . . . Then Tiberius, asked by a praetor, Quintus Pompeius Macer, whether cases under the treason law were to receive attention, replied: the laws must take their course.

*Tacitus, Annals*, trans. by M. Grant, p. 73
SOURCE 9.28

Financial policy
While expending extremely little for himself he laid out very large sums for the common good, either rebuilding or adorning practically all the public works and also generously assisting both cities and private individuals. He enriched numerous senators who were poor and on that account no longer wished to be members of the Senate... All these expenditures, moreover, he made from the regular revenues; for he neither put anybody to death for his money nor confiscated, at this time, anybody's property, nor did he even resort to tricky methods of obtaining funds.


SOURCE 9.29

The campaign against waste
Tiberius cut down the expenses of public entertainments by lowering the pay of actors and setting a limit to the number of gladiatorial combats on any given festival. Once he protested violently against an absurd rise in the cost of... high-quality fish—three mullets had been offered for sale at 100 gold pieces each... And to set an example in his campaign against waste, he often served, at formal dinner parties, half-eaten dishes left over from the day before...

Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars, trans. by R. Graves, p. 119

SOURCE 9.30

Retirement to Capri (AD 26)
[Tiberius] decided to live away from Rome. Like most historians, I attribute his withdrawal to Sejanus’ intrigues... It was also said that in old age he became sensitive about his appearance...

According to another theory he was driven away by his mother’s bullying...

This proved fatal... for they did not foresee the unbelievable fact that his voluntary self exile would last eleven years.

Tacitus, Annals, trans. by M. Grant, p. 186

Understanding and using the sources

Draw up a chart listing the positive and negative features of Tiberius and his reign. (Consider the issue of the treason trials, discussed on p. 296.)

Gaius
Tiberius died in AD 37, in suspicious circumstances. Many theories abound concerning his death, and Gaius is implicated in most of them. Suetonius and Tacitus recount versions of Tiberius’ death in which he is poisoned or smothered or throttled either by Gaius himself or in accordance with his orders. Suetonius relates that according to some writers Gaius actually confessed to intended parricide.

Activity: research
Why might Gaius have held high hopes of being the next ruler? Were there any other contenders?

Suetonius describes Gaius as very tall, with an enormous body supported on spindly legs, a thin neck, and an extremely pallid complexion. His eyes and temples were sunken, and his forehead broad and glovering. His hair was thin and he was bald on top, though he had a hairy body. For that reason it was a crime punishable by death to look down on him from above as he passed by, or for any reason whatsoever to mention a goat in his presence. He was by nature ugly, but he made himself even more so by practising gruesome faces in a mirror.8

8Ibid., p. 55.
It was, indeed, a horrible feature of the period that leading senators became informers even on trivial matters—some openly, many secretly. Friends and relatives were as suspect as strangers, old stories as damaging as new. In the Forum, at a dinner-party, a remark on any subject might mean prosecution. Everyone competed for priority in marking down the victim. Sometimes this was self-defence, but mostly it was a sort of contagion, like an epidemic. 

**Tacitus, Annals, trans. by M. Grant, p. 203**

Tacitus refers to the reign of Tiberius as a reign of terror largely because of the treason trials and the cruel nature of Tiberius. However, the charge of *maiestas* existed in Rome before Tiberius and was not clearly defined. Any offence against Rome was considered *maiestas*. By the time of Augustus and the Julio-Claudian rulers, the person of the princeps embodied the state and, therefore, any insult or offence against the leader or his family was open to the charge of *maiestas*. The Romans had no public prosecutor. Charges were brought by informers (*delatores*), and cases were tried in the Senate acting as a court. The *delatores*, if successful, were rewarded by receiving one-quarter of the convicted person’s property. Tacitus criticised Tiberius for supporting the practice of informers. In AD 25, there was a proposal that the informers should not receive their reward if the accused person committed suicide before the trial finished. Tiberius stopped this measure before it was passed, insisting that the law remain. Tacitus saw this as support for informers, but it can be interpreted as Tiberius’ respect for the law. Roman citizens were also reluctant to help the defendants in a *maiestas* case because they too could be accused of treason.

According to Tacitus, Tiberius was a tyrant. He clearly exaggerated the importance of the treason trials in the reign of Tiberius in order to prove his point of Tiberius’ tyrannical rule. Tacitus spoke of a ‘conspicuously monotonous glut of downfalls’ (*Annals*, IV, 33) There were eighty-six *maiestas* cases in the ‘reign of terror’, but at least thirty of the charged were acquitted. There were eighteen executions, but the majority of these were for conspiracies, not slander of Tiberius. Tiberius also quashed many convictions and reduced the severity of others.

The Senate must bear some responsibility for the treason trials, for many of the cases were brought by the senatorial class in order to win favour. Many of the trials occurred when Sejanus was in charge of Rome. It does appear that there were more prosecutions after Sejanus’ death, when the Senate took the opportunity to rid the state of his supporters. Towards the end of his reign, Tiberius himself convicted a few people—his experience of Sejanus had led him to become insecure and fearful. One of the people convicted was Sextus Paconianus, who was charged with writing satires against Tiberius.

**For further investigation**

Some of the important treason trials in the reign of Tiberius were: Libo Drusus (AD 16), Appuleia Varilla (AD 17), Calpurnius Piso (AD 20), L. Ennius (AD 22), Silius Caecina and Claudia Pulchra. The details of these trials can be found in Tacitus’ *Annals*. With reference to this source and others, find out:

(i) What were the charges against them?
(ii) What was the outcome of each trial?
(iii) What part did Tiberius or Sejanus play in these trials?
Accession of Gaius
Caligula’s accession seemed to the Roman people—one might almost say—to the whole world, like a dream come true.


Building program
He completed certain projects neglected by Tiberius: namely, the Temple of Augustus and Pompey’s Theatre; and began the construction of an aqueduct in the Tiber district, and an amphitheatre near the enclosure.

_Suetonius, The Twelve Caesars_, trans. by _R. Graves_, p. 143

Caligula unhinged
Suetonius also reported that what had unhinged Caligula was an excessively strong aphrodisiac given him by his wife Caesonia. Philo . . . suggested that the illness from which he suffered in the early part of his reign was breakdown due to over-indulgence . . . He has been variously labelled epileptic, schizoid, schizophrenic or just chronically alcoholic. Tacitus describes his mind as disordered and upset, but Caligula was probably not mad in any accepted sense of the term; though diagnoses by modern psychologists or physicians are useless because there is no adequate evidence to go on.

_M. Grant, The Twelve Caesars_, p. 111

Mad or bad?
He even went on to manufacture statues of himself . . . he afterwards ordered temples to be erected and sacrifices to be offered to himself as to a god.

Gaius was ruled by the charioteers and gladiators, and was the slave of actors and others connected with the stage . . .

He caused great numbers of men to fight as gladiators . . . It was not the large number of those who perished that was so serious, though that was serious enough, but his excessive delight in their death and his insatiable desire for the sight of blood . . . Others . . . owed their ruin to the emperor’s illness of the preceding year and to the death of his sister Drusilla, since . . . anyone who had entertained or had greeted another, or even had bathed, during those days incurred punishment . . .

One single incident will give the key to all that happened at that time: the emperor charged with maestas and put to death a man who had sold hot water.


Death of Gemellus
He caused the death of Tiberius [Gemellus], who had assumed the toga virilis, had been given the title of princeps iuventutis, and finally had been adopted into the family. The complaint made against the lad was that he had prayed and expected that Gaius would die.

_Cassius Dio, Roman History_, Vol. 7, trans. by _E. Cary_, p. 283

A violent end
Such frantic and reckless behaviour roused murderous thoughts in certain minds . . . when two Guards colonels put their heads together and succeeded in killing him . . . On 24 January . . . Caligula, seated in the Theatre, could not make up his mind whether to rise for luncheon . . . his friends persuaded him to come out with them along a covered walk . . . some say that Chaerea came up behind Caligula as he stood talking . . . and with a cry of ‘Take this!’ gave him a deep sword-wound in the neck, whereupon Gaius Sabinus, the other colonel, stabbed him in the breast.

HISTORICAL PERIODS

SOURCE 9.39

His character
Caligula was clearly capable of acting right to the end in a rational manner. Why then does he seem so often to have behaved otherwise? . . . while he was not clinically mad he was so obsessed with a sense of his own importance as to be practically devoid of any sense of personal responsibility.

A. Barrett, Caligula, p. 240

Activity: debate

That Caligula was mad, bad and dangerous to know.

Claudius

Activity: research

◆ What claim to rule did Claudius have? Was there any other contender?
◆ What events in Claudius’ early career would have prepared him for rule?

The events surrounding Claudius’ accession are the subject of myth, bad publicity and much speculation.

SOURCE 9.40

The new emperor
. . . Claudius became emperor, at the age of fifty, by an extraordinary accident. When the assassins ordered Caligula’s courtiers to disperse, pretending that he wished to be alone, Claudius went off with the rest and retired to a room called the Hermaeum; but presently heard about the murder and slipped away in alarm to a nearby balcony, where he stood trembling behind the door curtains. A guardsman . . . noticed a pair of feet beneath the curtain, pulled their owner out for identification and re-recognised him. Claudius dropped on the floor and grasped the soldier’s knees but found himself acclaimed emperor.

He was then bundled into a litter and transferred to the camp of the Praetorian Guard where he was held as a virtual hostage while the Senate debated the restoration of the republic . . .

Meanwhile, crowds surrounded the building and demanded a monarchy, expressly calling for Claudius. So he allowed the Guards to acclaim him emperor and to swear allegiance. He also promised every man 150 gold pieces, which made him the first of the Caesars to purchase the loyalty of his troops.


SOURCE 9.41

His character
Claudius comes across as a positive mishmash of conflicting characteristics: absent-minded, hesitant, muddled, determined, cruel (by proxy), intuitive, wise, and dominated by his wife and his personal staff of freedmen. He was probably all of these.

A. Kamm, The Romans, p. 58

SOURCE 9.42

His appearance
He was not short of either authority or dignity when he was standing up or sitting down, still less so when he reclined: he was tall but not lanky, and good looking, with a fine crop of white hair and a well-set neck. But his knees were so weak that he staggered as he walked, and his habits were embarrassing whether he was indulging in domestic or business affairs. He had an indecent laugh, and when he was annoyed he foamed disgustingly at the mouth and his nose ran. He stammered, and his head twitched the whole time, but faster when he was actually engaged in the slightest activity. He was always ill, until he became emperor. Then his health improved marvellously, except for attacks of stomach ache, which he said even made him think of suicide.

Suetonius, cited in A. Kamm, The Romans, p. 58

Understanding and using the sources

◆ What events in this account appear to be melodramatic and implausible?
◆ What impression is given of Claudius?
◆ Why do you think the people clamoured for the continuance of the monarchy?
◆ Why do you think the Senate debated the possibility of a republic?
◆ What precedent does Suetonius believe had been set by Claudius’ actions?
**SOURCE 9.43**

Conquest of Britain
And the Britons beyond the sea-shores which one sees,
Blue-shielded Brigantians too, all these
he chained by the neck as the Roman’s slaves.
He spake, and the Ocean with trembling waves
Accepted the axe of the Roman law.


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**SOURCE 9.44**

Amnesty
No sooner had Claudius’ power been established than he
gave priority to the task of obliterating all records of
those two days when there had been talk of a new
constitution. He ordered a general amnesty, and
observed it himself, apart from executing a few of the
colonels and junior officers who had conspired against
Caligula—to make an example of them and because
they had, he knew, planned his own murder as well.

*Suetonius*, *The Twelve Caesars*, trans. by *R. Graves*, p. 187

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**SOURCE 9.45**

Public works
On the occasion of a severe famine he considered the
problem of providing an abundant food supply, not only
for that particular crisis but for all time... all the grain
used by the Romans was imported, and yet the region
near the mouth of the Tiber had no safe landing places
or suitable harbours... Except for the cargoes brought
in during the summer season and stored in warehouses,
they had no supplies for the winter... Claudius
undertook to construct a harbour, and... he brought it
to accomplishment.


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**SOURCE 9.46**

Money
[Claudius’] attitude towards money was remarkable. For
he forbade anyone to bring him contributions, as had
been the practice under Augustus and Gaius, and
ordered that no one who had any relatives at all should
name him as his heir; he furthermore gave back the
sums that had previously been confiscated under
Tiberius and Gaius, either to the victims themselves, if
they still survived, or otherwise to their children.


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**SOURCE 9.47**

Public shows
Claudius often distributed *largesse* to the people, and
gave numerous magnificent public shows; not only the
traditional ones in the customary places but others,
including novelties and ancient revivals.

*Suetonius*, *The Twelve Caesars*, trans. by *R. Graves*, p. 193

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**SOURCE 9.48**

Messalina
She was infatuated with the best-looking young man in
Rome, Gaius Silius...

Claudius was unaware of his matrimonial
complications... Messalina’s adultery was going so
smoothly that she was drifting, through boredom, into
unfamiliar vices... [Gaius Silius] urged that
concealment should be dropped...

... the idea of being his wife appealed to her... So,
waiting only until Claudius left to sacrifice at Ostia, she
celebrated a formal marriage with Silius.

*Tacitus*, *Annals*, trans. by *M. Grant*, pp. 231, 238

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**FIGURE 9.12**  Claudius
Freedmen
[Claudius'] firmest devotion was reserved for Narcissus, his secretary and Pallas, his treasurer whom he encouraged the Senate to honour with large gifts of money and the insignia of quaestors and praetors as well . . .

Claudius fell so deeply under the influence of these freedmen and wives that he seemed to be their servant rather than their emperor; and distributed titles, army commands, indulgences or punishments according to their wishes . . . seldom even aware of what he was about.


Activity: research
Read the following sources or others that you might find: Cassius Dio, History, LX, 6–7, 11–13, 16, 25, 28.6, LXI, 29; Suetonius, Claudius, 14–16, 22–24; Levick, Claudius, Chapter 11; Letter to the Alexandrians in Chisholm and Ferguson (eds) The Augustan Age, pp. 539–41.

(i) Compile a list of Claudius’ reforms and legislation.
(ii) What areas did his legislation cover?
(iii) What impression do you gain of Claudius’ administration?
(iv) Do you agree with Tacitus’ description of Claudius as a tool of the women and freedmen?

Nero
You will need to refer to Chapter 6 for further information on Nero.

Activity: research
◆ How influential was Agrippina in Nero’s rise to power?
◆ How old was he when he became emperor?
◆ What attributes did he have that fitted him for the task of ruling the Roman Empire?

For discussion
You have just become emperor in fairly dubious circumstances. Your mother is suspected of removing all opposition, including your step-father, the emperor Claudius. Your childhood and upbringing have been dysfunctional, to say the least.

(i) What are your feelings towards your mother?
(ii) On whom should you rely for advice?
(iii) Have you any rivals for power?
(iv) What shall be the features of your reign?

Suetonius presents an image of Nero as

fair-haired, with features that were pretty rather than handsome, weak blue eyes, a fat neck, a pot belly, skinny legs, and a body which smelt and was covered with spots . . . He was so insensitive about his appearance that he used to wear his hair in rows of curls, and when he was on his Greek trip he let it grow down his back. He usually appeared in public in a dressing-gown without a belt, a scarf round his neck and no shoes.
**Source 9.53**

Spectacles

He gave an immense variety of entertainments—coming-of-age parties, chariot races in the Circus, stage plays, a gladiatorial show . . .

He staged a naval engagement on an artificial lake of salt water which had sea monsters swimming in it . . .

At an athletic competition held in the Enclosure, oxen were sacrificed on a lavish scale; that was when he shaved his chin for the first time, put the hair in a pearl-studded gold box and dedicated it to Capitoline Jupiter.


**Source 9.54**

The influence of Seneca and Burrus

. . . two leading members of the court, Seneca, who had graduated from the tutorship of Nero to become his advisor, and Burrus, commander of the Praetorian Guard, . . . governed the empire between them . . .

They had no part in the death of Britannicus; indeed it may have embarrassed them. But they were the men who successfully eased Agrippina out of her dominant role . . .

[Seneca’s] control of the empire, however, depended on his control of the young Nero. It was Seneca who composed Nero’s inaugural speech to the Senate—a model of modest correctness.

M. Grant, *The Twelve Caesars*, pp. 153–4

**Source 9.55**

The great fire of Rome

Now started the most terrible and destructive fire which Rome had ever experienced. It began in the Circus where it adjoins the hills . . .

Nobody dared fight the flames. Attempts to do so were prevented by menacing gangs. Torches, too, were openly thrown in, by men crying that they acted under orders . . .

Nero was at Antium. He only returned to the city when the fire was approaching the mansion he had built . . .

. . . flames broke out again in the more open regions of the city . . . This new conflagration caused additional ill-feeling because it started on Tigellinus’ estate. For people believed that Nero was ambitious to found a new city to be named after himself.

Of Rome’s fourteen districts only four remained intact.

Tacitus, *Annals*, trans. by M. Grant, p. 354

**Source 9.56**

Treatment of Christians

Nero had self-acknowledged Christians arrested. Then, . . . large numbers of others were condemned—not so much for incendiarism as for their anti-social tendencies . . . Despite their guilt as Christians, and the ruthless punishment it deserved, the victims were pitied. For it was felt that they were being sacrificed to one man’s brutality rather than to the national interest.

Tacitus, *Annals*, trans. by M. Grant, p. 354

**Source 9.57**

Death of Nero

. . . perceiving that they were drawing near, [Nero] commanded his companions to kill him. And when they refused, he uttered a groan and said: ‘I alone have neither friend nor foe.’ By this time the horsemen were close at hand, and so he killed himself, after uttering that oft-quoted remark: ‘Jupiter, what an artist dies in me!’ And as he lingered in his agony, Epaphroditus dealt him the finishing stroke.


**Activity: research**

Read the following sources: Suetonius, Nero, 10–12, 20–25; Tacitus, *Annals*, XIV, 15–16, 19, XVI, 3; Griffin, Nero, Chapter 8.

(i) What were Nero’s artistic pursuits and talents?

(ii) How did the Romans respond to Nero the artist?

(iii) Who were the Augustiani? What part did they play in Nero’s performances?

(iv) What festival did Nero institute?

(v) What effects did Nero’s artistic activities have on his reign?
According to Dio and Tacitus (Sources 9.20 and 9.21) the Senate was no longer the major ruling body of Rome. Augustus had usurped the Senate’s functions, yet it had handed him much of his authority. The Senate could have refused to give these honours and powers to Augustus, for it had the legal power; Augustus, however, controlled the ‘real’ power—the army. The Senate discussed issues, minted bronze and copper coinage, made laws through the passing of senatus consultum, acted as a court of justice and had charge of the senatorial provinces. However, Augustus changed its mode of operation by the introduction of the consilium (the senatorial council) and the use of his auctoritas. Dio explains the operation of the consilium:

[Augustus] called in the consuls . . . to advise him for periods of six months, together with one of the holders of each of the other offices of state [that is, the magistrates], and fifteen men chosen by lot from the rest of the Senate. In consequence it became a practice that all legislation put forward by the emperors is communicated after a fashion through these advisers to all the other senators.

Augustus depended on the senatorial class for the administrative machinery of the empire. By the end of his reign, the Senate virtually followed his orders. Tiberius tried to restore the Senate to its former position of executive responsibility, but to no avail—it had become too dependent on the princeps. Gaius treated the Senate with disdain. The Senate had no respect for Augustus. In AD 13 the consilium prepared the agenda for Senate meetings and discussed issues with Augustus. The Senate became, virtually ‘a rubber stamp’, for it was unlikely that its members would resist the direction of the consilium and the leading statesman, Augustus. In AD 13 the consilium was enlarged to include Augustus’ step-son Tiberius, the two adopted grandsons, the consuls designate and an additional five senators chosen by lot.

- Augustus had the right to introduce the first item to Senate meetings. The Senate basically acted as an advisory body to Augustus, but was able to pass resolutions, or senatus consulta. Augustus changed the way in which the Senate functioned by introducing the consilium—a committee composed of Augustus, the two consuls, a representative of each of the magistrates and fifteen men chosen by lot from the Senate. The consilium prepared the agenda for Senate meetings and discussed issues with Augustus. The Senate became, virtually ‘a rubber stamp’, for it was unlikely that its members would resist the direction of the consilium and the leading statesman, Augustus. In AD 13 the consilium was enlarged to include Augustus’ step-son Tiberius, the two adopted grandsons, the consuls designate and an additional five senators chosen by lot.

- Augustus wanted the Senate to be a responsible and dignified body, so he insisted that religious observances were undertaken before the commencement of its meetings. In 9 BC it was determined that the Senate met twice a month. A quorum was established for certain types of business.

- The Senate, in conjunction with the two consuls, formed a senatorial court and conducted trials of people of high rank. For example, Augustus brought to the Senate a case of maiestas, or treason, against Cassius Severus. Volesus Messalla was accused before the Senate of provincial misgovernment. The senatorial courts dealt not only with treason, but also with extortion and adultery.

- The more settled peaceful provinces were administered by the Senate.

- Under Augustus, the Senate retained control of the aerarium, or public treasury of Rome. However, we learn from the Res Gestae that the treasury was often empty and that Augustus had to make contributions to it, which meant that he exerted an unofficial control over the Senate’s expenditure. The setting up of the military treasury in AD 5–6 further reduced the Senate’s control of finances. The Senate minted bronze and copper coins with the mark ‘SC’.
inscribed on them. Augustus seems to have had an influence on the design of these coins, as many of them reflect his policies.

**Tiberius**

- Tiberius attempted to restore the traditional rights and dignity of the Senate by consulting it on every issue. He 'commended to the senate Germanicus’ son Nero Caesar’ and asked that he be ‘permitted to stand for the quaestorship five years ahead of the legal age'. (Tacitus, *Annals*, III, 29.1) Suétionius reports that he consulted the Senate on national revenue, repair of buildings, troop movements, military commands and foreign policy (Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 30.1–2).
- Being a traditionalist, Tiberius always entered the Senate House without an escort, and rose to greet the consuls (Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 31.4).
- The election of magistrates was transferred from the *comitia* (people’s assembly) to the Senate. Tiberius tried to encourage the Senate to become a significant legislative body—the most important business was transacted in the Senate (Tacitus, *Annals*, IV, 6). Tiberius was concentrating more power in his own hands and taking a direct role in the electoral process (Levick, *Tiberius*, p. 96).
- Tiberius abolished the *consilium* of Augustus and instead established a council of his friends plus a group of twenty men chosen for him from the Senate. The *consilium* of Tiberius advised him on administrative matters (Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 55).
- Tiberius expanded the judicial role of the Senate by making it responsible for trying provincial officials and those charged with *maiestas* and (occasionally) murder. The senatorial court dealt with many treason cases in Tiberius’ reign.
- Like Augustus, Tiberius assisted individuals to meet the financial qualifications of the senatorial group. Others who asked for his help were told to prove their case before the Senate (Tacitus, *Annals*, I, 75.6).
- The Senate offered Tiberius titles and honours, which he refused (Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 26).
- Although he wanted the Senate to be an independent body and encouraged it to debate and discuss issues, the senators were sometimes reluctant to uphold their responsibilities. In AD 21 Tiberius reminded the Senate that its province of Africa required a new governor who would quell the rebellion that was occurring there. The Senate showed itself to be inadequate at this point, for it wanted Tiberius to make the choice (Tacitus, *Annals*, III, 32).
- Tiberius did not conduct purges of the Senate as Augustus had done, perhaps disapproving of his predecessor’s methods. He was also sparing in the number of men he admitted to the Senate.
- In AD 19 the Senate took a greater role in religious matters when it chose a new Vestal Virgin. In 22 it debated on the rights of the *Flamen Dialis* and in 24 had to elect a replacement priest.
- Senatorial commissions were set up to deal with the problems of the flooding of the Tiber, the care of public buildings, the maintenance of public records, investigation of catastrophes—such as the collapse of the Amphitheatre in AD 27 and periodic earthquakes.
- As his reign progressed, Tiberius became increasingly frustrated with the Senate (Dio, *Roman History*, LVIII, 18, 3–6). He became so annoyed with the servility of the senators that he commented that they were ‘men fit to be slaves’ (Tacitus, *Annals*, III, 64).
- In AD 26 Tiberius left Rome and settled on Capri. When in Rome, he had regularly attended the Senate and this probably raised the level of the debate. As a result of his leaving Rome, Tiberius changed the centre of government. Levick notes that ‘the Senate, functioning as a court, was being exploited by rival factions . . . and incapable of operating as a serious deliberative body’ (Levick, *Tiberius*, p. 113).

**Gaius**

- Two days after the death of Tiberius, Gaius appeared before the Senate, where ‘immediately and unanimously [it] conferred absolute power upon him’ (Suetonius, *Gaius*, 14). He was given tribunician power and proconsular *imperium* as well as many titles. The balance that had been built up by Augustus and maintained by Tiberius was destroyed in one blow. At that meeting of the Senate, Tiberius’ will was declared *null and void*. By a senatorial decree, Gaius was given the power to do what he thought was right for the state.
- At first, Gaius treated the Senate with great respect and promised to share power with it (Dio, *Roman History*, LIX, 6). He won popularity with the Senate when he abolished the charges of *maiestas*, put an end to the use of *delatores* (informers) and recalled senators exiled in the reign of Tiberius. He was concerned for the welfare of senators, allowing them to sit on cushions at the shows instead of bare boards.
- After his illness in AD 37, Gaius’ behaviour changed, now treating the Senate with contempt and dispensing with their services. Suetonius tells us that Gaius enjoyed humiliating senators by making them run beside his chariot dressed in their togas or wait on him dressed in their tunics (Suetonius, *Gaius*, 26).
He was planning to give his horse, Incitatus, a consulship—an insult to the office and to the Senate (Suetonius, Gaius, 55). He abused the Senate for destroying his family, favouring Sejanus and being hostile to Tiberius (Suetonius, Gaius, 30).

- In AD 38, Gaius renewed the laws of maiestas.
- He removed the Senate's right to mint coins.
- He executed any senators who tried to give him advice.
- After the conspiracy of AD 39, senators became fearful that Gaius might suspect them of plotting against him. The Senate became sycophantic and granted him even more honours.
- Senators such as Vinicianus, Valerius Asiaticus and Longinus were part of the plot that killed Gaius.
- The Senate had little choice in confirming Gaius as princeps, given the arrangements of the Praetorian Guard. Yet the senators, according to Barrett, 'must bear responsibility for the massive grant of powers they made to the young, inexperienced and almost totally unknown Caligula, and for their own reluctance to try to curb or restrain him.' The Senate responded to each humiliation by giving Gaius even more honours and by spending vast sums trying to entertain him (Barrett, Caligula, p. 239).

CLAUDIUS

- After Gaius' assassination, Claudius was proclaimed ruler by the Praetorian Guard while the Senate debated whether to restore the republic. Josephus tells us that the Senate wanted to regain its former prestige. In AD 41 it declared Claudius a public enemy. Claudius granted 15,000 sesterces to every guardman, as a result of which the Senate was forced to confer on him the powers of princeps. Claudius was resented because the Senate believed it had been given no say in the choice of ruler (Josephus, The Jewish War, XIX, 19, 212–67). 'By forcing himself on the Senate, Claudius inflicted a deep wound in its authority and self-regard' (Levick, Claudius, p. 93).
- When Claudius began his rule he completely ignored the fact that the Senate had seriously considered changing the form of government (Suetonius, Claudius, 11).
- A number of senators had been involved in Gaius' murder, but Claudius gave amnesties to all except the actual murderers. He tried to be conciliatory, recalling exiles, repealing Gaius' laws and granting consulships to those with republican sympathies.
- Claudius displayed respect and courtesy to the Senate—he stood in its presence; restored to it the elections of the magistrates; held banquets for senators and their wives; personally visited sick senators; granted consulships to men of distinction and restored to the Senate its right to mint coinage.
- Claudius attempted to increase the prestige of the Senate by expelling lazy senators (Tacitus, Annals, XII, 52). He encouraged the Senate to take its responsibilities seriously as a forum for discussion and for the passing of legislation. Foreign affairs and matters concerning the provinces were once more discussed by the Senate. There were more senatus consulta passed in Claudius' reign than in that of any other princeps (Levick, Claudius, p. 97).
- Claudius established an efficient centralised administration. His reliance on this civil service encroached on senatorial areas of responsibility. He renewed the practice of having advisers sit with him, a practice that had been abandoned when Tiberius retired to Capri (Dio, Roman History, LX, 4.4). The Senate became even more hostile to Claudius (Tacitus, Annals, XII, 57). A further cause of hostility was his extensive use of freedmen such as Pallas, Narcissus and Polybius in the administration of Rome. Tiberius and Augustus had also used freedmen, but Claudius formalised their use.
- Claudius kept many routine administrative details to himself and his selected assistants, so that the Senate felt that it was ignorant of the direction of government.
- Claudius interfered in traditional areas of Senate responsibility. Charge of the imperial treasury was taken away from the Senate and given to procurators answerable to Claudius. Procurators were also placed on senatorial commissions. Claudius returned some provinces to the Senate but then he interfered in the administration of them.
- In AD 41 Claudius abolished the charge of maiestas, but later revived it. Many of the trials for the accused were supposedly held in the palace behind closed doors or in the Senate before Claudius, the prefects and the freedmen (Dio, Roman History, LX, 16.3). Claudius regularly attended the senatorial courts but an increasing number of criminal matters were handled in the imperial court.
- In AD 42 an attempted coup was hatched; Claudius was always fearful of the recurrence of plots. It was claimed that in Claudius' reign, thirty-five senators and about 300 equestrians were killed.
- Augustus had used the censorial power as an instrument of government, but Claudius revived the office of censor itself. As censor, he held a revision of the Senate and enrolled many of his supporters. He also introduced into the Senate worthy men from the
provinces. (The Senate did not like admitting foreigners.) Seneca mocks Claudian policy in this matter: ‘He made up his mind, you know, to see the whole world in the toga, Greeks, Gauls, Spaniards, Britons and all’ (Seneca, Apocolocyntosis, 3).

- Dio tells us that Claudius accepted all the titles and honours given to him at the beginning of his reign, with the exception of ‘father of his country’. He later accepted this when he felt he had earned it (Dio, Roman History, LX, 3.2). After the conquest of Britain in AD 43, the Senate gave him the title of ‘Britannicus’.

- Claudius wanted the senators to express their views, but they were intimidated by the constant presence of the Praetorians, who supported Claudius. This element of force deepened senatorial resentment at Claudius’ rule.

**NERO**

- Because he was influenced by Seneca and Burrus, Nero’s relations with the Senate were at first good. He promised to reverse the unpopular measures that Claudius had introduced. In his first speech to the Senate, composed by Seneca, Nero promised that the Senate would exercise its traditional functions; that there would be no treason trials; that the freedmen would be controlled; that he would not conduct all the judicial business as Claudius had done and that he would model his leadership on that of Augustus.

- Criminal cases in Italy and the provinces were tried in the senatorial court.

- Initially, Nero rejected offers of statues and titles.

- The Senate was able to debate freely (Tacitus, Annals, XIII, 25). Nero wanted to abolish customs duties, but the Senate prevented this (Tacitus, Annals, XIII, 50).

- Coins were issued on the authority of the Senate.

- After the murder of Agrippina in AD 59, the death of Burrus in AD 62 and Seneca’s retirement, Nero’s relations with the Senate deteriorated. According to Suetonius, Nero made senators and knights do battle in the arena at public shows (Suetonius, Nero, 12). As his reign progressed, Nero neglected his imperial duties in favour of poetry, drama and music. He appeared disinterested in discussing matters of state, preferring to demonstrate the mechanics of water-organs or talk about his lyre-playing (Suetonius, Nero, 41).

- Treason trials were revived by Tigellinus, the Praetorian prefect. A number of prominent senators and wealthy people were murdered. Many senators had their property confiscated. Nero ‘hinted broadly that it was not his intention to spare the remaining senators, but would one day wipe out the entire senatorial order’ (Suetonius, Nero, 37).

- Most of the senators became more sycophantic. For example, Nero’s wife Octavia was murdered and the Senate responded with decrees of thanksgiving. Nero’s daughter died—at the age of four months—and the Senate declared her a goddess.

- Some senators, such as Thrasea Paetus, tried to resist Nero.

- In AD 65 the Pisonian conspiracy was uncovered. A number of senators had conspired to assassinate Nero. After the plot was uncovered, the treason trials were conducted in secret. Many senators, both innocent and guilty, were murdered—including Seneca, Lucan and Thrasea Paetus. Tigellinus purged the Senate.

- In AD 68 the Senate declared Nero a public enemy.

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**ESSAY**

*Explain how the role of the Senate changed from the time of Augustus through the Julio-Claudian periods.*
If one looks at the Roman military system, one will recognise that the possession of a large empire has come into their hands as the prize of their valour, not as a gift of fortune. For this people does not wait for the outbreak of war to practise with weapons nor do they sit idle in peacetime bestirring themselves only in times of need. Rather, they seem to have been born with weapons in their hands . . . no wonder that the boundaries of their empire are in the east to the Euphrates, in the west to the Atlantic Ocean, in the south the new lands of Libya and in the north the Danube and the Rhine. One would easily say that the people who have won this empire are greater than the empire itself.\footnote{Josephus, The Jewish War, cited in N. Lewis & M. Reinhold, Roman Civilization: Sourcebook II, Harper & Row, New York, 1966, pp. 492, 494.}

The army had been instrumental in helping the Romans acquire and maintain their vast empire. Augustus understood the importance of keeping direct control over the army and of making it an instrument of the state rather than a weapon to be used by individual generals. He instituted changes that made the army a professional standing body—this Augustan structure was retained for the next few centuries. It became an important part of Roman tradition for the ruler to be seen as a capable military figure. Even Claudius astutely cultivated this image. When the rulers ignored the power of the army and failed to project a military presence, as Nero did, they ran the risk of being overthrown by the army.

**Activity**

**Research**

Find out how the Roman army was organised in the Augustan period and during the 1st century AD. You will need to research the meaning of the following words: legion, cohort, auxiliary, ala or alae, legate, centurion, military tribune.

**Augustus**

- Soldiers during the republic had depended on their generals for pay and rewards. Generals such as Pompey and Caesar often used their armies for their own political ends. Augustus was at pains to put the army under his control and separate the military and political roles that the army could play. Soldiers received their pay and rewards from the emperor or the centralised financial administration. This reduced their dependence on the commanding generals and hence weakened the patron–client relationship that existed between generals and soldiers. (Suetonius names this as the principal motive behind the reform.) The army was reliant on Augustus and now became his client.
- In 29 BC Augustus took the title ‘imperator’ as part of his name. This emphasised the importance of his military leadership.
- In 27 BC Augustus was given control of Spain, Syria and Gaul–Germany. This gave him control of four-fifths of the armed forces and the right to choose the generals and the legions. In 12 BC Illyricum was converted from a senatorial to an imperial province, thus adding to his control. ‘This long-term concentration of the supreme command of almost the entire armed forces in one hand was . . . unique and new’ (Raaflaub, ‘Political Significance’, p. 1010).
- Augustus standardised the pay and allowances for the entire army. In 13 BC he fixed the period of service at twelve years for Praetorians and sixteen years for legionaries. In AD 6 it became sixteen years for Praetorians and twenty years for legionaries. He changed the bounty payable on completion of service from a piece of land (before 13 BC) to a lump sum of money equalling thirteen years’ pay. Before AD 6 this money came from Augustus’ private fortune. After AD 6 the reforms were funded by the military treasury (aerarium militare). The 5 per cent inheritance tax and the 1 per cent sales tax went into the military treasury (Suetonius, Augustus, 49).
- As a result of these measures, conscription was no longer necessary. However, after the Varian disaster of AD 9 and the Pannonian revolt, conscription was briefly applied in Italy.
- The legions were drawn mainly from the sons of veterans. Augustus forbade soldiers to marry during their term of service partly to improve military efficiency by keeping women and children out of the army camps. The children of the many men who
Augustus used the Praetorians as bodyguards. They became a permanent force. The urban cohorts were used as city police, but Augustus was careful never to have more than three cohorts in Rome (Suetonius, *Augustus*, 49). Other troops stationed in Rome were the vigiles (a fire brigade composed of 7000 freedmen).

- Auxiliary cohorts, supplying specialist forces and cavalry, were also permanently established by Augustus. Sometimes these foreign troops were commanded by their own chieftains, but from the time of Augustus, equestrian tribunes and prefects mainly commanded them.
- Two standing fleets commanded by equestrian prefects were established by Augustus, one at Misenum and one at Ravenna. There were also various river fleets stationed throughout the empire, such as those on the Rhine and the Danube (Suetonius, *Augustus*, 49).
- In 28 BC, Augustus reduced the number of legions from sixty to twenty-eight. This demonstrated to the Romans that he had fulfilled one of his main political platforms by bringing peace to the world. Financial considerations were at work here, as was a sense of the need to minimise the possibility of military revolts.
- The Roman Empire covered a large area, but there was limited manpower available to maintain it. Troops were dispersed along the borders of the empire so as to avoid a concentration of the army in one place. A consequence of this was that soldiers were alienated from civil society.
- The greatest military disaster of Augustus’ reign was the defeat of Varus in AD 9. The Germans annihilated Varus and three Roman legions in the Teutoburg forest. Much to the disgrace of the Romans, the Germans also captured the Roman standards. Augustus was supposedly haunted by this awful defeat and constantly cried out, ‘Varus give me back my legions!’ (Suetonius, *Augustus*, 23).
- The control and patronage of the army was dominated by Augustus and his family. All provincial soldiers swore an oath to Augustus. After victories, at triumphs and on politically important occasions, donatives were distributed to the soldiers from Augustus’ fortune. In *Res Gestae* 3.3, Augustus explains that he settled 300,000 veterans in colonies. When his grandson was presented to the army in 8 BC, Augustus gave the soldiers a donative (Dio, *Roman History*, LX, 6.4). Colonies established by veterans bore such names as *colonia Julia* or *Julia Augusta*.
- Augustus fostered the centurions by creating new career paths for them and allowing them entry into the equestrian order. These men were very loyal to Augustus.
- Under the Augustan system, the people who gained the top military positions were usually members of the imperial family or those who owed their careers to Augustus. The legati Augusti were appointed by Augustus and responsible to him. Augustus condemned haste and recklessness in his military commanders (Suetonius, *Augustus*, 25.1).
- Augustus ensured that nobles and members of the senatorial class held positions of authority—though without real military power (Raaflaub, ‘Political Significance’, p. 1017).
- Triumphs were no longer held by successful generals, but only by the imperial family.
- Personal connections with the army were regarded as important. Augustus went to Spain and Gaul and personally commanded the final stages of the war. In 19 BC he sent his step-son Tiberius to negotiate the return of the Parthian standards.
- Augustus put the army on a stable footing and tried to eliminate the misuse of the army that had occurred at the end of the republic. The regulations concerning pay and years of service encountered some difficulties, for when Augustus died the armies in Pannonia and Germany staged serious revolts. By AD 14 these soldiers had not received the promised rewards of Augustus’ reforms.
- Another difficulty was that each soldier had to pay for his own equipment, uniform and rations. The donatives came to be seen more as part of regular pay than as a gift.
- Augustus’ military policy was to a large extent successful because he cared for the social and material needs of soldiers, officers and veterans; cultivated the ties of clientela; provided reliable leadership.

**Tiberius**

- Tiberius enjoyed a long and distinguished military career before he became ruler. On his accession in AD 14 the armies in Pannonia and Germany mutinied. These were serious revolts, and Velleius Paterculus, an experienced soldier, wrote that ‘the army . . . wanted a new leader, a new order of things, and a new republic . . . They even dared to threaten to dictate terms to the Senate and to the emperor’ (Velleius Paterculus, *History*, 2.125.1). Tiberius’ son Drusus was sent to deal with the army in Pannonia,
and his nephew Germanicus quelled the revolt in Germany (Tacitus,  Annals, I, 15–48). As emperor, Tiberius made no visits to the troops serving on the frontiers. He closely followed the measures that Augustus had put in place for the army. ‘His long career as commanding general provided him with such a bonus of loyalty within the armies that, after the mutinies of AD 14, there were only minor difficulties’ (Raaflaub, ‘Political Significance, p. 1020).

- According to Tacitus, during the reign of Tiberius there were eight Roman legions along the Rhine, three in Spain, two in Africa and Egypt, four in the East (guarding the territory from Syria to the Euphrates), two in Pannonia, Moesia and Dalmatia.
- In AD 23 Tiberius recruited soldiers from the Romanised people in the provinces and the descendants of veterans. He was not impressed by the quality of the Italians that were enlisting, saying that they were mainly the destitute and the lazy (Tacitus,  Annals, IV, 4).
- The army began to play a role not only on the events in the empire but also within Rome itself. The vigiles played a part in the downfall of Sejanus. The Praetorian prefect Sutorius Macro had previously been a prefect of the vigiles. While Sejanus was in the Senate House listening to the letter from Tiberius denouncing him, Macro dismissed Sejanus’ Praetorians and replaced them with a group of loyal vigiles (Dio, Roman History, LVIII, 9.6).
- Tiberius sought to reduce robbery by decreasing the distances between military posts (Suetonius, Tiberius, 37).
- Tiberius delegated military campaigns to able generals. He avoided aggressive action unless it was necessary, preferring to win by diplomacy rather than force (Tacitus,  Annals, II, 26.3).
- Tiberius provided reliable military leadership and cultivated ties with the legions. His success as a military commander stands in contrast to the inexperience of his successors, who, ‘aware of traditional expectations, suffered from lack of confidence in themselves and suspicion of military talent in others’ (Griffin, Nero, p. 224).

**Gaius**

- Gaius was popular with the army because he was the son of Germanicus. He had spent his early years in the army camp and was given the nickname ‘Caligula’, meaning ‘little army boots’, because he was dressed in miniature army uniforms (Suetonius, Gaius, 9).
- From Suetonius we learn that Gaius dismissed generals who were late in bringing their auxiliary troops.
- He discharged older centurions who were within a few days of retirement. As a cost-cutting measure he reduced the retirement bonuses for soldiers (Suetonius, Gaius, 44).
- In AD 39/40 Gaius went to Gaul where he was acclaimed seven times (even though he fought no battles). He wanted to create a military image.
- In AD 39 the army in Germany and the commander Gaetulicus, as well as members of the imperial family, were involved in a plot to overthrow Gaius, who visited Germany and quickly suppressed the revolt. Grant sees this as a turning point in Gaius’ reign (Grant, The Twelve Caesars, p. 124).

**Claudius**

- The Praetorians, rather than the Senate, chose Claudius as ruler. He therefore needed the support of a powerful group. Despite his scholarly pursuits, lack of military experience and unmilitary appearance, Claudius cultivated the soldiers throughout his reign, for he realised the importance of a military image.
- In AD 41 Claudius faced a serious crisis when the governor of Dalmatia, Scribonianus, staged a revolt. However, Scribonianus’ legions refused to follow him, and so the revolt failed. Claudius rewarded the legions with the title ‘Claudia pia fidelis’, meaning ‘Claudius’ own loyal and true’.
- Claudius did not have a personal relationship with the army when he began his reign. He quickly corrected this by personally leading his troops to subdue Britain in AD 43 (Dio, Roman History, LX, 21.4–22.2). On his return to Rome he held a triumph. Coinage of the period shows the title ‘imperator’ on one side and the triumphal arch honouring the achievement on the other side.
- Claudius carefully cultivated his military image on coins, statues, buildings and on every possible public occasion. At the ceremony to celebrate the draining of the Fucine Lake, Claudius wore a military cloak (of imperial purple).
- Claudius rewarded his troops with titles and grants of citizenship, and began the practice of awarding certificates for honourable discharge of soldiers.
- He was saluted as ‘imperator’ on twenty-seven occasions.
- In AD 45 Claudius granted to the soldiers the privileges enjoyed by married men. Soldiers now had the right to give legacies to their children.
- The army was well disciplined and generally content throughout Claudius’ reign. He chose capable men as generals—Galba, Corbulo, Vespasian, Suetonius Paulinus.
N E R O

- During his reign, Nero was given thirteen imperial salutations.
- Nero had little concern for the soldiers, allowing their pay and rewards to fall into arrears.
- Nero’s extravagant behaviour and emphasis on his artistic activities upset the army. He made no attempt to build a military image or cultivate ties with the army as Claudius had done.
- He made serious mistakes in the choice of leaders. Caesonius Paetus, sent to the East to drive Tiridates out of Armenia, suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Parthians.
- Nero killed some of the more successful military generals. Corbulo had served with distinction in the East. He was then sent to Germany, but Nero feared him and had him killed.
- Many groups, including the army, became disillusioned with Nero and with the increasingly powerful freedmen. When he went on his trip to the East, Nero left a freedman Helius in charge of Rome.
- The soldiers and the provincial governors were upset by the heavy burden of taxation that Nero placed upon the provinces to fund his extravagance. Nero feared the power and threat posed by the military commanders.

- In AD 68 Julius Vindex, the governor of Gaul, staged an unsuccessful revolt. Galba revolted in Spain. Macer and the legion in Africa turned against Nero, then the legions in Germany withdrew their support from him, as did the Praetorian Guard in Rome. Nero was forced to commit suicide. The army, then, played a role in Nero’s downfall.
- Nero was unable to shoulder ‘the burden of expected military glory’ (Griffin, *Nero*, p. 233).

**Activity**

ESSAY

Analyse the role of the army in the time of Augustus and explain the changes that occurred in the Julio-Claudian period.

FOR DISCUSSION

Why was Augustus’ reform of the army an important feature of his reign?
Another group that had a significant impact in this period was the Praetorian Guard, which Augustus formed in 27 BC. Initially, the nine cohorts of Praetorians were stationed outside Rome, their responsibility being to safeguard both the city and the imperial family. They patrolled the palace and buildings in Rome as well as the towns surrounding Rome. The Praetorian prefect, who had charge of them, was directly answerable to Augustus. The position of prefect was the highest office that members of the equestrian order could attain. By the end of the Julio-Claudian period, the prefect wielded considerable power and influence within Rome. The Guard was often required to carry out unpleasant tasks for the ruling family.

**AUGUSTUS**
- The initial leadership of the Praetorian Guard consisted of two prefects.
- In 2 BC Augustus appointed two Praetorian prefects—Publius Aper and Ostorius Scapula. While on duty at the palace, guardsmen carried weapons but wore civilian dress. On parade, they wore elaborately decorated breastplates. They received one-and-a-half times the pay of an ordinary legionary.
- Augustus later replaced the two prefects with one—Valerius Ligur, who was granted a chair of honour alongside Augustus.

**TIBERIUS**
- In AD 15 Lucius Strabo, formerly Praetorian prefect under Augustus, became Prefect of Egypt. His son Lucius Aelius Sejanus became Praetorian prefect.
- In AD 23 a camp for the Praetorian Guard was built just outside Rome, near the Porta Viminalis. (This may have been a suggestion of Sejanus.)
- Sejanus played an important role in imperial politics. He took part in the murders of Drusus (AD 23), Agrippina the Elder (AD 29) and her sons Nero (AD 31) and Drusus (AD 33). He desired to marry Livilla in AD 25, but Tiberius refused. He became betrothed to Julia in AD 31. Many of the treason trials were seen as the responsibility of Sejanus. When Tiberius retired to Capri in AD 26 (possibly at the suggestion of Sejanus), the Praetorian prefect cleverly controlled the flow of information between Rome and the emperor.
- Sejanus was extremely loyal to Tiberius. He saved Tiberius’ life when the roof of the grotto at Spelunca caved in. Tiberius referred to him as ‘adjutor imperii’—‘sidekick of power’.
- When Tiberius realised just how much power Sejanus had been wielding he had him removed and killed.
- Sutorius Macro was prefect of the Guard from AD 31–38. He had played a vital part in the overthrow of Sejanus and was rewarded with the top job. He looked after Tiberius’ interests in Rome, but also cultivated the young Gaius. According to Tacitus’ account, Macro killed Tiberius in AD 37 (Tacitus, *Annals*, VI, 50). In Dio’s account, Macro is Gaius’ accomplice in the murder (Dio, *Roman History*, LVIII, 28).

**GAIUS**
- Macro helped Gaius in gaining senatorial approval. In AD 38 he became one of Gaius’ victims when he was ordered to commit suicide.
- Marcus Arreccius Clemens replaced Macro as prefect. He was involved in plots against Gaius.
- Some of the Praetorians and senators were involved in the plot to kill Gaius. It was the tribune of the Guard, Cassius Chaerea, who struck the fatal blow.
- The Praetorian Guard found Claudius in the palace and made the decision that he would be the next ruler.

**CLAUDIUS**
- Claudius was extremely grateful to the Praetorians for his elevation to power, and gave them generous donatives throughout his reign. He also had gold and silver coins minted in AD 41–42 that depicted him shaking hands with the guardsmen. This indicated the close relationship that existed between Claudius and the Guard.
- Despite his gratitude to the Guard, Claudius executed Chaerea and Sabinus, the Praetorian tribunes who had killed Gaius.
- There were two Praetorian prefects in Claudius’ reign—Rufrius Pollio and Catonius Justus. Pollio enjoyed the great honour of being seated alongside Claudius on public occasions. Pollio accompanied Claudius and the cohorts of the Guard when they joined the expedition to Britain, but he was executed by Claudius in AD 47.
Messalina saw to it that Catonius Justus was executed in AD 43 (he knew of her adulterous affairs).

Rufrius Crispinus was loyal to Messalina. In AD 47 he arrested Valerius Asiaticus, on her behalf, on the charge of conspiracy (the real reason was that Asiaticus was an enemy of Messalina).

In AD 51 Claudius’ new wife, Agrippina, removed Crispinus from office, on the pretext that only one prefect was needed instead of two. Agrippina recommended one of her clients, Afranius Burrus, as the replacement.

Lusius Geta had been appointed prefect before AD 47. In AD 48 Claudius asked Geta for his advice regarding Messalina. However, he could not be trusted with Messalina’s execution because he was loyal to her and her children.

**Nero**

Burrus promoted the interests of Agrippina by presenting her son Nero to the Praetorian Guard in AD 54.

Burrus and Seneca advised Nero and kept a check on his behaviour. During his time as prefect, Burrus played a significant role in the formulation of Nero’s policies. In AD 55 he was accused of plotting against Nero, but escaped the charge.

Burrus’ influence declined after Nero’s murder of Agrippina in AD 59.

In AD 62 Burrus tried to persuade Nero not to divorce Octavia. Burrus developed a throat condition and died later that year.

Faenius Rufus was co-prefect with Gaius Ofonius Tigellinus, AD 62–65. Rufus was involved in the Pisonian conspiracy of AD 65 and was executed.

Tigellinus was prefect, AD 62–68. He made extensive use of delatores to conduct a reign of terror in Rome. He ruthlessly executed those involved in the conspiracy of Piso. He fell ill in AD 68 and his co-prefect Nymphidius Sabinus assumed command.

In the last days of Nero’s reign, Tigellinus deserted Nero.

Sabinus ensured that the Guard withdrew their support from Nero. He had pledged his support to Galba, one of the contenders for the throne, in return for a payment of money.

**For further investigation**

Research the lives and careers of Sejanus, Macro, Burrus and Tigellinus
It should be noted at the outset that imperial policy includes the treatment of provinces and frontiers. Provinces are those areas conquered and settled by the Romans, while frontiers refer to the imperial boundaries—those areas on the borders of the empire. The frontiers were fluid, moving frequently as initiatives expanded and contracted.

Political and geographical conditions were so variable within the empire that the Romans did not use a single strategy. They adopted various means to control the empire: military conquest; diplomacy; buffer zones of client states; the traditional method of ‘divide and rule’, whereby the emperors fostered internal conflicts. The Romans dealt with each area according to its own circumstances. Two areas of particular concern throughout this period were the Rhine–Danube frontier and the Syria–Asia Minor area that bordered on the Parthian empire.

Augustus intended to conquer the whole world, or at least to create the impression that he had. He projected the image of a world conqueror, a bringer of peace, the ruler over foreign kings. He extended the Roman Empire in some areas, but suffered a major setback in Germany.

Tiberius had undertaken expeditions on behalf of Augustus. He understood the Augustan policies of consolidating the Roman frontiers and improving the government of the provinces. During his reign, therefore, Tiberius followed the Augustan policy of consolidation, and made some innovative changes to provincial government.

Gaius reversed Augustan policies in the East, particularly in Parthia and Judaea, which weakened Rome’s position. However, he made some wise decisions with regard to client kings.

Claudius adopted a policy of expansion and conquered Britain. Like Augustus before him, Claudius cultivated the image of a great conqueror.

Nero maintained the Roman frontiers but failed to solve some major provincial problems. His neglect of the provinces had dire consequences, for it was the provincial governors who led the revolts that ultimately caused his downfall.

**Augustus**

- The Augustan poets praised Augustus for extending the Roman Empire and bringing great glory and wealth to Rome. Augustus promoted several images of himself, including that of a world conqueror. At the beginning of the *Res Gestae*, he claimed that he had ‘subjected the world to the power of the Roman people’.
- Augustus did not employ one overarching policy for the whole of the empire—particular circumstances dictated the use of specific methods. ‘Augustus ... allowed the allied nations to manage their affairs according to their ancestral traditions.’ He was content to permit some territories to govern themselves, while over others he favoured the continuation of direct Roman rule. This idea of imperial flexibility ‘he impressed upon the Senate in writing’ (Dio, *Roman History*, LIV, 9).
- **Client kings:** The general policy, was to leave the client kings or native rulers in control of their own territories. To ensure the loyalty of these client kingdoms, the Romans often held members of their families as hostages in Rome. If the local kingdoms were unstable or threatened Roman security, they were annexed and became provinces of Rome. Such client kingdoms were usually situated on the fringes of the empire, and acted as buffer zones between Roman-controlled territory and the possibly hostile areas beyond.
- Augustus’ aim was to have defensible frontiers against ‘barbarian’ invaders. He wanted to push frontiers to their natural limits without losing control of distant armies.
- In 25 BC Augustus established Juba as the client king of Mauretania. He also established client kingdoms in Cappadocia, Commagene and Chalcis.
- **Senatorial and imperial provinces:** In 27 BC the provinces were divided into senatorial and imperial units of administration. The Senate controlled the senatorial provinces, which rarely held troops; the imperial provinces were controlled by Augustus through his *legati*. ‘He handed over the weaker provinces to the Senate, on the ground that they were at peace and free from war, but he kept the stronger under his authority, arguing that they were insecure and exposed to danger and either had enemies near their frontiers or were capable of starting a serious rebellion on their own initiative’ (Dio, *Roman History*, LIII, 12).
- Augustus established the client kingdom of Judaea, which was put into the hands of Herod the Great. In AD 6, after Herod’s death, it became an imperial province.
- **The Balkans:** Between 12 and 9 BC, Tiberius, on
behalf of Augustus, conducted four campaigns in the Balkan region. A serious revolt erupted in Pannonia in AD 6, but eventually this area was divided into the two provinces of Dalmatia and Pannonia.

- **Spain:** In 26 BC Augustus personally led the army to north-west Spain to extend Roman control. It took further campaigns by M. Agrippa before Spain was subdued in 19 BC. Horace wrote an ode celebrating Augustus' success in Spain, and the *Ara Pacis* was set up to honour the achievement.

- **Gaul:** In 27–13 BC Gaul was divided into three districts: Belgica, Aquitania and Lugdunensis, for ease of administration.

- **Provincial government:** Augustus saw provincial government as a priority and made extensive tours of the provinces: 27–24 BC—Gaul and Spain; 22–19 BC—the eastern provinces; 15–13 Gaul (Dio, *Roman History*, LIV, 20).

- Augustus improved the provinces by his careful choice of governors and prefects, whom he paid generously in an effort to avoid administrative corruption. Under Augustus, the usual tenure for commands was 3–5 years. The road system was improved between Rome and the provinces for better communication. Augustus promoted colonisation and the development of towns throughout the empire.

- Augustus encouraged the worship of Roma in the provinces, creating a bond of loyalty between the provincials and Rome.

- **Germany:** Augustus planned to make the Elbe River the border of the northern frontier. As a result of the Varus disaster in AD 9 (Dio, *Roman History*, LVI, 18–23), Augustus concluded that the conquest of Germany was not possible. The tribal nature of the Germans and the difficulty of the terrain meant that it was too costly in manpower and resources to conquer. Instead the Romans extended and strengthened the northern frontier.

- **Egypt:** Egypt was specially controlled by Augustus because of its great wealth; it almost became a private estate of the emperors. Only men of equestrian rank were sent as governors of Egypt. Senators had to gain special permission from imperial authorities even to set foot there (*Res Gestae*, 27).

- **The East:** Augustus adopted a general policy of non-aggression in the East. On behalf of Augustus, Tiberius installed Tigranes on the Armenian throne. Augustus conducted diplomatic relations with Parthia and achieved a propaganda success when the Parthian king, Phraates, returned the Roman standards taken from Crassus in 53 BC (Dio, *Roman Histories*, LIV, 8).

- In 25 BC Augustus annexed Galatia and strengthened Syria.

- **Tiberius**

- Tiberius carefully followed Augustan advice to avoid extending the empire, and ‘left the frontiers in a more stable condition’ (Webster, *Roman Imperial Army*, p. 40).

- Before coming to power, Tiberius had spent twenty-eight years abroad. As princeps, he neither visited the provinces nor left Italy. However, he did intervene when necessary. For example, when Germanicus entered Egypt without permission, Tiberius responded quickly.

- **Provincial government:** Tiberius made two important innovations in his reign—he lengthened the tenure of provincial governors and centralised the system of administration. Tiberius wanted the provinces to be governed by men of merit, so he allowed legates and governors to remain in their provinces for long periods of time. For example, C. Poppeaean Sabinus served in Moesia for twenty-four years. Lengthening provincial commands allowed men to become familiar with the demands of their province. However, not all the appointments were prudent. Pontius Pilate governed the volatile area of Judaea for nine years (AD 27–36). Pilate made a number of serious mistakes that offended the Jews. He brought Roman military standards bearing the image of Tiberius into Jerusalem. He used part of the sacred treasure to build an aqueduct, and insisted on erecting golden shields in Herod’s Palace. All of these measures upset traditional Jewish law. Tiberius centralised the provincial administration by allowing some governors to rule their provinces from Rome. L. Aelius Lamia, for example, remained in Rome while fulfilling the office of legate of Syria from AD 21 to 32.
• Rome was dependent on the provinces for supplies, especially grain (Tacitus, Annals, III, 54.6–8). It was the duty of the princeps to ensure that the provinces were efficiently exploited, hence Tiberius’ comment to the prefect of Egypt that he wanted his sheep shorn not flayed (Suetonius, Tiberius, 32.2).

• Eleven prosecutions of provincial officials were conducted during Tiberius’ reign.

• In AD 17 Tiberius displayed his generosity by remitting the taxes of twelve cities of Asia Minor that had been hit by earthquakes.

• Tiberius had permanent military bases built along the Rhine and the Danube to strengthen the frontiers.

• Rhine: The northern frontier was maintained at the Rhine after Germanicus’ attempts to expand it to the Elbe were stopped by Tiberius. In AD 28 the Romans suppressed a revolt of the Frisii.

• Danube: Tiberius believed that if he left the rebellious tribes to their own internal disturbances they would eventually turn against themselves. He used a native leader, Catualda, to keep a watch on the upper Danube on behalf of the Romans (Tacitus, Annals, II, 60). He further strengthened the Danube area in AD 15, when Achaia and Macedonia became imperial provinces. Tiberius replaced the two kings in the lower Danube region and appointed a Roman to supervise them. The Danube was also strengthened by improved roads and river fleets.

• The East: Germanicus settled the question of kingship in the East. A new treaty was negotiated with Parthia, and the Romans installed Zeno (Artaxes) as the new king of Armenia (Tacitus, Annals, II, 55). Once more the Romans asserted their authority in the area. In AD 17 the client kingdoms of Cappadocia and Commagene were annexed and became provinces of Rome.

• Africa: A deserter, Tacfarinas, led revolts in the senatorial province of Africa from AD 17 to 24. Tiberius was annoyed with the Senate for allowing this situation to go on for seven years. Africa was an important area because it supplied two thirds of Roman grain needs. Junius Blaesus finally defeated Tacfarinas (Tacitus, Annals, IV, 21–5).

• Gaul: Two Gallic noblemen Florus and Sacrovir, led revolts in the province of Gaul.

• Tiberius’ principate was marked by tranquillity. A general environment of peace was interrupted by three minor disturbances.

GAIUS

• Gaius appeared to be inconsistent in his policies (particularly in Parthia). He was influenced by his eastern friends and rewarded them with client kingdoms, hoping to ensure their loyalty. Commagene became a client kingdom again. Gaius established client states in Thrace, Pontus and Armenia Minor. His measures were well accepted, and Claudius maintained them.

• Rhine: Gaius went to the Rhine area to secure the support of the army. He may have been contemplating a campaign in Germany (Suetonius, Gaius, 45–7). He used the pretext that he wished to strengthen the frontiers, but in fact he was concerned that one of the Rhine commanders, Lepidus, was in league with two of his sisters in a conspiracy. Galba was given command of the upper Rhine, and spent a number of years securing the frontier against the Germans.

• Gaul: In AD 39 Gaius visited Gaul. It is believed that he planned an invasion of Britain, but the troops refused to make the crossing. Even though the invasion did not eventuate, Gaius announced Britain’s annexation.

• Africa: Gaius ordered Ptolemy, the client king of Mauretania to commit suicide in preparation for its annexation. This was a very provocative action on Gaius’ part, and led to a civil war in Africa.

• The East: Gaius restored dispossessed friendly kings to their former thrones and found kingdoms for others he favoured. He reversed Augustus’ policy of religious toleration in Judaea. He ordered the Jews to others he favoured. He reversed Augustus’ policy of religious toleration in Judaea. He ordered the Jews to

CLAUDIUS

• Claudius wanted to be remembered as the ‘extender of empire’. During his reign new territories, such as Britain, were added to Rome’s empire. Claudius expanded Rome’s imperial holdings, and assimilated the inhabitants of newly acquired territories. Like Augustus, he stressed the military role of the princeps.

• Claudius’ prime concern seems to have been responsible and efficient government.

• Rhine–Danube: Claudius maintained Tiberius’
defensive and diplomatic policy on the Rhine–Danube frontier, but moved the frontier to the Rhine River. To reinforce this area, fleets patrolled the Danube and roads were improved. Noricum became an imperial province governed by an equestrian procurator. Further south, the provinces of Achaia and Macedonia were returned to the control of the Senate.

- In AD 47 Claudius prevented Corbulo from conducting any further aggressive and expansionary campaigns in Germany (Tacitus, *Annals*, XI, 19).

- **Britain:** Claudius annexed Britain in AD 43. The factional fighting of the British chieftains provided Claudius with his excuse for the invasion. He was keen to enhance his military image and popularity with the army and to gain the riches of Britain. Aulus Plautius completed most of the conquest before giving way to Claudius, who took formal possession of Britain (Dio, *Roman History*, LX, 21.1–5). A colony of veterans was established at Camulodunum, and trade and business activity began in the town of Londinium, the headquarters of the imperial governor. By AD 54, the Romans controlled southern England, while the fringes of the British frontier were guarded by the client kingdoms of the Iceni, Regni and Brigantes tribes. The conquest of Britain was an important achievement for Claudius, for he had extended the boundary of the empire. The conquest was commemorated on coins, architecture and in literature.

- **Senatorial and imperial provinces:** Claudius restored the provinces of Macedonia and Achaia to senatorial control (Dio, *Roman History*, LX, 24.1).

- Mauretania, which had erupted during the reign of Gaius, was organised into two imperial provinces by Claudius. Britain, Thrace (AD 46), Lycia (AD 43) and Judaea also came under imperial control (Dio, *Roman History*, LX, 17.3–4). These provinces were governed by a *procurator Augusti*, personally accountable to Claudius. This centralisation of control was a feature of Claudius’ rule.

- **The East:** Gaius had stirred up trouble with the Jews, but Claudius skilfully soothed their anger by reversing Gaius’ policies.

- Judaea was a client kingdom under Herod Agrippa, but on his death in AD 44 it became an imperial province.

- Poor relations prevailed between the Jews and Greeks of Alexandria. Claudius listened to the arguments of both sides and attempted to curb the ill-feeling between the two groups.

- In AD 49 Mithradates, a Roman appointee, was placed on the throne of Armenia. This kept the Parthians occupied (Tacitus, *Annals*, XI, 6–10).

- **Romanisation:** Claudius improved the infrastructure of the empire. For example, the Via Claudia Augusta (a 525-km road) linked Augsburg to Trent in the Danube region. Numerous towns and colonies, such as Cologne and Trier, were built throughout the empire.

- **Gaul:** Under Claudius, many provincials were granted Latin rights or, in some cases, full Roman citizenship. In AD 46 the whole Anauni tribe was granted Roman citizenship. In AD 48 Claudius even allowed some Gallic nobles to enter the Roman Senate (Tacitus, *Annals*, XI, 23.1–25.1). This was part of Claudius’ push to Romanise the empire, but it caused much alarm in some quarters of Roman society.

- **Client kingdoms:** Claudius changed the governments of Raetia, Noricum, Mauretania and Thrace from client kingdoms to provinces. He believed that direct Roman control was preferable to the system of client kingdoms.

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**Nero**

- Initially, under the guidance of Seneca and Burrus, Nero’s policy towards the empire showed restraint and consolidation. Nero was not interested in expanding the empire, only in spending the money derived from it (Suetonius, *Nero*, 31).

- Nero displayed little real interest in the provinces and frontiers of the empire. He was inconsistent in his policies. He loved all things Greek, so he exempted Greece from paying taxes, but the rest of the empire had to pay dearly. He chose capable men as governors of upper and lower Germany—Scribonius Proculus and Scribonius Rufus. Later in his reign, he became afraid of military men and required them to commit suicide. Corbulo suffered such a fate (Dio, *Roman History*, LXII, 17). Griffin comments that ‘Nero did not put the provinces at risk by appointing incompetent governors. But he did put the confidence of the Senate at risk through his growing unwillingness to trust its aristocratic members and to reward military achievement . . . all Nero’s army commanders came to feel insecure as well as unappreciated, and it was only a matter of time until one of them initiated or supported an attempt at revolution’ (Griffin, *Nero*, p. 118).

- **Britain:** According to Suetonius, Nero considered withdrawing the troops from Britain (Suetonius, *Nero*, 18). The serious uprising of Boudicca was caused by the greed of the Roman tax collectors and money-lenders. Boudicca, Queen of the Iceni, enjoyed a client relationship with Rome, but she rebelled
against the harsh demands of the Romans. Other disgruntled tribes, such as the Trinovantes, joined her rebellion. They were successful in burning three Roman towns, including the capital, Londinium, before they were defeated (Dio, Roman History, LXII, 1–12).

- Nero granted Latin rights to the people of the Maritime Alps.
- He made edicts concerning all the provinces, not just those under imperial control.
- **The East**: Nero attempted to annex Armenia. Corbulo advised Nero against these actions but was ignored. The Romans suffered a humiliating surrender and lost Armenia to the Parthians (Dio, Roman History, LXII, 19–23). Despite this, Nero the showman could not resist making a monumental display, in Rome, of presenting the throne to Tiridates.
- In AD 64, the client kingdom of Pontus was annexed. As a result of this move, Asia Minor and the Black Sea area came under direct Roman control.

In AD 64, Gessius Florus was made procurator of Judaea and only increased the tension in the region by his heavy *exactions* until, in AD 66, the Jews rebelled. The Roman forces were defeated on this occasion. In the last years of Nero’s reign, Vespasian was sent to try to regain Judaea for the Romans.

- By the end of Nero’s reign, the Roman Empire confronted serious problems. The governor of Gaul, Vindex, attempted to overthrow Nero, partly because the Gauls were suffering from the heavy burden of taxation (Dio, Roman History, LXIII, 22.2). Vindex conspired with Galba, the governor of Spain, who ultimately succeeded in depriving Nero of power.

### CONCLUSION

The dynasty begun by Augustus came to an end in AD 68 with the death of Nero. A period of disruption prevailed until the Flavian dynasty was established. Under the leadership of Augustus and the Julio-Claudians, Rome had changed dramatically:

- the government had become more centralised and was now accountable to the princeps
- the Senate had lost its importance as a governing body, but functioned as an administrator of parts of the empire
- the army had increased its importance throughout the period, finally acquiring sufficient power to choose the emperor
- the image of the ruler had become a vital means of ensuring political survival—the military image was especially important to cultivate
- despite encountering a few problems, the empire, on the whole, was well governed and stable.

By AD 68 the republican government had virtually disappeared; the centralised imperial government was well established.

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*Figure 9.14*  
Nero the entertainer—one view of imperial rule at the end of the Julio-Claudian period

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**Activity**

**Essay**  
Assess imperial policies in this period.