

## The Deeds of Augustus Caesar



A century of class conflict, military dictatorship, and civil war came to an end when young Octavian, the great-nephew and adopted heir of Julius Caesar, defeated the fleet of Anthony and Cleopatra at Actium in 31 B.C. Both Anthony and Cleopatra committed suicide. In 29 B.C.E. Octavian returned to Rome in triumph. After a period of transition from a state of war to peace, Octavian formally proclaimed the restoration of the republican constitution at a meeting of the Senate in 27 B.C.E. While this won him great acclaim, as did his offer to surrender his power to the Senate, everyone knew that the ancient Republic was beyond restoration and that a strong imperial government under a powerful ruler was essential to prevent a return of the chaos that had almost destroyed Rome.

*Augustus* - a title bestowed upon him at the time he restored the constitution-pretended to rule as a republican official by sharing his power with the Senate. In reality he was an absolute monarch. This first Roman Emperor proved to be a farsighted states-man with extraordinary administrative ability. Concentrating his strength on internal problems, he established a system of government which became the foundation of the *Pax Romana* {"Roman Peace"} for two centuries. Before his death in 14 C.E., he had his numerous accomplishments inscribed in bronze.

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At the age of nineteen, on my own initiative and at my own *expense*, I raised an army by *means* of which I restored liberty to the Republic, which had been oppressed by the tyranny of a faction. For this *service* the Senate . . . enrolled me in its order . . . [and] gave me the *imperium* {the right to command soldiers. Augustus, in fact already had the power to command the army} As proprietor {High ranking official} it ordered me, along with the consuls, "to see that the Republic suffered no harm." In the same year, moreover, as both consuls had fallen in war, the people elected me consul and a triumvir for settling the constitution.

Those who slew my father I drove into exile, punishing their deed by *due process of law*, and afterward when they waged war upon the Republic I twice defeated them in battle. Wars, both civil and foreign, I undertook throughout the world, on sea and land, and when victorious I spared all citizens who sued for pardon. The foreign nations which could with safety be pardoned I preferred to save rather than to destroy. The number of Roman citizens who bound themselves to me by military oath was about 500,000. Of these I settled in colonies or sent back into their own towns, after their term of service, something more than 300,000, and to all I assigned lands or gave money as a reward for military service. Twice I triumphed with an ovation, . . .and was saluted as imperator twenty-one times. Although the Senate decreed me additional triumphs I set them aside. . . For successful operations on land and sea, . . . the Senate on fifty-five occasions decreed that thanks should be rendered to the immortal gods. . . . At the time of writing these words I have been thirteen times consul. .

The dictatorship offered me by the people and the Roman Senate, in my absence and later when present, . . . I did not accept. I did not decline at a time of the greatest scarcity of grain the charge of the grain supply, which I so administered that within a few days I freed the entire

people, at my own expense, from the fear and danger in which they were. The consulship, either yearly or for life, then offered me I did not accept. .

When the Senate and the Roman people unanimously agreed that I should be elected overseer of laws and morals, without a colleague and with the fullest power, I refused to accept any power offered me which was contrary to the traditions of our ancestors. .

The Senate decreed that every fifth year vows should be undertaken for my health by the consuls and the priests...By the decree of the Senate . . it was enacted by law that my person should be sacred. . Four times I aided the public treasury with my own money. .

I restored the channels of the aqueducts which in several places were falling into disrepair through age...Three times in my own name I gave a show of gladiators, and five times in the name of my sons or grandsons; in these shows there fought about ten thousand men. .I gave the people the spectacle of a naval battle beyond the Tiber River]. .

I freed the sea from pirates...I extended the boundaries of all the provinces. .Embassies were often sent to me from the kings of India, a thing never seen before in the camp of any general of the Romans. In my sixth and seventh consulships, when I had extinguished the flames of civil war, after receiving by universal consent the absolute control of affairs, I transferred the Republic from my own control to the will of the Senate and the Roman people. For this service on my part I was given the title of Augustus by decree of the Senate; and the doorposts of my house were covered with laurels by public act; and a civic crown was fixed above my door; and a golden shield was placed in the Curia Julia whose inscription testified that the Senate and the Roman people gave me this in recognition of my valor, my clemency, my justice, and my piety. After that time I took precedence of all in rank, but of power I possessed no more than those who were my colleagues in any magistracy.

While I was administering my thirteenth consulship, the Senate and the Equestrian Order and the entire Roman people gave me the title of Father of my Country.

**Source:** *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, bound with Velicius Paterculus, *History of Rome*, translated by Frederick W. Shipley, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, pp.345-401. Reprinted by permission of the publishers and the Loeb Classical Library.