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AUGUSTUS

Introduction to the Life of an Emperor

Augustus, Rome's first emperor, is one of the great figures of world history and one of the most fascinating. In this lively and concise biography, Karl Galinsky examines Augustus' life from childhood to deification. He chronicles the mosaic of vicissitudes, challenges, setbacks, and successes that shaped Augustus' life, both public and private. How did he use his power? How did he manage to keep reinventing himself? What kind of man was he? A transformative leader, Augustus engineered profound change in Rome and throughout the Mediterranean world. No one would have expected such vast achievements from the frail and little-known eighteen-year-old who became Caesar's heir amid turmoil and crisis. A mere thirteen years later, after defeating Antony and Cleopatra, he had, in his words, "power over all things."

Karl Galinsky is the Cailloux Centennial Professor of Classics at the University of Texas at Austin. The author and editor of several books, including *Augustan Culture* and *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus*, he has received awards for his teaching and research, including fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the Max-Planck Society.

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University of Texas, Austin



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Karl Galinsky

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

List of Maps, Genealogical Chart, and Illustrations	<i>page</i> vi
Timeline	xv
Note on Major Ancient Sources	xix
Preface	xxiii
1 From Velitrae to Caesar's Heir	i
2 Power Struggles and Civil War	20
3 The Experiment of the Principate	61
4 The Challenge of <i>Pax Augusta</i>	84
5 Augustus at Home: Friends and Family	110
6 Cultural Vitality	144
7 The Augustan Empire: Unity and Diversity	159
8 The Final Days and an Assessment	176
Select Bibliography and References for Further Reading	187
Index	191
Index of Passages and Inscriptions	199

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-76797-2 - Augustus: Introduction to the Life of an Emperor

Karl Galinsky

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

LIST OF MAPS, GENEALOGICAL CHART, AND ILLUSTRATIONS

MAPS

- | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| 1 | The Augustan empire and its provinces | <i>page</i> viii |
| 2 | The City of Rome AD 14 | xi |

GENEALOGICAL CHART

- | | | |
|--|--|-----|
| | Genealogical chart of the family of Augustus | xii |
|--|--|-----|

ILLUSTRATIONS

- | | | |
|---|--|----|
| 1 | Coin with sign of Capricorn. <i>Denarius</i> from Spain, ca. 17–15 BC | 3 |
| 2 | Marble portrait head of Octavian, early 30s BC | 17 |
| 3 | Glass token with symbols of Octavian, ca. 44 BC | 23 |
| 4 | Series of three <i>denarii</i> of Octavian, before 31 BC | 49 |
| 5 | Map of the battle of Actium | 54 |
| 6 | Marble portrait head of Cleopatra VII, between 40 and 30 BC | 57 |
| 7 | <i>Aureus</i> (gold coin) of Octavian, Asian mint, 28 BC | 62 |
| 8 | Marble statue of Augustus from Prima Porta. Tiberian copy of ca. AD 15 | 75 |
| 9 | Augustus as priest. Marble statue, Rome. After 12 BC | 77 |

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-76797-2 - Augustus: Introduction to the Life of an Emperor

Karl Galinsky

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

– LIST OF MAPS, GENEALOGICAL CHART, AND ILLUSTRATIONS –

10	Altar of Augustan Peace, Rome: female deity, 9 BC	94
11	Altar of Augustan Peace, Rome: the goddess Roma, 9 BC	95
12	Altar of the Lares at the crossroads. Rome, after 7 BC	103
13	Plan of the Palatine, Rome	105
14	Terracotta lamp from Carthage with Augustan symbols	106
15	Cameo with portrait of Livia, c. 20 BC	112
16	Papyrus fragment: Augustus' eulogy of Agrippa	116
17	The Pantheon, Rome	120
18	Julia with Gaius and Lucius Caesar. <i>Denarius</i> , Rome, 13 BC	124
19	Gemma Augustea, c. AD 10	132
20	Altar of Augustan Peace, Rome: south frieze, 9 BC	139
21	Model of the Mausoleum of Augustus, Rome	155
22	Bilingual inscription from the theater at Leptis Magna, Libya, c. AD 1	171

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Karl Galinsky

Frontmatter

[More information](#)



Map 1. The Augustan empire and its provinces.



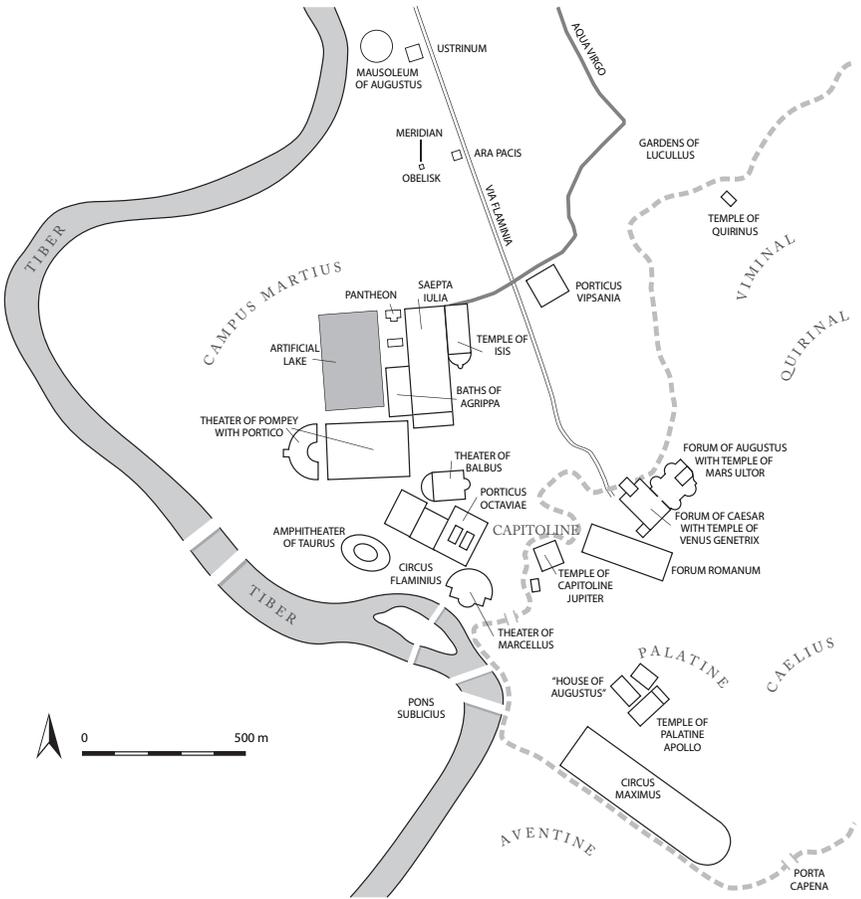
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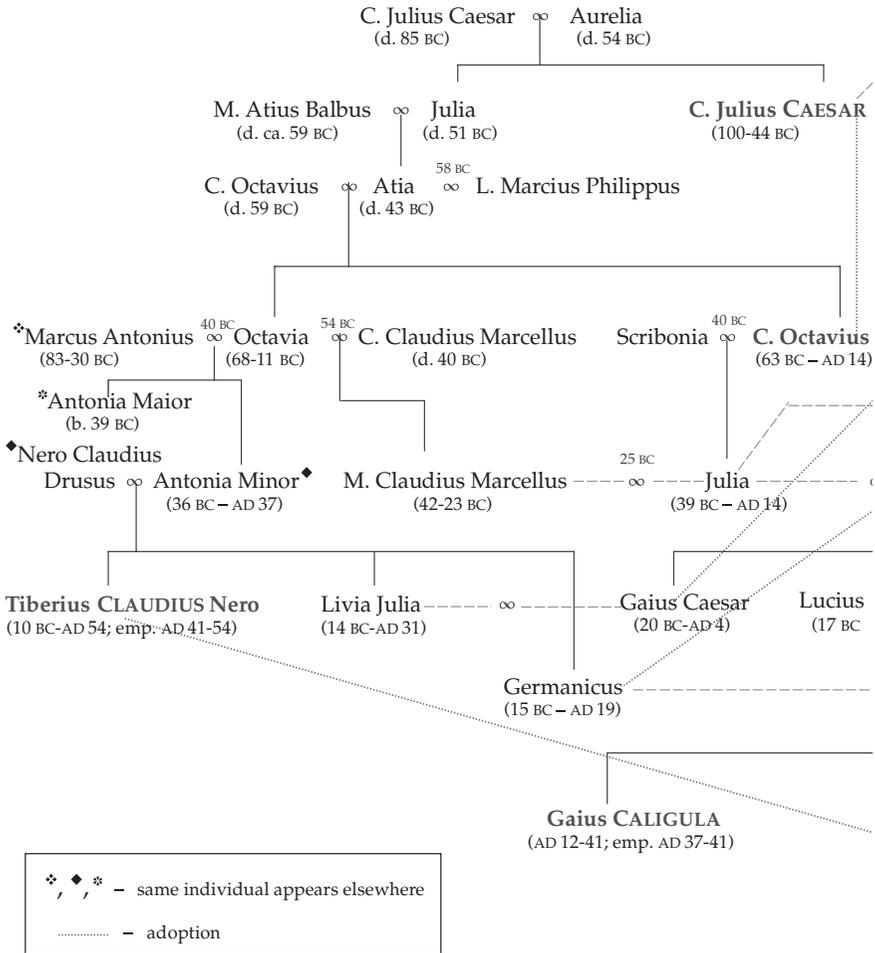
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Frontmatter

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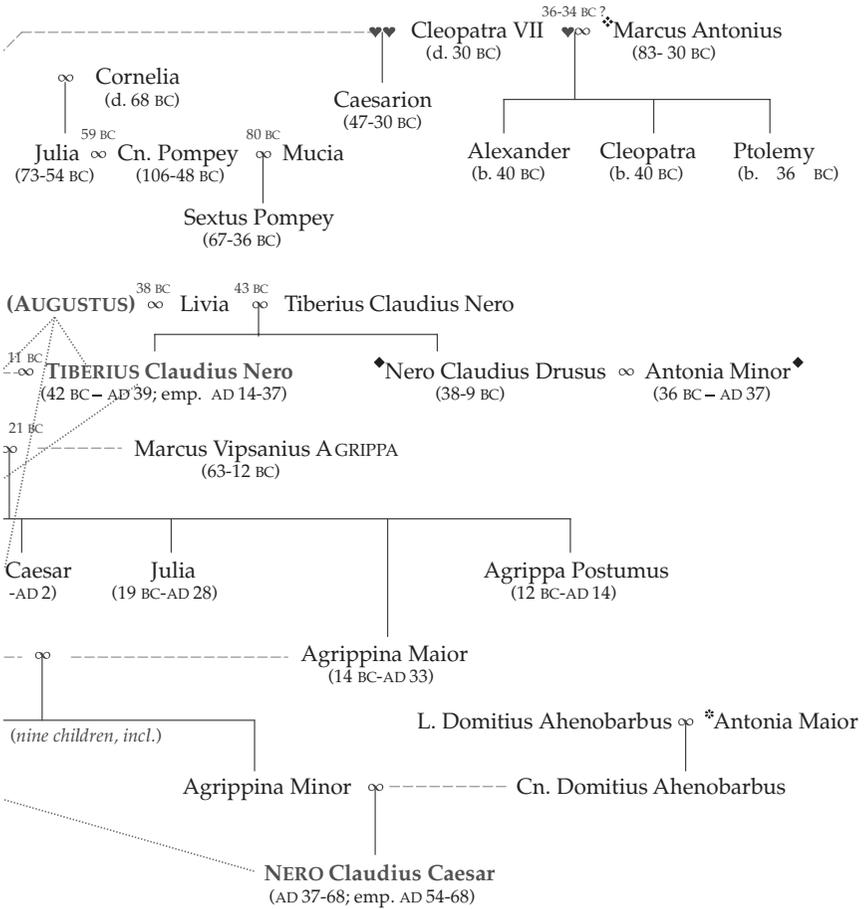


Map 2. The City of Rome AD 14.



Genealogical chart of the family of Augustus.

The Julio-Claudian Family



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Frontmatter

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TIMELINE

63 BC	Sept. 23	Birth of Gaius Octavius, the later Augustus
c. 63 BC		Birth of Agrippa
59		Death of the father, Gaius Octavius
58	Jan. 30	Birth of Livia
49–45		Civil wars of Julius Caesar
45	Sept./Oct.	Octavian goes to Apollonia
44	Jan./Feb.	Designated <i>magister equitum</i>
44	March 15	Assassination of Julius Caesar; Caesar's will names Octavian as heir
44	May 8	Octavian formally accepts Caesar's will
44	July 20–30	Games in honor of Caesar's Victory; appearance of comet
43	Jan. 2	Octavian becomes a member of the senate and receives <i>propraetorian imperium</i>
43	Aug. 19	After march on Rome, Octavian is made consul
43	Nov. 27	Beginning of Triumvirate of Antony, Lepidus, and Octavian; proscriptions
43	Dec. 7	Death of Cicero
42	early Oct./Oct. 23	Battles of Philippi. Defeat and suicide of Brutus and Cassius
42	Nov. 16	Birth of Tiberius
40		Fall of Perugia. Treaty of Brundisium. Marriage to Scribonia
39	summer	Treaty of Misenum

– TIMELINE –

39	late Dec.	Birth of Julia
38	Jan. 17	Marriage to Livia
37	autumn	Renewal of Triumvirate (Treaty of Tarentum); Antony permanently returns to Cleopatra
36	Sept. 3	Battle of Naulochus. Defeat of Sextus Pompey
35–34		Octavian campaigns in Illyria
34	late	Beginning of propaganda war between Octavian and Antony
32		Consuls and c. 300 senators flee to Antony. Antony divorces Octavia
31	Sept. 2	Battle of Actium
30	Aug. 1	Fall of Alexandria. Suicide of Antony and Cleopatra
29	Aug. 13–15	Octavian celebrates triple triumph
27	Jan. 13–16	Senate meetings confirming return to constitutional government; Octavian named “Augustus”
27–24		Augustus in Spain and Gaul
23		Augustus almost dies. Reorganization of his powers: he receives tribunician power and overriding <i>imperium</i> . Death of Marcellus
22–19		Augustus in Sicily and the east
21		Agrippa marries Julia
20		Parthian “victory”: Parthians return Roman military standards captured in 53 BC. Birth of Gaius Caesar
19	Sept. 21	Death of Vergil. Posthumous publication of <i>Aeneid</i>
18		“Moral” legislation: Julian Laws about marriage and adultery
17		Birth of Lucius Caesar. Augustus adopts both grandsons. Secular Games
16–13		Augustus in Gaul
15	May 24	Birth of Germanicus
12		Augustus becomes <i>pontifex maximus</i> . Death of Agrippa. Birth of Agrippa Postumus

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Karl Galinsky

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

– TIMELINE –

11		Marriage of Tiberius and Julia
11–10		Augustus in Gaul
9	Jan. 30	Dedication of Ara Pacis
8		The month of <i>Sextilis</i> is renamed <i>Augustus</i> . Reorganization of the city of Rome into XIV Regions.
		Augustus again in Gaul
6		Tiberius withdraws to Rhodes
2		Augustus named <i>pater patriae</i> . Dedication of Forum of Augustus
AD 2		Tiberius returns from Rhodes. Death of Lucius Caesar. Banishment of Julia
4		Death of Gaius Caesar. Augustus adopts Tiberius following Tiberius' adoption of Germanicus
6		Banishment of Agrippa Postumus
6–9		Rebellion in Pannonia
9		Defeat of Varus in Germany; loss of three legions. Revision of marriage laws
10–12		Military campaigns of Tiberius in Germany
13		Augustus writes his final will. Germanicus campaigns in Germany
14	Aug. 19	Death of Augustus in Nola
14	Sept. 17	<i>Divus Augustus</i> by decree of the senate. Tiberius named Augustus' successor with title <i>Augustus</i>
29		Death of Livia

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NOTE ON MAJOR ANCIENT SOURCES

GREEK AND ROMAN HISTORIANS AND BIOGRAPHERS

Only three of these are contemporary with Augustus; there were others whose works have not survived. For **Nicolaus of Damascus**, see Chapter 1. **Velleius Paterculus** (c. 19 BC–after AD 30) participated as a high-ranking military officer in the campaigns of Tiberius and Augustus' grandson Gaius Caesar and became a senator in AD 7. A major part of his two books of *Roman Histories* deals with the period of Augustus and Tiberius. Even though he is an unabashed fan of these two (cf. Boxes 3.3 and 5.6), he provides a valuable “boots on the ground” perspective that is missing from later writers. **Strabo** (c. 64 BC–AD 24), an educated and well-traveled Greek who spent much of his time in Rome, wrote a seventeen-book description of the world known to Romans at the time of Augustus and Tiberius. Its title is *Geography*. It is highly informative, even if not accurate in all details (cf. Box 7.2).

Of the later writers, the following stand out:

Suetonius (c. AD 70–c. 130). One part celebrity journalist, one part gossip wag, Suetonius served in the Communications Office under the emperors Trajan and Hadrian, where he oversaw the imperial correspondence. He had access to the imperial records and used them, especially the letters of Augustus, for his *Lives of the Caesars* that are rich in anecdotal details. Suetonius is a great read even today but needs to be enjoyed with a lump, rather than a grain, of salt.

Tacitus (c. AD 56–117). Cut from the cloth of the Roman elite, Tacitus was a senator, consul, and provincial governor. In his *Annales*, which

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Karl Galinsky

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[More information](#)

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covers the period from Tiberius' ascension to power in AD 14 to the death of Nero in 68, and his *Dialogue on Orators*, he is the voice of that elite, lamenting the demise of the Republic while being realistic about the impossibility, and even undesirability, of its revival; mordant wit and innuendo provide an outlet. Tacitus did not follow through on his plan to write a separate work on the reign of Augustus, but the memory of Augustus, which was still in its communicative stage at his time, is woven throughout his jaundiced account of the successors.

Plutarch (c. AD 45–after 120). Plutarch, a resident of the Greek east, is best known for his *Parallel Lives*, which were famously used by Shakespeare and others. His stand-alone *Life of Augustus* is among his lost works. Still, he provides much information through his biographical sketches of Caesar and Antony. The multitude of his other works includes a collection of quotations from Augustus.

Appian (c. end of the first century AD–c. 160). Born in Alexandria, later a resident of Rome, Appian treats a wide array of topics in his multivolume *Roman History*, which ranges from the beginnings of Rome to his own times. Particularly relevant to Augustus are the three books on the civil wars of the triumviral period. Appian's strengths include his interest in social issues, knowledge of finance, and relative objectivity. Probably because he was a native of Egypt, he gives the events there special attention and thus is a major source for information on Cleopatra.

Cassius Dio (c. AD 164–after 229). He was the scion of a prominent Greek family in Bithynia (Northwest Turkey; see Map 1) and had a distinguished public career as Roman senator, consul (twice), and provincial governor. Like Appian's, his eighty-book *Roman History* began with the origins of Rome and proceeded to his own day. Unreliable as he is in many ways, Dio is the major continuous narrative source we have for Augustus from his beginnings to 10 BC. The subsequent books, 55–60, dealing with the period from 9 BC to AD 46, exist mostly in abridged form, with a major lacuna for the years 5 BC–3 BC. Like other ancient historians, Dio creatively composed speeches for his protagonists in order to illustrate key issues; see Box 3.2.

Others: Given Augustus' abiding place in Roman memory, it is not surprising that scattered bits and pieces about him are found in the writings of several other Roman authors, including Pliny the Elder's (AD 23/4–79) *Natural History* (see Box 4.1). Another source is the collections of diverse topics by literati such as Aulus Gellius' (c. AD 130–c. 180) *Attic Nights* (see Box 5.9) and Macrobius' (early fifth century) *Saturnalia* (see Boxes 5.3, 5.10, and 5.11).

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

– NOTE ON MAJOR ANCIENT SOURCES –

INSCRIPTIONS (EPIGRAPHY)

Under Augustus, inscriptions became a mass medium of both written and visual communication; on major buildings in Rome, for instance, the inlaid letters were large and made of gilded bronze. The number of known “monumental” inscriptions (i.e., all durable inscriptions on stone and bronze plaques posted on stone, but not writing tablets or other equivalents for domestic use) increased exponentially, from 3,000 during the five centuries of the Republic to some 300,000 in the empire; their actual total has been estimated as high as 20 million to 40 million. The main reason was not the increase in territory, but the discovery of the power of inscriptions, analogous to the power of images. Augustus literally inscribed himself, and was inscribed, on the Roman empire (cf. Boxes 7.3 and 7.4). It is obvious that this is a rich source of information; good examples include the largest of them all, Augustus’ *Res Gestae* of which copies were set up in several of the cities of the empire, but also private funerary inscriptions (cf. Box 2.5).

PAPYRI

Papyrus, made from the plant in Egypt, was a very common writing material in Greco-Roman antiquity. Unfortunately, it is also more perishable than stone. Most of the surviving papyrus documents, therefore, come from the sands of Egypt and their dry climate. For Augustus’ time, they comprise mostly administrative documents, at various levels, for that region. An exception of more general relevance is a snippet from Augustus’ funeral oration on Agrippa; see Box 5.2.

COINS (NUMISMATICS)

Because they are hardware that has survived, coins figure prominently in many discussions of Roman civilization. They can be quite informational (cf. Fig. 7), but often that information is only supplementary. Their “propaganda” value, in particular, has been overrated; one of the reasons is that major coin catalogues, such as those of the British Museum, were published at a time when the propaganda of authoritarian rulers in Europe loomed large and when Augustus was cast as their godfather. It is important to realize that the gold and silver coinage (*aurei* and *denarii*) with the most striking designs did not wind up in the hands of most of the populace. The designs on the lower-denomination Roman base-metal

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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coins were rather humdrum and would hardly sway hearts and minds. The basic unit was a *sestertius* (HS); four *sestertii* were one *denarius*, and 100 *sestertii* were an *aureus*. The annual salary of a Roman legionnaire was 900 HS, which explains, among other things, why Roman soldiers relied on booty in addition to their base pay. For further comparison, the price for an unskilled slave was some 200–1,000 HS, and the value of the free annual allocation of grain to heads of household in the city of Rome was worth between 300 and 360 HS.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE

The story of Augustus' life is as stunning as his achievements. Frail and only eighteen years old, he stepped on the stage of history when Caesar, slain on the Ides of March of 44 BC, named him, his grandnephew then known as Octavius, as his heir and posthumously adopted him. If the young man had followed the counsel of his mother and stepfather and refused to accept the will, history would have taken a different course and this book (and many others) would not have been written. He had no résumé to speak of at the time, yet some thirteen years later he defeated Antony and Cleopatra and, in his own words, had "power over all things." He became the sole ruler of Rome's Mediterranean empire and profoundly reshaped it and its culture. In the process he reinvented himself from a murderous warlord who took no prisoners to the model of an effective leader who gave Rome stability for almost two centuries. No question, then, that he is a key figure not only of classical antiquity but also of world history.

Given his tumultuous ascent to power, the range of his actions and policies, his immense impact, and the many sides of his personality, unanimity of opinion is the last thing we should expect, let alone wish, from biographers and historians, whether on the myriad of individual issues or on his overall attainments. Not waiting for others, he presented the latter, with his own perspectives, in the most monumental inscription from Roman times, the *Res Gestae*. It is not an autobiography – the one that he wrote has not survived – and the focus is not on personal details; his wife Livia, for instance, is not mentioned, although she was a great influence on his life.

That brings me to the genesis of this book. Over the years, I had dealt with many aspects of the Augustan age. It is a fascinating period to study because of its creativity, dynamics, and many dimensions in all its areas of cultural, political, and social activity. When my friend Beatrice Rehl of Cambridge University Press approached me about the new series of

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

– PREFACE –

key figures in classical antiquity it gave me an opportunity to concentrate on Augustus' life and impact. That is, therefore, what this book is mostly about. As always, there was a challenge: as every scholar knows, it is often easier to write longer than shorter books. On just about every point in this book there has been extensive scholarly debate and discussion, starting with the nature and reliability of our sources. For each sentence I wrote, there could have been three or four more with additional elaboration in scholarly footnotes. The series chose not to adopt such a format and I therefore have followed the advice given to me long ago by a prolific scholar I have always admired, Erika Simon: *souverän auswählen*, which is, roughly, “select with authority” (and don't look back). The book's purpose is to provide a concise and informative introduction, to set some accents, and to stimulate the reader to explore any of its topics further. Another welcome emphasis in this series is to illustrate how we know what we know; hence the incorporation of a good number of “boxes.”

A few months after I signed the contract I received a generous award from the Max-Planck Society for a multidisciplinary research project on the role of memory in ancient Rome. Building up and administering the project, which now involves some thirty grantees, with the apparatuses of two state universities in different countries has been another challenge. I am most grateful to this sponsor, however, for funding the necessary release time from which the writing of this book has benefited. I also want to thank the following for various kinds of assistance: Beatrice Rehl and Amanda Smith for their guidance; the clearance reviewer of the Press for his/her constructive suggestions; Peter Wiseman for advice on some very controversial points; and Darius Arya, Robert Daniel, Erica Firpo, Andrea Morgan, Stefan von der Lahr, and Henner van Hesberg for help with some of the illustrations. My greatest thanks go to Dr. Douglas Boin, whose keen reading improved the manuscript in many ways and whose efficient help with some research issues and the coordination of the photo permits was invaluable.

Sis felicior Augusto, melior Traiano (“may you be [yet] more fortunate than Augustus and better than Trajan”) – that was the formal wish of the senate at the accession of every new emperor after Trajan. One area where Augustus would not count himself fortunate was his children. He had only one daughter, who caused him as many problems as he did her, and he had no sons; hence he doted on his two grandsons, both of whom died early. So I have been *felicior Augusto* and happily dedicate this book to my two wonderful sons and friends, Robert and John.

Karl Galinsky