The Archaeology of Rome and the Roman provinces

Lecture 7. The early Roman Empire
D. The Augustan Age

Life improved; period of cultural creativity, greatest writers in Roman history – Horace, Ovid, Livy, and Virgil
Augustus was adopted by Julius Caesar in his will, and thus became a member of the Julian family, which claimed its origins from the legendary hero Aeneas. The Claudian connection came with Augustus's marriage to Livia Drusilla in 38 BC. Her own father had been a Claudius, and her first husband (before Augustus) was Tiberius Claudius Nero. Augustus tried to keep the succession in the Julian line through his only daughter Julia, but his chosen heirs died before reaching maturity leaving Tiberius as the eventual successor. He was Livia's son from her first marriage, and hence a Claudian (though Augustus made him a Julian by adoption). Tiberius's successors, too, were Claudians, descendants of his brother Drusus, down to the death of Nero in AD 68.
Octavian Becomes Augustus

- **Octavian** was sole ruler of Rome after his forces defeated Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium
- The Senate gave him the name "**Augustus**," meaning "most high"
- 23 BCE – Octavian, now referred to as Augustus, was made **consul for life** by the Senate
  - Also made "**Princeps**," meaning "first citizen"
    - Origin of the word "prince"
  - Also made "**Imperator**," meaning "successful general"
    - Origin of the word "emperor"
  - Also made "**Pontifex Maximus**," or "chief religious leader"
    - Origin of the word "pontiff" (used to describe the pope today)
  - Also made a **tribune**
  - He had the power to call the Senate, veto the Senate’s laws, and make laws himself
How was the Republic replaced by imperial rule?

- General prosperity masked the potential conflicts
- Civil war
- By the end of the first century B.C., Rome was the capital of an empire that stretched from the Straits of Gibraltar to the frontiers of Palestine
- It gave peace and orderly government to the Mediterranean area for the next two centuries
Primus inter pares

• “First among equals”
• Augustus and later emperors tried to maintain the façade that they were elected officials rather than dictators
• Being “first among equals” gave the illusion that an emperor was the most prestigious and important member of the Roman Senate, but that each senator was simultaneously equally important
• In reality, the Roman emperors ruled with little input from anyone else
Academic dispute (nerd war)

- The Roman Revolution (1939) is an influential scholarly study of the final years of the ancient Roman Republic and the creation of the Roman Empire by Caesar Augustus.
- The book was the work of Sir Ronald Syme (1903–1989).
- It was immediately controversial. Its main conclusion was that the structure of the Republic and its Senate were inadequate to the needs of Roman rule, and that Augustus was merely doing what was necessary to restore order in public life.
- This was a situation and reasoning uncomfortably reminiscent of contemporary events in Nazi Germany and the other fascist regimes of the time.

vs.

- The Last Generation of the Roman Republic (1974) is a scholarly work by Erich S. Gruen on the end of the Roman Republic in the 1st century BC.
- The central argument of the work is that the Late Roman Republic can be characterised by the strength and continuity of its institutions, rather than by their gradual disintegration.
- The latter view was popularly accepted prior to the release of this work, that understanding initially begun by Ronald Syme’s great work The Roman Revolution (1939).
How was the Republic replaced by imperial rule?

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Rome under Augustus:
A Golden Age

- Attempted to reform public morals by promoting family life (largely unsuccessful).
- Began the practice of declaring emperors gods, and of picking their own successors. (He called Haley’s Comet the spirit of Caesar.)
- Built and maintained the empire’s infrastructure (e.g., roads).
- Encouraged the growth of business.
- Established fire and police departments for Rome.
- Established a strong money system.
- Extended citizenship to more and more provincials.
- Said he “found Rome a city of bricks and left it a city of marble.”
- Promoted a return to religiousness.

Pax Romana: 27 BCE - 180 CE
Pax Romana – Roman Peace

• Rome controlled the entire Mediterranean region and beyond

• This “peace” (mostly internal) lasted nearly 200 years

• More and more provincials were granted official Roman citizenship
Strategy: Divide and Control

• Rome’s fear:
  – That allies and colonies would unite against Roman Rule

• Rome’s solution:
  – Keep groups under Roman control disunited

• How it was done:
  – Forbade alliances between them
  – Separate privileges and treaties
Treatment of Conquered Peoples

- Conquered peoples were treated well
  - Some received full Roman citizenship, including suffrage
  - Some controlled their own affairs but paid tribute and gave soldiers to the Roman army

- Colonies
  - Rome established colonies in conquered areas, each protected by a garrison of Roman soldiers
  - Republic encouraged intermarriage
    - Led to the spread of Roman culture and language (Latin)
    - „Romanization“
Why didn’t conquered peoples rebel?

- Effective governance
  - Protection/Peace
  - Citizenship

- Romanization
  - Roman culture
  - Latin language
  - Roman laws

- Trade benefits
  - Standardized money
  - Safe trade

- Cities
  - Roads
  - Aqueducts
Empire of Maintenance and Consolidation

Augustus’ Imperial Policy (?): Grand Strategy or Ad Hoc Reaction?
“For these [the Romans] I place neither time nor limits; I have given power without end.”

Vergil, *Aeneid*, 1.278-9 (Jupiter)
“The *princeps* recognized that prudent diplomacy and discreet display of force were preferable to expensive and hazardous ventures.”

E.S. Gruen
“Power born of potential force is not expended when it is used, nor is it a finite quality. Force, on the other hand, is just that; if directed to one purpose, it cannot simultaneously be directed at another, and if used, it is ipso facto consumed.”

E.N. Luttwak
“What, with hindsight, historians analyze as Roman ‘policy’ was often, simply, the Roman government’s pragmatic reaction to situations.”

J.A. Crook
Raw Numbers and Territorial Extent of the Roman Empire

- Twenty-eight legions (25 after 9 CE): 300,000 troops (150,000 legionaries; 150,000 auxiliaries)
  - Terms of Service: 16 years for Praetorian Guard; 20 years for regular legionaries (after 5 CE)
- Four-thousand mile long frontier of varied nature (mountain, forest, desert, river)
- Economics of Defense
  - Land grants to Discharged Veterans before 6 CE
  - Cash payments thereafter from aerarium militare (financed by personal contributions, a 1% sales tax, and a 5% inheritance tax)
Augustus addressed many management-related issues in his will, read to Senate by his successor, Tiberius

“This contained a description of the resources of the state, of the number of citizens and allies under arms, of the fleets, subject kingdoms, provinces, taxes, direct and indirect, necessary expenses and customary bounties. All these details Augustus had written with his own hand, and had added a counsel, that the empire should be confined to its present limits, either from fear or out of jealousy.”

Tacitus, *Annals*, 1.11
Res Gestae

- Res Gestae Divi Augusti (The Deeds of the Divine Augustus) is the funerary inscription of the first Roman emperor, Augustus, giving a first-person record of his life and accomplishments.
- The Res Gestae is especially significant because it gives an insight into the image Augustus portrayed to the Roman people.
- Various inscriptions of the Res Gestae have been found scattered across the former Roman Empire. The inscription itself is a monument to the establishment of the Julio-Claudian dynasty that was to follow Augustus.
- The text consists of a short introduction, 35 body paragraphs, and a posthumous addendum. These paragraphs are conventionally grouped in four sections, political career, public benefactions, military accomplishments and a political statement.
Mausoleum of Augustus
Res Gestae

- The Res Gestae was a unique public relations move for the first emperor of the Roman Empire, whose political career was in many ways experimental.
- If their frequent use as "history" by later historians (both ancient and modern) who characterized Augustus' rule according to categories he himself constructed in the Res Gestae is any indication, it is a rather successful piece of propaganda.
- On the other hand, it would be absurd to overlook the usefulness to historians of what is essentially a first-person account of his rule.
Monumentum Ancyranum

- The Monumentum Ancyranum (Latin for "Monument of Ankara") refers to the inscription of the Res Gestae Divi Augusti ("Deeds of the Divine Augustus") located on the Augusteum (the Temple of Augustus and Rome) in Ankara, Turkey. It is the most intact copy of the Res Gestae in the world.

- The temple was built after the conquest of central Anatolia by the Roman Empire and the formation of the Galatia province, with Ancyra as its administrative capital.

- After the death of Augustus in AD 14, a copy of the text of the Res Gestae Divi Augusti was inscribed on both walls inside the pronaos in Latin, with a Greek translation on an exterior wall of the cela.

- The inscriptions are the primary surviving source of the text, since the original inscription on bronze pillars in front of the Mausoleum of Augustus in Rome has long been lost, and two other surviving inscriptions of the text are incomplete.

- The Monumentum Ancyranum was first made known to the western world by Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, ambassador of Ferdinand of Austria, to the Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent (1555–1562) at Amasia in Asia Minor. Busbecq first read the inscription and identified its origin from his reading of Suetonius; he published a copy of parts of it in his Turkish Letters.
Fig. 10.2 Section of the Latin version of the *Res Gestae*, from the interior wall of the Temple of Roma and Augustus, Ancyra (Ankara), showing chapter 1 and part of chapter 2.
Res Gestae

- The first section (paragraphs 2–14) is concerned with Augustus' political career; it records the offices and political honours that he held. Augustus also lists numerous offices he refused to take and privileges he refused to be awarded.
- The second section (paragraphs 15–24) lists Augustus' donations of money, land and grain to the citizens of Italy and his soldiers, as well as the public works and gladiatorial spectacles that he commissioned. The text is careful to point out that all this was paid for out of Augustus' own funds.
- The third section (paragraphs 25–33) describes his military deeds and how he established alliances with other nations during his reign.
- Finally the fourth section (paragraphs 34–35) consists of a statement of the Romans' approval for the reign and deeds of Augustus.
Res Gestae

- By its very nature the Res Gestae is propaganda for the principate that Augustus instituted. It tends to gloss over the events between the assassination of Augustus' adoptive father Julius Caesar and the victory at Actium when his foothold on power was finally undisputed. Augustus' enemies are never mentioned by name.
- Caesar's murderers Brutus and Cassius are called simply "those who killed my father". Mark Antony and Sextus Pompey, Augustus' opponents in the East, remain equally anonymous; the former is "he with whom I fought the war," while the latter is merely a "pirate."
- Often quoted is Augustus' official position on his government: "From that time (27 BC, the end of the civil war) I surpassed all others in influence, yet my official powers were no greater than those of my colleague in office." This is in keeping with a reign that promoted itself from the beginning as a "restoration" of the old republic, with a leader who was nothing more than "first among equals", but was akin to absolute monarchy by divine right, backed by the swords of the legions
“I extended the boundaries of all the provinces of the Roman people which were bordered by nations that were not subject to our empire. I pacified the provinces of the Gauls, the Spains, as well as Germany...I pacified the Alps...My fleet sailed through the Ocean from the mouth of the Rhine eastwards to the territory of the Cimbri, a place to which no Roman had gone before either by land or sea...”

Augustus, *Res Gestae*, 26
“By conquering enemies, I recovered many military standards—from Spain, Gaul, and the Dalmatians—which had been lost by other generals. I forced the Parthians to return to me the spoils and standards of three Roman armies, and, as suppliants, to seek the friendship of the Roman people. And I deposited those standards in the innermost shrine which is in the Temple of Mars the Avenger.”

Augustus, *Res Gestae*, 29
Disaster of 9 CE:
Varus’ Three Lost Legions

- Attempt to push Roman frontier to Elbe River
- Massacre of Three Legions in Teutoburg Forest by German Chieftain Arminius (September, 9 CE)
- Romans fall back to Rhine-Danube frontier
- Changes in Roman Imperial Policy from Offensive to Defensive Imperialism?
Res Gestae Divi Augusti (Eng. The Deeds of the Divine Augustus) is the funerary inscription of the first Roman emperor, Augustus. Among other things it states that the Empire should have its frontier "ad ripam flumni Danuvii."
Roman Emperors after Augustus

- Great variety in the quality of those emperors who succeeded Augustus
- The office of emperor was initially designed to be hereditary
  - But from the start, there was confusion as to which family member would inherit the throne
  - Some emperors proved to be cutthroats, or insane, or both
  - The military came to play an enormous role in selecting who would become emperor
Tiberius (14-37 CE)

- Stepson of Augustus
- Abolished the Assembly
- Capable general who extended the frontier in the north
- Strengthened the empire
- Appeared to dislike ruling, and gradually retired to the island of Capri
Caligula (37 CE-41 CE)

- Son of famed military leader Germanicus, the nephew and adopted son of Tiberius
- Earned his name “Caligula,” meaning “little boots,” by the Roman army as a child (he was dressed like a soldier)
- Two years of good, effective rule, interrupted by a severe illness, and followed by two years of horrible rule
- Members of family and perceived enemies
  - Exiled some, killed some, and forced others to commit suicide
- Assassinated in 41 CE by members of the Praetorian Guard
Claudius (41-54 CE)

- Brought southern Britannia (what later became Great Britain) under Roman control, as well as several kingdoms in the East
- Opened the Senate up to provincials
- Became emperor because he was the last adult male of his family (brother of Germanicus and uncle of Caligula)
- Conducted a census of the empire in 48 CE
  - 5,984,072 Roman citizens
Nero (54-68 CE)

- Considered a tyrant
- Came to power after his mother allegedly poisoned his predecessor, Claudius
- Murdered his mother, his stepbrother, and two of his wives
- Also killed his teacher, the famous philosopher Seneca
- Fire in Rome (64 CE)
  - Nero was accused of setting the fire, and of fiddling while the city burned
  - Nero blamed the fire on the new religious group known as “Christians”
- Forced to commit suicide
Year of the Four Emperors (69 CE)

- Brief period of civil war after the death of Emperor Nero
- Four emperors ruled in quick succession
  - Galba
  - Otho
  - Vitellius
  - Vespasian
- Illustrated the problems of imperial succession
Year of the Four Emperors (69 CE)

- The Year of the Four Emperors, 69 AD, was a year in the history of the Roman Empire in which four emperors ruled in succession: Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian.
- The suicide of the emperor Nero in 68 was followed by a brief period of civil war, the first Roman civil war since Mark Antony’s death in 30 BC.
- Between June of 68 and December of 69 Galba, Otho, and Vitellius successively rose and fell before the July 69 accession of Vespasian, who founded the Flavian dynasty.
- The social, military and political upheavals of the period had Empire-wide repercussions, which included the outbreak of the Revolt of the Batavi.
Year of the Four Emperors (69 CE)

- In 65, the Pisonian conspiracy attempted to restore the Republic, but failed. A number of executions followed, leaving Nero with few political allies left in the Senate.
- In late 67 or early 68, Gaius Julius Vindex, governor of Gallia Lugdunensis, rebelled against Nero's tax policy.
- Vindex's revolt in Gaul was unsuccessful. The legions stationed at the border to Germania marched to meet Vindex and to confront him as a traitor.
- Led by Lucius Verginius Rufus, the Rhine army defeated Vindex in battle and Vindex killed himself shortly thereafter. Galba was at first declared a public enemy by the Senate.
- In June 68, the Praetorian Guard prefect, Nymphidius Sabinus, as part of a plot to become emperor himself, incited his men to transfer their loyalty from Nero to Galba.
- On June 9, 68 AD, Nero discovered he was tried in absentia and condemned to death as a public enemy.
- He met death at his own hand, thereby becoming the first Roman Emperor to commit suicide.
- This marked a definitive end to the Julio-Claudian Dynasty.
Year of the Four Emperors (69 CE)

- Galba was thereafter exalted into emperorship and welcomed into the city at the head of a single legion, VII Galbiana, later known as VII Gemina.
- This turn of events did not give the German legions the reward for loyalty that they had expected, but rather accusations of having obstructed Galba's path to the throne.
- Their commander, Rufus, was immediately replaced by the new emperor, and Aulus Vitellius was appointed governor of Germania Inferior.
- The loss of political confidence in Germania's loyalty also resulted in the dismissal of the Imperial Batavian Bodyguards, and Germania's later rebellion.
- Galba did not remain popular for long. On his march to Rome, he either destroyed or imposed enormous fines on towns that did not accept him immediately.
- In Rome, Galba cancelled all the reforms of Nero, including benefits for many important persons.
- Like his predecessor, Galba had a fear of conspirators and executed many senators and equites without trial.
- The soldiers of the Praetorian Guard were not happy either. After his safe arrival in Rome, Galba refused to pay them the rewards that the prefect Nymphidius had promised them in the new emperor's name.
At the beginning of the civil year of 69 on January 1, the legions of Germania Inferior refused to swear allegiance and obedience to Galba.

On the following day, the legions acclaimed their governor Vitellius as emperor.

Hearing the news of the loss of the Rhine legions, Galba panicked. He adopted a young senator, Lucius Calpurnius Piso Licinianus, as his successor.

By doing this, he offended many, above all Marcus Salvius Otho, an influential and ambitious nobleman who desired the honor for himself.

Otho bribed the Praetorian Guard, already very unhappy with the emperor, winning them to his side.

When Galba heard about the coup d'état, he went to the streets in an attempt to stabilize the situation.

It proved a mistake, because he could not attract any supporters. Shortly afterwards, the Praetorian Guard killed him in the Forum along with Lucius.

The Senate recognized Otho as emperor that same day.
Year of the Four Emperors (69 CE)

- They saluted the new emperor with relief. Although ambitious and greedy, Otho did not have a record for tyranny or cruelty and was expected to be a fair emperor.
- Otho's initial efforts to restore peace and stability were soon checked by the revelation that Vitellius had declared himself Imperator in Germania and had dispatched half of his army to march on Italy.
- Backing Vitellius were the finest legions of the empire, composed of veterans of the Germanic Wars, such as I Germanica and XXI Rapax.
- Otho was not keen to begin another civil war and sent emissaries to propose a peace and convey his offer to marry Vitellius' daughter.
- It was too late to reason; Vitellius' generals were leading half of his army toward Italy.
- After a series of minor victories, Otho suffered defeat in the Battle of Bedriacum.
- Rather than flee and attempt a counter-attack, Otho decided to put an end to the anarchy and committed suicide. He had been emperor for a little more than three months.
- On the news of Otho's suicide, the Senate recognized Vitellius as emperor.
Year of the Four Emperors (69 CE)

- With this recognition, Vitellius set out for Rome; however, he faced problems from the start of his reign. The city remained very skeptical when Vitellius chose the anniversary of the Battle of the Allia (in 390 BC), a day of bad auspices according to Roman superstition, to accede to the office of Pontifex Maximus.
- Events seemed to prove the omens right. With the throne tightly secured, Vitellius engaged in a series of banquets (Suetonius refers to three a day: morning, afternoon, and night) and triumphal parades that drove the imperial treasury close to bankruptcy.
- Debts quickly accrued, and money-lenders started to demand repayment. Vitellius showed his violent nature by ordering the torture and execution of those who dared to make such demands.
- With financial affairs in a state of calamity, Vitellius took to killing citizens who had named him as their heir, often together with any co-heirs.
- Moreover, he engaged in the pursuit of every possible rival, inviting them to the palace with promises of power, only to order their assassination.
- Meanwhile, the legions stationed in the African province of Egypt and the Middle Eastern provinces of Iudaea (Judea) and Syria acclaimed Vespasian as emperor.
Year of the Four Emperors (69 CE)

- Vespasian had received a special command in Judaea from Nero in 67, with the task of putting down the Great Jewish Revolt.
- He gained the support of the governor of Syria, Gaius Licinius Mucianus. A strong force drawn from the Judaean and Syrian legions marched on Rome under the command of Mucianus.
- Vespasian himself travelled to Alexandria, where he was acclaimed emperor on July 1, thereby gaining control of the vital grain supplies from Egypt.
- His son Titus remained in Judaea to deal with the Jewish rebellion. Before the eastern legions could reach Rome, the Danubian legions of the provinces of Raetia and Moesia also acclaimed Vespasian as emperor in August, and led by Marcus Antonius Primus, invaded Italy.
- In October, the forces led by Primus won a crushing victory over Vitellius's army at the Second Battle of Bedriacum.
- Surrounded by enemies, Vitellius made a last attempt to win the city to his side, distributing bribes and promises of power where needed.
Year of the Four Emperors (69 CE)

- He tried to levy by force several allied tribes, such as the Batavians, but they refused. The Danube army was now very near Rome.
- Realizing the immediate threat, Vitellius made a last attempt to gain time by sending emissaries, accompanied by Vestal Virgins, to negotiate a truce and start peace talks.
- The following day, messengers arrived with news that the enemy was at the gates of the city. Vitellius went into hiding and prepared to flee, but decided on one last visit to the palace, where Vespasian's men caught and killed him. In seizing the capital, they burned down the temple of Jupiter.
- The Senate acknowledged Vespasian as emperor on the following day. It was December 21, 69, the year that had begun with Galba on the throne.
- Vespasian met no direct threat to his imperial power after the death of Vitellius. He became the founder of the stable Flavian dynasty that succeeded the Julio-Claudians. He died of natural causes in 79. The Flavians, each in turn, ruled from 69 to 96.
Vespasian (69-79 CE)

- Built the Colosseum in Rome
  - Place where gladiatorial combats were held
- First Jewish Revolt (66-70 CE)
- Systematic strengthening of the frontiers, especially on the Danube
  - Destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, in the Roman province of Judea
- Succeeded by son Titus, then son Domitian
The Empire at its Peak

• Flavian Dynasty
  – Vespasian (69–79)
  – Titus (79–81)
  – Domitian (81–96)

• Five Good Emperors
  – Nerva (96-98)
  – Trajan (98-117)
  – Hadrian (117-138)
  – Antoninus Pius (138-161)
  – Marcus Aurelius (161-180)