

Octavian: Rise to Power

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"Caesar Augustus" wasn't always powerful! First, he was "Octavian."

Map of Ancient Greece, 1st Century BC

In the first century BC, three of Ancient Rome's major battles were fought in Greece. In 48 BC, Julius Caesar defeated Pompey the Great at Pharsalus. In 42 BC, Mark Antony and Octavian defeated Marcus Brutus and Cassius Longinus at Philippi. In 31 BC, Octavian and Marcus Agrippa defeated Antony and Cleopatra at Actium.

Brutus and Cassius approached Macedonia from the east travelling west from Asia (current day Turkey), through Thrace. When they reached Philippi, a small hill town with springs and streams, they set up their camps.

Octavian and Antony approached from the west. They sailed from Brundisium, Italy, to the port of Dyrrachium, then marched their armies east along the Via Egnatia, first to Amphipolis and then on to Philippi.



Two battles were fought at Philippi. In the first one, Antony handed Cassius a decisive defeat. Cassius committed suicide when it was over. In the second battle, Octavian and Antony defeated Brutus. He also committed suicide after the battle. Octavian and Antony then divided up the rule of the "Roman Republic." Octavian returned to Rome to rule the west. He had the enormously difficult and complicated task of settling all the veteran Roman soldiers in Italy. Antony, now known as the "Hero of Philippi," ruled in the east with relative ease and a lifestyle that bordered on decadence.

During the 5th and 4th centuries BC, Rome was heavily influenced by Classical Greek Culture which included their thoughts on art, politics, architecture, and philosophy. Alexander the Great expanded Greek influence to the east all the way to India. After his death in 323 BC, Greece entered into what is known as the Hellenistic period as their culture spread through the territories he conquered. This lasted until 146 BC when Greece fell under Roman influence and Macedonia became a province of Rome.

Cleopatra, the queen of Egypt, was a Macedonian Greek, a descendant of Ptolemy I, one of Alexander's generals and a top advisor to him. After Alexander's death, Ptolemy assumed the rule of Egypt.

Being proud and protective of their Greek heritage, his descendants never mixed their blood with Egyptian blood. They continued to speak Greek and did not learn the Egyptian language. Cleopatra changed this. A brilliant woman, she spoke seven languages, including Egyptian, which endeared her to the people she ruled.

The Romans were suspicious of Cleopatra, many thinking that she wanted to rule with Caesar from Egypt or Greece. After Caesar was assassinated, they had a concern about her with Mark Antony that was even greater because, over the years, she had become a more powerful leader on her own.

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