

Notes on Quiz #7: Augustus, Princeps, Imperator

1. So... what was the principate, exactly? How specifically was Octavian/Augustus given power?

The principate gave Octavian, now called Augustus, the authority to act on behalf of the Roman state, but did not quite create a governmental office.

Instead, starting with what historians call the Second Settlement Augustus was granted a bloc of powers associated with offices of the Republic for five or ten year intervals. The most important of these were (a) the imperium and the powers of a consul; (b) the powers and privileges of the plebeian tribunate, including the veto, the right of appeal to the people on behalf of a citizen, and sacrosanctity; and (c) the powers of a censor, which included conducting the census and ordering the membership of the senate. He also afterwards acquired the title of pontifex maximus, which put him in control of the state religion.

More generally, the princeps was the person in whom the people, the soldiers, and the nobles invested their faith and loyalty after the brutality and divisions of the civil wars, creating strength and unity of identity where the actual government of Rome and institutions like the senate had failed to do so.

2. Augustus claimed to have restored the Republic. Do you agree?

This could be answered in a number of ways. The case against restoration would include arguments relating to the Republican machinery of government—consuls, censors, the senate, etc.—had completely lost their independence and ability to act on behalf of the people, since the will of the Roman commonwealth was now exercised by Augustus. The people were also partially disempowered, since their ability to elect consuls was now virtually meaningless.

On the other hand, Augustus ended the civil wars and restored the normal operation of government, which meant that people could trust in the system again and reliably expect the state to provide defense, leadership, services, and justice. Augustus also stood for respect for the old ways, the *mos maiorum*, which meant he was aggressively seeking to restore traditional values and customs as a part of his rehabilitation of Rome and the Roman identity. Finally, Augustus, unlike the populist leaders that came before him (Caesar, Antony), aggressively sought to be the leader of all the Romans, not just the masses and soldiers.

EC1. The Augustan Age included contributions to Latin literature by all of the following Romans EXCEPT:

- (a) Horace, the poet known for Satires and Odes
- ✓ (b) Bilbonus, author of There and Back Again
- (c) Livy, the prose historian known for Ab Urbe Condita
- (d) Vergil, author of the Aeneid

EC2. What were some of the ways Augustus reformed and stabilized Rome and its empire? What were the effects?

His reforms and actions included centralizing authority in Rome, subordinating governors to himself and limiting opportunities for generals to establish their own power bases, with certain provinces under his direct control to prevent corruption and infighting in the senate; restructured the membership and privileges of both the senatorial and the equestrian orders; reorganized the provincial legions to create permanent, standing defense forces, while reducing and streamlining the overall size of the military and establishing retirement benefits for veterans; passed social legislation designed to promote family life and the production of legitimate children; reformed the protections available to slaves and freedmen; created improved infrastructure for Rome itself, including new watches and fire brigades, roads, and aqueducts/water storage; organized the religious institutions, reviving or revising cults and priesthoods and restoring temples; and reformed the currency, establishing new mints and new coinage and consolidating the revenue and treasure of the state. By sharing power with the senate and retaining his authority at the same time, Augustus was able to benefit from the counsel of the nobility and prevent them from feeling excluded as they had under Caesar.

In general, his military and economic policies promoted stability in Rome and throughout the empire, leading to the decades of immense prosperity known as the pax Romana.