

Mark Antony

Biography
(83 BCE–30 BCE)

Marcus Antonius (Mark Antony) is best known as the Roman general who was a lover of Cleopatra. The two committed suicide after their defeat by Octavian.

Who Was Mark Antony?

Mark Antony, Roman politician and general, was an ally of [Julius Caesar](#) and the main rival of his successor [Octavian](#) (later Augustus). The passing of power between the three men led to Rome's transition from a republic to an empire. Antony's romantic and political alliance with Egyptian queen [Cleopatra](#) became his downfall.

Early Life

Mark Antony was born Marcus Antonius in Rome in 83 B.C. to a well-respected Roman family.

Promised an excellent education, his reckless behavior squandered much of that opportunity. Deep in gambling debt and pursued by creditors, Antony fled to Greece in 58 B.C. and took part in military campaigns in Judea, where he performed well.

With Julius Caesar

Between 52 and 50 B.C., Mark Antony was assigned as a staff officer to Julius Caesar in Gaul and was instrumental in helping bring the province under Rome's control. Upon returning from Gaul, Antony was appointed tribune, representing the interests of the people. His success and popularity helped him gain support for his benefactor, Caesar, who was being challenged by members of the Roman Senate.

As pressure increased against Caesar, Mark Antony joined his mentor in Gaul and engaged in a series of battles between Caesar and Pompey. Antony again helped Caesar defeat his enemies and he returned to Rome as Caesar's second in command. Having amassed a great deal of power, in 45 B.C., Caesar was designated dictator for one year.

Caesar's actions led many to believe he was positioning himself to become king. A plot to assassinate him emerged, and on March 15, 44 B.C., he was killed in the Roman Senate. Antony was next in line to Caesar but was challenged by Octavian, Caesar's nephew and adopted son, who claimed he was heir to Caesar's rule. The Second Triumvirate

Caesar's death brought a chaotic grab for power among several factions. As Mark Antony pursued Caesar's killers in Gaul, Octavian's armies scored a series of victories against Antony, forcing him to retreat to southern Gaul. Caesar's assassins, Brutus and Cassius, were preparing to descend on Rome when Octavian, Antony and Lepidus formed the Second Triumvirate and defeated the traitors in the battle of Philippi in October 42 B.C.

Antony and Cleopatra

With Octavian ruling western Rome and Lepidus governing Africa, Mark Antony stationed himself in southern Turkey and pursued Egypt's queen, Cleopatra, first forming a romance then an alliance to help him defend the eastern provinces. In 40 B.C., Antony's wife, Fulvia, and his brother, Lucius, rebelled against Octavian, forcing Mark Antony to return to Italy. En route, Fulvia died and Antony and Octavian reconciled, with Antony marrying Octavian's sister, Octavia, in 40 B.C.

In 36 B.C., Mark Antony resumed his alliance and romance with Cleopatra, seeking to amass enough funds from her to support his campaign in Judea. Cleopatra saw this as an opportunity to increase her power and agreed. (Around this same time, rumors spread that Antony and Cleopatra had married, but this is unlikely, as he was already married to Octavia.)

Defeat by Octavian and Suicide

By the end of 33 B.C., the Second Triumvirate had ended, as prescribed by law, and tensions between Mark Antony and Octavian had reached a climax. A propaganda war enveloped Rome, with Antony accusing Octavian of being a usurper, forging evidence of his adoption by Caesar and Octavian accusing Antony of low morals for leaving his wife for Cleopatra. The situation escalated into a military war, with the two generals meeting at Actium, Greece, on September 2, 31 B.C. In a confused battle, Antony's fleet was defeated and he fled back to Cleopatra in Egypt. As Octavian's forces entered Alexandria, the distraught Antony committed suicide by his own sword. Cleopatra followed him in death after Octavian's forces had captured Egypt.