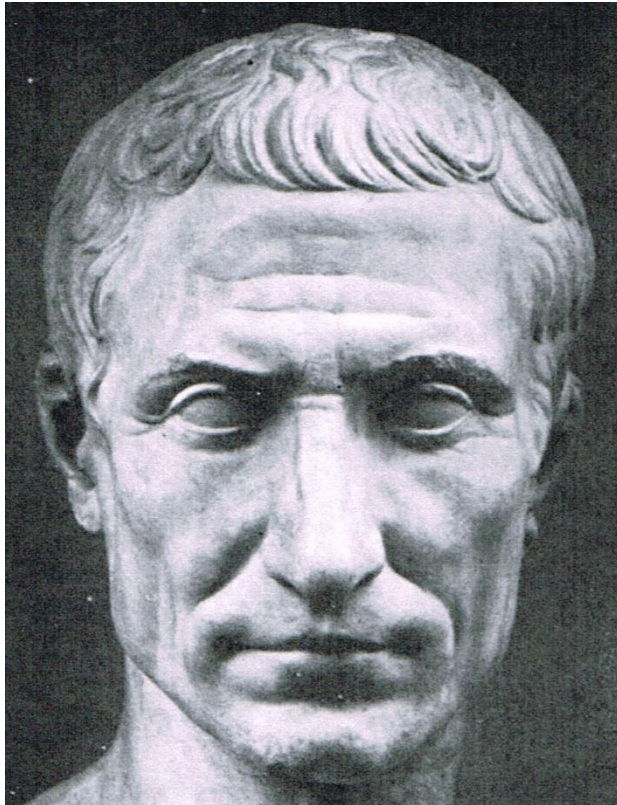


*Caesar's Rule and Caesar's Death :  
Who Lost? Who Gained?*

*By Garry Victor Hill*





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## *Copyright and Disclaimer*

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## Introduction

The assassination of Julius Caesar has become an iconic image, from art, films, fiction Shakespeare's play and secondary histories, yet this most famous event has only one immediate eyewitness primary source that we can trace with surety. Even that eyewitness only left one brief paragraph. Others were probably interviewed or wrote accounts years later and ancient historians probably had access to eyewitness accounts that have since vanished. Unfortunately source notes are a modern construction. In ancient history even in passing accreditations to sources are rare. Even so, in broad outlines ancient sources agree and also sometimes do so in details. We know how Caesar's murder was committed and ancient historians give us the names of many of Caesar's killers, Ancient accounts and the assassin's own statements give either clear proof or strong indications for their motives. The opinions of their enemies are another primary source.

Many of the effects of his murder are obvious, the immediate shock, the following turmoil, fear of civil war, followed by intermittent civil wars and then the implosion of the Republic and the rise of Octavian as defacto ruler of the empire. However other effects were less obvious and more insidious and are not often remarked upon.

Either while writing this version or soon after three books came into print and have information and insights definitely worth including in a later version. These are Barry Strauss's *The Death of Caesar* (2014), a collection of essays entitled *Augustus* which is edited by Jonathan Edmondson (2014) and a 2015 reprint of Alison Cooley's *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*. These three works will be included in a later version and so will the work of other ancient writer, Dio Cassius.

## Chapter One



*This map reveals Rome's territorial expansion in one long lifetime of a 102 years. Caesar's addition of Gaul took eight years. Despite being added to the empire as depicted here until 30BC Cleopatra's empire was more of a subservient ally than a ruled over province. Public Domain*

After Caesar's murder his assassins were proved by unfolding events to be acting against Rome's best interests, whatever their intentions. Within less than a year of Caesar's assassination their actions had led to another list of murderous

proscriptions, and another civil war. These horrors were followed by a decade of political and social turbulence. Within less than two decades of Julius Caesar's murder these effects would combine to emasculate all surviving forms of Republican government, which became subservient to one man who really held the power; Caesar's great nephew and designated heir, Octavian.

Rome had seen dictators before, Sulla, Marius, Pompey and Julius Caesar, but they had not lasted so long: Octavian was never overthrown or killed. As the defacto first man in Rome he lasted for fifty-seven years and as undisputed sole ruler over the empire he ruled for forty-four of those years. No others before him held political power for so long or in such a concentrated way or used it so effectively. Amongst Rome's many leaders few had ever ruled with such little internal opposition. Although previous rulers had developed extreme personality cults, they had to be enforced and never lasted. Never before had any ruler developed a personality cult that combined such extremism with pervasive, long lasting popularity and decades of durability. Octavian's cult even outlasted him, becoming part of Rome's history and religion. Despite the outer forms of continuing republicanism, Octavian ruled with almost unlimited powers, and was eventually deified as the Emperor Augustus. This position would be inherited with frequently disastrous consequences as several subsequent emperors were erratic, showing signs of megalomania, paranoia and insanity. They frequently made disastrous decisions concerning Rome's best interests. Ironically this was the very form of dictatorship that Caesar's assassins had dreaded and tried to stop.

After crossing the Rubicon in 49 BC, therefore illegally invading Italia, Julius Caesar had turned another power struggle for control of the Roman world into another civil war on Roman soil. This was not a war of conquest for scarce resources, for plunder or over religious or ethnic tensions. In modern history civil wars emerge in nations which have within its borders groups with different ways of life which leads to different worldviews and ideologies. These mesh with their self-interest. These ideologies become part of the conflict, often concealing the underlying economic motives and self-interest. Rome's Social War, the Marius – Sulla conflict, the Spartacus slave rebellion and the modern civil wars in England, France, America, Spain, Russia, China, Nigeria, Yugoslavia, Iraq and Syria all show this: this Roman war did not. Pompey and his forces insisted that they were defenders of the Republic against a man who wanted to be king, but Pompey's previous support for Sulla and his own rule showed his fondness for dictatorship. This was a conflict between two very ambitious and powerful men, Pompey and



Caesar. Ronald Syme succinctly describes the barrier that all attempts at negotiation hit: “Caesar would tolerate no superior, Pompeius no rival.”<sup>1</sup> To win a war that should have been a personal duel millions would suffer.

As with Caesar’s earlier conflicts, this war was resolved through a mixture of military victories, punitive measures, relentless sieges and blockades leading to starvation. Sometimes negotiations based on leniency, giving clemency and even giving political positions to those who surrendered were used.<sup>2</sup>

Caesar began to win the conflict from the start and initially almost bloodlessly as he marched south towards Rome. Italy north of Rome had always feared the Gaul’s invasions. By crushing them Caesar appeared as a local hero. His policy of indulging in clemency and distancing himself from the murderous harshness of his contemporary, the former dictator Sulla, increased this popularity. As Pompey had been aligned with Sulla and had done little to fix local problems he was something less than a local hero, getting only apathy at best. As Caesar marched his legion southwards, town after town surrendered with little if any resistance to Caesar. They frequently welcomed him and his initial force of a single legion.<sup>3</sup>

In response Pompey stated that: “I have only to stamp my foot upon the ground, and there will rise up armies of infantry and armies of cavalry.”<sup>4</sup> Pompey soon found that he could stamp his feet to no effect but noise. He had neither the concentration of forces nor the popularity to hold Rome; he and his allies, rather than negotiate any further, fled to where he was popular, among his provincial legions.<sup>5</sup> Clearly Pompey and those aligned with him, Cato, Brutus, Cassius, Cicero and many others who would later support Caesar’s assassination, were so

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution*. First printed in 1939, this source used here is the 1952 revised edition. Oxford, 2002. p.42.

<sup>2</sup> Caesar, *The Civil War*. Harmondsworth, 1967, I.81-87.5, pp.75-79, II.15.2 pp.88-92; III.79.5 III. 86.1pp.146-149.; Plutarch, *Fall of the Roman Republic: Six lives by Plutarch*. London, 1980. ‘Caesar’ 250-251 Plutarch, *Makers of Rome: Nine lives by Plutarch*. London, 1965. ‘Brutus’ pp.227-229.; M.H. Cary and H.H. Scullard, *A History of Rome*. Houndsmills, 1975. p.276; Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*. Harmondsworth, 1957, ‘Julius Caesar’ pp.40-44; Cicero, ‘Letter to Friends’ 13.52 8 written in 46 BC. Reproduced by Mathew Dillon and Lynda Garland, *Ancient Rome: From the Early Republic to the Assassination of Julius Caesar*. London, 2005. p.660.

<sup>3</sup> Syme, p.49; Adrian Goldsworthy, *Caesar: The Life of a Colossus*. London, 2006, p.390.

<sup>4</sup> Plutarch, *Fall of the Roman Republic*. ‘Pompey’ 57 pp.219.

<sup>5</sup> Plutarch, *Fall of the Roman Republic*. ‘Pompey’ 60-63 pp.221-225; Caesar, *The Civil War*. 14 p.42.

hostile to Caesar that they were willing to fight a losing battle rather than negotiate with a man offering them clemency. Even after his easy seizure of Rome, even after Pompey's massive defeat at the battle of Pharsalus and his death soon after, followed by the surrender of several of his leading followers, many amongst those survivors who hated Caesar continued to fight on for almost three more years in what was clearly a lost cause. It was not until Caesar's victories at the battle of Munda and Thapsus in 45 BC that the last Pompeian army was destroyed and that their remnants were reduced to being raiders – until Caesar was assassinated and they gained new support under the leadership of Pompey's son Sextus Pompey.<sup>6</sup>

This enmity towards Caesar was vividly apparent in the way that two of the last Pompeian leaders committed suicide rather than accept his clemency. Scapula built a funeral pyre “and cremated himself” and Cato bungled a self-stabbing and then worked at spilling his intestines out.<sup>7</sup> If this had been one case it could be attributed to some form of mental disorder, but two? Caesar himself states how as he was marching on Rome “those with old grudges against Caesar were mustered in the senate” where “the more savage and vindictive the speaker, the more he was applauded by Caesar's enemies.”<sup>8</sup> Cassius, who became the initiator and co-leader of Caesar's assassins, was said by Plutarch to be a violent tempered man motivated by “personal animosity rather than in any disinterested aversion to tyranny.”<sup>9</sup> He seems another of those suffering from what Plutarch labelled “the festering disease of envy in Roman politics.”<sup>10</sup> Brutus, entitled by Shakespeare “the noblest Roman of them all” also had personal motives. His mother had been one of Caesar's mistresses and this proud man had to live with the reputation of being Caesar's illegitimate son, whatever his parentage.<sup>11</sup> When he helped murder Caesar his stab was to Caesar's thigh.<sup>12</sup> Was this meant to be a castrating blow? When not long before the assassination Brutus published an admiring biography of his father in law Cato, Caesar wrote a vitriolic response concerning Brutus and Cicero, who had also written about Cato admiringly.<sup>13</sup>

Like most megalomaniacs, Caesar could clearly inspire extraordinary levels

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<sup>6</sup> Appian, *The Civil Wars*. Translated and Introduction by John Carpenter. Harmondsworth: 1996. II 105 p.125.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid* II 105 p.125, 99 p.122.

<sup>8</sup> Caesar, *The Civil War*. 4 and 3 p.36.

<sup>9</sup> Plutarch, *Makers of Rome*. 'Brutus' 8 pp.229-230.

<sup>10</sup> Plutarch, *Fall of the Roman Republic*, “Caesar” 29 p.273.

<sup>11</sup> Appian, 111 pp128-129.

<sup>12</sup> Appian, 117 p132.

<sup>13</sup> Adrian Goldsworthy, *Augustus: From Revolutionary to Emperor*. London; 2014. p78.

of loyalty and admiration, but also the most extreme and illogical hatred. This suggests that the supporters of Pompey and then later Caesar's assassins, or many amongst them were so motivated by envy and hatred that they were not thinking of the best interests of Rome or of their senatorial class. They claimed, with varying levels of sincerity, to be motivated by a desire to save Rome's Republican form of government from Caesar's rule.<sup>14</sup> They seemed to be ignoring or could not comprehend that their Roman Republic had been corrupted, battered, overtaxed and savaged by a series of conflicts that left it weakened, divided and for many of its people, impoverished. The Republic needed peace, prosperity, unity, efficient government, reforms and stability to recover.

This was apparently not what those Republicans opposed to Caesar wanted in any clear or at least immediate form. They wanted their faction to win the faction fight in Rome and then to remove "the bad people" from power. What the Republicans seemed to want beyond that was at best nebulous. Even so, there was more going on here than a repeat of the personal power struggle between Pompey and Caesar. Both men had a wide vision of empire based on their conquests and both had realized that by becoming an empire Rome had irrevocably changed; in reality political power was now based in commanding the legions, not in the senate and not in the senatorial class, although officially they still ruled. As Barry Strauss argues in his *The Death of Caesar* (2014) Caesar's assassins seem to have missed that point. Traditionalists and aristocrats, they were entitled the optimates "the best men" and as their self-proclaimed title suggests, were fighting for a Rome where their class controlled first the city, then Italia and then the empire, which existed to serve and enrich them.<sup>15</sup> Caesar on the other hand had a more wide and progressive vision. He had come out of the Populares movement, which while having some support amongst traditional aristocratic families such as Caesar's had gained most of its support from the upwardly mobile, the "novas humo" the new men, the middle classes, the legions and the plebeians. His uncle and mentor Marius had also done this decades before, but Caesar went further. His policies reveal a vision where Roman citizenship, rank and even senatorial positions would be given not on the basis of Roman ancestry, but by merit and loyalty to Rome; barbarians could not only be romanised but would be part of ruling the Empire.

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<sup>14</sup> M.L. Clarke, *The Noblest Roman: Marcus Brutus and his Reputation*. London, 1981, p.56. Brutus quoted; M. Cary and H.H. Scullard, *A History of Rome*. p.281.

<sup>15</sup> Barry Strauss, *The Death of Caesar: The Story of History's Most Famous Assassination*. New York: Simon & Shuster, 2014. p17

For “the best men” such a concept was as unsettling as the Civil War and in some ways more unsettling. Dictators had come and gone but the established hierarchical order had never been threatened in this way. To them barbarians and Romans were inalienably separate. The idea of progress seemed to have been very limited to them and limited to increased wealth, territorial expansion or creating new architecture. Romans strongly believed themselves to have been descended from Trojans; that is they were always aristocrats, always civilized. The reality revealed by archaeology is that around 1000-750BC there was no marble palace but a few small, circular wattle and dub huts with thatched circular rooves and mud floors which were established on Palatine Hill for herders of sheep, goats and cattle.<sup>16</sup>

On his website F. Cavazzi reproduces a photographic cross section of a reconstruction of one of these huts. It could be on the plains of modern Angola – or located amongst the villages of Brutus’s barbarian contemporaries. Rome had never really been unchangeable, but had progressed and in Caesar’s lifetime was still progressing, whatever the supposedly best men thought.

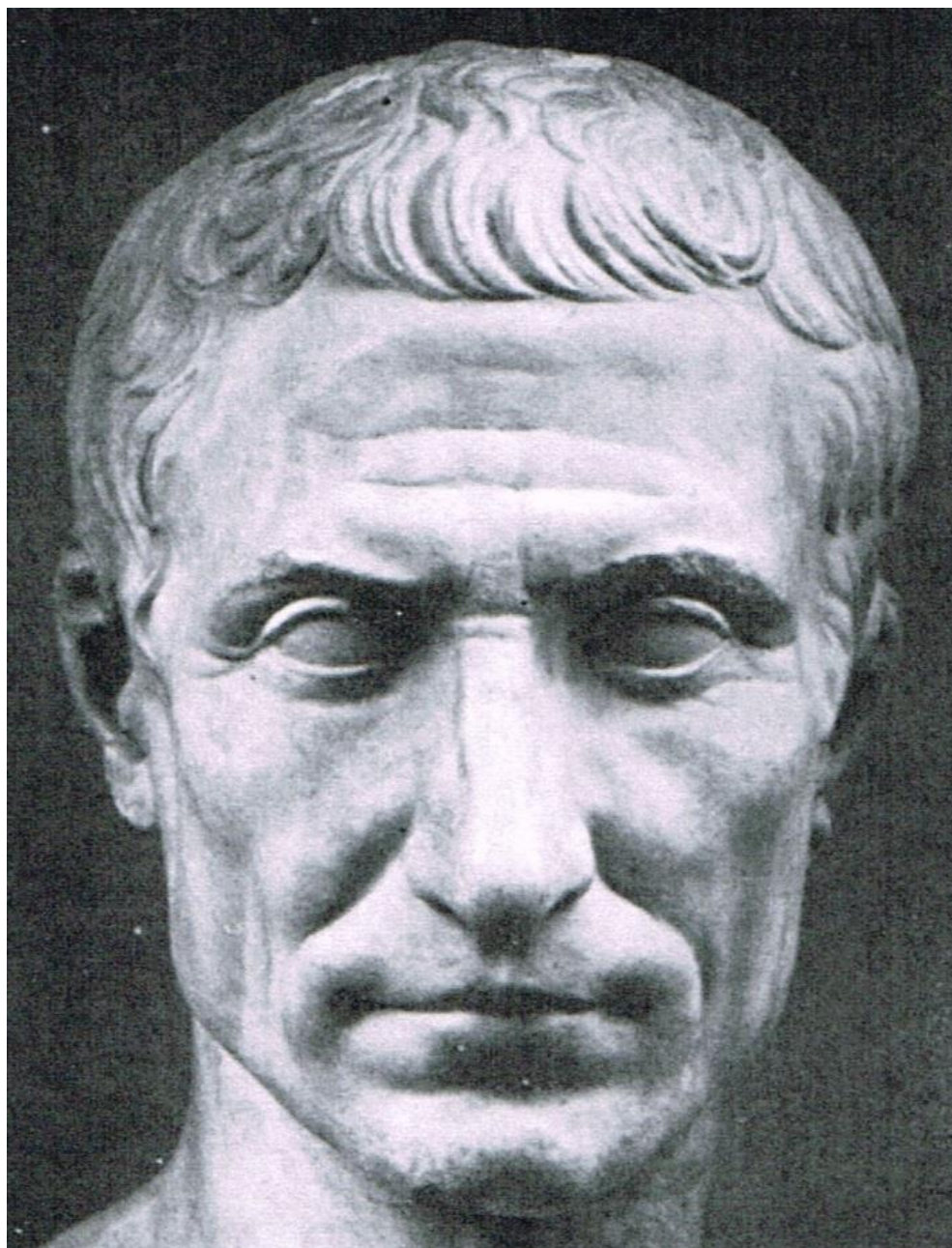
Realities have little strength against desires, especially to those who are obviously threatened with the loss of their privileged way of life, as the optimates class were when Caesar took control. Then as now and at all points in between, appeals to a near mythic golden age of a nation’s early days almost always has an appeal in times of crisis. In these assorted Golden Ages national heroes rescue the people from disorder, usually in their worldview caused by foreigners or a ruling individual or by forgetting the true values and giving in to moral corruption and/or a hunger for wealth. Vanquish the evil threat, return to the old ways and good times will come again. It was a role offered to Brutus and he took it. Many reminded him of his ancestors who in old stories at least, overthrew the tyranny of Rome’s kings and defended the Republic from its enemies.<sup>17</sup> The resemblance to Rome’s hated kings was not imaginary: although Marius, Sulla and Pompey held great power, bending or temporarily breaking the constitution, they did not officially gain power for life. Dictatorship was only allowed for brief periods. For unknown reasons Sulla even retired voluntarily at the height of his power.

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<sup>16</sup> ‘Casa Romuli’ *Wikipedia*; Michael Grant, *History of Rome*. London, 1978. p10; F. Cavazzi, *The Founding of Rome* [www.roman-empire.net/founding/found-index.html](http://www.roman-empire.net/founding/found-index.html) Updated 6th April 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Plutarch, *Makers of Rome*. ‘Brutus’ 1 pp.223-224, 9 pp.230-231.

After his return from the final conquest of the Pompeian forces Caesar was made consul for ten years and then made dictator for life – which lasted another twenty-eight days.<sup>18</sup> Consuls were supposed to rule for one year only and dictatorships to last for six months. As a general he plundered rich towns that were



*Julius Caesar. Public Domain/Commons/Wikipedia*

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<sup>18</sup> Appian, II 106 p.125.

not hostile to him solely for their wealth and as consul in he had already been involved in unconstitutional and illegal behaviour, including stealing gold from the capitol.<sup>19</sup> After defeating Pompey this tendency worsened. His followers' adulation turned to deification: temples and statues were raised to him, the seventh month was renamed July in his honour and sacrifices, contests and votive offerings were made in his name.<sup>20</sup> He even had the front of his home built in the style of a temple. Temples of course were the homes of the Gods and the implication here did not go unnoticed. All these things fuelled suspicion, revulsion and enmity. The loss of power by the senate was almost laughable. Cicero wrote that his name was being used to forward motions written by an unnamed noted figure (Caesar) at his home then read in the senate when he was not even in Rome. The first knowledge he had of these motions was when he gained congratulations for them from far off lands.<sup>21</sup>

Caesar accepted many of the offerings, but reduced the proffered ten year consulship to one year, to be served with Mark Anthony.<sup>22</sup> In several different public situations he also rejected proffered kingship.<sup>23</sup> In one of these where Mark Anthony publicly proffers the crown three times before a watching audience the feel of street theatre comes down through the millennia. Was it sincere or a performance to assuage the fears of the masses? Who set it up? Caesar? Anthony? The pair of them? Some amongst the best men in the hope that Caesar would accept and take the crown, and by doing so alienate his followers? However all these rejections were merely rejections of titles, real power lay in being declared dictator. Until he made himself dictator for life he seemed to know how far he could go with the public in these matters and to know the value of image, at least with the populace. His public rejection of kingship brought public applause.<sup>24</sup> Hated as he was among many in the aristocracy, he was clearly admired and loved by many populares, although Suetonius states that in his last days they were tiring

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<sup>19</sup> Suetonius, 54 pp.32-33.

<sup>20</sup> Appian, II 105 pp.125-126, 144 p.147 Mark Anthony's funeral oration for Caesar is quoted; Suetonius, 76 p.41.

<sup>21</sup> Cicero, 'Letter to Friends' 9.15. 3-4 written in 46 BC. Reproduced by Mathew Dillon and Lynda Garland. p.659.

<sup>22</sup> Appian II 107 p.125-126.

<sup>23</sup> Appian, II 107-108 p.126-127.; Suetonius, 79 pp.43-44.

<sup>24</sup> Appian, II 109 p.127.

of his dictatorial ways.<sup>25</sup> This may be a public reaction to his being declared dictator for life twenty-eight days before his death. Even Sulla was considered a notorious tyrant, for ruling for three years as dictator before retiring.

Caesar's popularity was or had been genuine, being more than just court flattery and hagiographic historians and poets at work for pay. He had brought many benefits to Rome. As a warrior he had courageously and victoriously served Rome from youth onwards, opposing three of Rome's most feared enemies, Sulla, Spartacus and the pirates of the Mediterranean Sea. As aedile and later as consul and dictator he had gained a reputation for generosity in restoring the Appian Way and in his lavish games, often through his extravagant use of personal finances or loans to him.<sup>26</sup> He had celebrated four triumphs in rapid succession: these would have given him glory and a reputation for victory. The public celebrations accompanying triumphs with banquets, games and distribution of wealth would have only increased his popularity. He had added almost all of Gaul and in effect the Kingdom of Egypt to the empire, enriching not only the empire and his legions, but the people. Gaul alone paid an annual tribute of 400,000 gold pieces.<sup>27</sup> These conquests also brought the benefits of new areas to plunder, and then settle and tax. They would also be of use for new food supplies; Egyptian grain alone would become a staple supply for Rome. There were also the Egyptian operated mineral mines, especially the gold mines to the south.

In practical politics Caesar brought more benefits to Rome than his assassins ever did. Before considering his achievements and the criticism that most of them such as the great library, the road along the Apennines, draining the Pontine Marshes, extending Ostia's harbour and building the forum were either only plans or in their early stages, it is worthwhile to consider that he was in power for less than five years. Of those all but the last fourteen months were in wartime and wars are expensive devourers of time, efforts, money and priorities. Of those war years most of his time was spent away from Rome.

Rome was not built in a day indeed, but he did complete several tasks concerning legislation, injustice, disorganisation and economics. These meant much to the Romans in his time but less to historians coming after. New buildings relieved some congestion, schemes stopped the flooding of the Tiber and he made

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<sup>25</sup> Suetonius, 80 p.43, 80 p.44.

<sup>26</sup> Goldsworthy, *Caesar* pp.105-108; Appian, II p.69.

<sup>27</sup> Suetonius, 25 p.19.

a start on land reclamation of the Pontine Marsh.<sup>28</sup> Caesar also introduced qualifications for the magistrates and councillors, reformed the awkward and confusing calendar and instituted more effective rules concerning the magistracies, traffic regulations and lending.<sup>29</sup> He kept a close watch on the magistrates and although he had been involved in corruption himself, he was severe with their corruption.

To people today one of his biggest achievements goes almost unnoticed – his restructuring of the debt crisis, which was wracking Rome’s economy. He forbade the hoarding of currency, introduced a standardised gold coin to give the currency validity, reduced extortionist interest rates, allowed debts to be paid in land, not cash and cancelled all accrued interest due since the war with Pompey began.<sup>30</sup> Even the creditors, many of them initially resentful of losing a potential source of income, realised that their debts were not payable and that Caesar’s measures were a strong start to Rome’s economic recovery.<sup>31</sup>

He also made the senate more accountable by ordering that daily records of its meetings be kept and these records were open to the public. He increased senate numbers by a third, up to nine hundred. Many of these new senators were *novo humos*, the “new men” from outside the old aristocratic families. He brought in laws for the employment of free men by a quota system. This applied especially on the great estates, the *latifundia*. One intention with this law was to reduce brigandage amongst those enslaved or lowly paid workers who could easily escape and form robber bands.<sup>32</sup> This would also reduce the chances of another slave rebellion like the Spartacus Rebellion and those similar, earlier slave rebellions in Sicily. Another big advantage coming from this policy was to stop the drift to the cities of those who were poor but free. He reorganised the corrupt and inefficient free grain distribution laws through the use of censuses and street by street reorganisation of distribution.<sup>33</sup> He granted citizenship to any doctor or teacher willing to work in Rome.<sup>34</sup> One of his odder laws was the prohibition on luxury goods in clothing and food and even the wearing of particular clothing or jewellery

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<sup>28</sup> H.H. Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero: A History of Rome from 133BC to AD68*. London, 1972, pp.148-149; Plutarch, *Fall of the Roman Republic*. “Julius Caesar” 58 p298.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>30</sup> Grant, pp.193-194; Scullard p149

<sup>31</sup> Grant p194.

<sup>32</sup> Scullard, pp.148-149.

<sup>33</sup> Goldsworthy, *Caesar* pp.478-479.

<sup>34</sup> Goldsworthy, *Caesar* p479; Suetonius 42p28 42



by people below a certain rank. His police frequently confiscated such food and clothing, a strange act of petty tyranny.<sup>35</sup> He reduced debtor's interest and brought in punishments for the rich that meant they could not escape the law through easily affordable fines; by doing this he started curbing corruption in the courts. This was also part of this process of reducing the power of the rich.<sup>36</sup> Caesar also gave Roman farmers tax relief while his soldiers gained double the daily pay and were occasionally given a slave each.<sup>37</sup> His personal generosity was such that "Caesar became the one reliable source of help to all who were in legal difficulties, or in debt, or living beyond their means..."<sup>38</sup>

If amongst his other plans many needed time this was inevitable: Rome was not built in a day indeed. Until his murder he was making a start on restoring old roads and building new ones, constructing a harbour at Ostia which would facilitate trade, draining the malarial Pontine Marshes and redistributing land. He was also establishing twenty new colonies for his veterans with citizenship rights for many provincials.<sup>39</sup> By the time of his death around 80,000 of the city's poor had been resettled in colonies.<sup>40</sup> This expansion of Roman citizenship to those who were not Roman by birth was giving many within the Empire legal rights and chances of advancement and economic benefits. This policy would increase not only the chances of peace within the empire, but its economic prosperity as wars could be costly and there was no guarantee that they would ultimately give returns on their cost. These new citizens would have also increased prosperity by broadening the tax base and increased trading within the Roman Empire.

Through much of the empire he started large public building works, while in Rome he started work on the forum, paying for the needed land in the central city area with his plundered gold from Gaul. There was also the planned massive library modelled on that of Alexandria, which was one of the largest the world has ever known.<sup>41</sup> Could this have been guilt, because during his stay in Alexandria, the conflicts with the city's inhabitants led to the burning of much of that famous and admired collection? He had been impressed by Alexandria and several of his

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<sup>35</sup> Suetonius, 43 p.28.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid* 43 p.28.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid* 26 p.20. Appian also mentions his generous military payouts, 102 p123

<sup>38</sup> Suetonius, 27 p.21.

<sup>39</sup> Plutarch, *Fall of the Roman Republic*. "Julius Caesar" 57 p.297. 58 p298; Scullard, pp.148-150.

<sup>40</sup> Strauss, *The Death of Caesar* p43.

<sup>41</sup> Goldsworthy, *Caesar* pp.478-479; Grant, pp.194-195.

building schemes seem to have been inspired by what he saw there.<sup>42</sup> He also started on the codification of Roman laws, which would make the law simpler by eradicating those that were archaic amongst them and by making them public on notices and inscriptions.<sup>43</sup> Rome had close to a million inhabitants at this time and his plans for clearing the congested and over-crowded areas within the city would be used by successive rulers over the next two hundred years.<sup>44</sup>

Unlike most megalomaniacs Caesar continued his policy of mercy after returning to Rome; he issued no proscriptions. His policy was almost the reverse, installing former enemies to high office and giving clemency liberally, including pardoning one of his most determined enemies, Metellus, and even promoting Brutus and Cassius to be praetors in 46 BC.<sup>45</sup> The senate and people established a 'Temple Of Clemency' in gratitude.<sup>46</sup>

To what extent this was motivated by humanity and to what extent by vanity, self-aggrandisement or practical needs remains unclear. His policy of clemency and the erection of the temple of Clemency were clearly part of a desperately needed healing process.

Julius Caesar's own words quoted by Adrian Goldsworthy show mixed motivations that are tied to holding power through stability:

Let us see if in this way we can willingly win the support of all and gain a permanent victory, since through their cruelty others have been unable to escape hatred or make their victory lasting – save for Lucius Sulla and I do not intend to imitate him. This is a new way of conquest, we grow strong through pity and generosity. *Augustus: From Revolutionary to Emperor*. p64.

Caesar apparently was aware that the upper classes had torn themselves apart in these conflicts and that this was a way to social chaos. There was also the dissipation of economy and energy to be considered. One of history's greatest generals understood the negative consequences of prolonged war, especially civil

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<sup>42</sup> Strauss, *The Death of Caesar* p37 p43.

<sup>43</sup> Goldsworthy, *Caesar* pp.478-479.

<sup>44</sup> Cary and Scullard, p.276.

<sup>45</sup> Cicero, 'Letter to Friends' 6.6.8. October 46. Section 8 Reproduced by Mathew Dillon and Lynda Garland, p.660; Clarke, p.33.; Plutarch, *Fall of the Roman Republic*, 'Caesar' 57 p.298; Cary and Scullard, p.276.

<sup>46</sup> Cary and Scullard, p.276.

war. Amongst his contemporaries many others felt the same. Apparently nobody at that stage wanted a return to proscriptions, let alone continued civil war. Appian notes that Caesar ordered a census soon after the civil war ended and that this revealed that Rome had lost half its population.<sup>47</sup> Many of these people would have been among those eighty thousand resettled in overseas colonies.<sup>48</sup> Others would have been unaligned civilians fleeing to the countryside or the provinces to avoid yet another civil war. Pompeian supporters had also fled either to join his forces or to live under his rule or subsequently that of his son in those provinces Pompey's allies or supporters controlled. Even considering these groups, this strongly suggests that the massive casualty figures from battles in this war coming from ancient historians may not be exaggerations.

Further evidence that this was so comes from the funeral oration Mark Anthony gave for Caesar. He referred to how a new civil war would lead to "the complete extinction of our city's remaining noble families."<sup>49</sup> Scullard refers to the senatorial class at this time as being "depleted by war" and even twenty years later Octavian was granted the right to create new patrician families, due to the high casualties in the wars.<sup>50</sup> With more honesty he could have mentioned "and in my proscriptions." Apart from self-preservation this reconciliatory policy also seems why the senate discussed pardons rather than proscriptions after Caesar's murder and accepted Cicero's motions for amnesty.<sup>51</sup> Despite the conciliatory efforts of Anthony, Lepidus, Cicero and Brutus, Rome, far from gaining any long term benefits from Caesar's death, would soon have its social fabric torn apart yet again. This pattern went back beyond the recent war with Pompey, to a series of conflicts and costly conquests that went back even beyond the Spartacus War, to the social wars and the conflict between Marius and Sulla a generation before.

Due to depictions in popular culture the legions are perceived as something like Doctor Who's daleks: virtual automations who are uniform killing machines. They are an obedient force who serve their commander the way chess pieces serve a player. Nothing could be further from the truth. They had to be virtually wooed, inspired, encouraged fed and most of all rewarded. When Caesar's uncle Marius

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<sup>47</sup> Appian, II 102 pp.123-124.

<sup>48</sup> Suetonius, 42 p.27; Cary and Scullard, p.276.

<sup>49</sup> Appian, II 145 p.148.

<sup>50</sup> Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero*. p.151 p.216.

<sup>51</sup> Plutarch, *Makers of Rome*. 'Brutus' 19 p.239, *The Fall of the Roman Republic*. 'Caesar' 67 p.307, 'Cicero' 42 pp.353-354.

reformed the legions he not only reformed its structure, he gave it a different social base.

Under Marius and after the Roman army was no longer reliant on or even dominated by men of property who formed cavalry; he recruited from amongst the dispossessed plebeians. These were formed into infantry legions of six thousand with the cavalry frequently being formed from foreign allies.<sup>52</sup> With Marius and then after him the legions main motive became plunder, not patriotism. The loyalty of the legions was to commanders who won and therefore gave them plunder and land allocations, (sometimes even with slaves) in retirement. This would have a revolutionary effect on politics.<sup>53</sup> Caesar seemed to understand what this meant for the political world very well. In Rome political rule had been decided not by votes, but by the swords of armies since the time of his birth and patriotism had little if anything to do with controlling the armies. His appeals to the plebeians through bread and circuses was almost certainly not from any sense of justice, but to keep his power base, the plebeian based legions, on his side. With the policies of winning over the allies this was probably linked to his need for cavalry and to feed the legions from local supplies. Seeing the effects of civil war and civil discord from childhood on, he knew the destructive power of the military as a weapon and that actually using this power was not always wise.

Clearly Caesar wanted to see the needed peace established and he would give great benefits to the Roman people, even if only a small proportion was paid for by taxes and trade. More of the benefits were probably paid for by confiscating the estates and wealth of many of Pompey's supporters, and most obviously by the mass slaughter, subjection, enslavement, and impoverishment of others, particularly those amongst the Gauls who had rejected Roman rule. Rome was not only an imperial economy, it was a plunder economy. Only the new calendar, the resolution of the debt crisis, veteran's payouts and their increased pay and some new buildings and some new laws were fully functional in Caesar's lifetime. Other beneficial practical projects were carried on by Mark Anthony during his consulship, but most were delayed due to Caesar's murder - until after Octavian became the first man in Rome and restarted much of this work, completing several aspects, in the subsequent decades of his rule.

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<sup>52</sup> Montgomery of Alamein, *A History of Warfare*. London; Collins, 1968. p99.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*.

In terms of what Caesar's policies revealed about him there are negatives. Grandiose building schemes and parades that glorify the nation and the leader as if they are inseparable, silly petty tyrannies, sudden rushes to more efficient government pushed through by one man, an all-encompassing empire where one superior race dominates, leading others into its civilization after it has conquered them, political power resting on an army, grandiose parades, statues and temples erected to a living man – all these aspects of Caesar's rule are signs of megalomania. So are massive building programs, a passion for creating order out of disorder and rearranging society. If Julius Caesar was not a megalomaniac to start with, his partaking in the Roman triumphs would have made him one.

In *The Roman Triumph* (1962) Robert Payne assesses this lavish and massive victory parade, usually granted by the senate for victories where over five thousand enemy soldiers were killed. Few other events could equal a Roman triumph for being a grandiose mixture of celebratory propaganda and a warning display of power. Victorious troops marched to acclaim, cheering and tossed garlands while piles of booty were displayed. Behind the hailed, conquering hero came the captured enemy leaders or the leaders' families, usually enchained, bedraggled and dirty. Their humiliation went further with jeers from the mob. After the parade they were usually dispensed with by executions while the triumphant hero feasted and basked in the applause and acclaim from speeches. Sometimes prominent rebels were spared, kept like somewhat dangerous pets, being exiled hostages for the good behaviour of their conquered peoples. The enemy prisoners without rank were often sold off as slaves, but depending on the general's whim or market forces, they might be executed. Executing captives might depend on if they glutted the slave market or were in demand. Constructing those who have something you want as strange and therefore enemies, stealing from them and then enjoying their sadistic destruction is another sign of megalomania. Pompey and Caesar loved their triumphs.

It was no accident that Julius Caesar modelled himself on Alexander the Great or that Mussolini modelled himself on Caesar. Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin, Trotsky, Tito, Kim Ill Sung and Mao would also easily fit into this broad political pattern. Caesar's famous overwhelming charm and benevolence also fit the megalomaniac pattern, as does their sudden reversal into fury, shrieking and threats when their charm does not get them their own way.

Caesar was not a benevolent figure to many aristocrats and others, but then neither were his assassins. Plutarch (with Shakespeare following his lead)

depicts Brutus as the epitome of Republican honour, totally committed to the ideals and laws of the Republic before anything else, a man who believed Caesar was threatening the Republic's survival.<sup>54</sup> Plutarch however, wrote biographies to give moral lessons and Brutus is used as a moral exemplar. In M.L. Clarke's biography passages from ancient documents and Brutus's own words show another side. He was an ingrate to his friend Cicero, as well as to Caesar. Brutus did not protect Cicero or mourn for him. Like the bad and greedy generals who wanted to be dictators and whom he decried, he plundered provincial cities. During the new civil war, Brutus the supposedly great Republican, took over as war leader and ruled without election, crossing a thin line between general and governor, he ruled like royalty where he conquered, issuing pardons, taxes and even coinage with his face and name on it. Brutus was also a loan shark, charging 48% interest on his loans to the Cypriots.

Apart from vague talk of a return to rule by the constitution, Brutus and the other conspirators seemed to lack practical beneficial plans for Rome.<sup>55</sup> If they had any such plans they kept them more secret than their murder plot. Their plan was negative: murder Caesar. Cicero, himself a fervent Republican, who in the aftermath of Caesar's murder described the assassins as "our heroes," aptly described the conspirators as having "no plan, no thought, no method."<sup>56</sup> He would later add that they lacked both manpower and money, confirming that their enemies and later writers were correct in saying that they had little support.<sup>57</sup>

Hatred or fear of Caesar seems to have been the main motive and one that he fuelled: his vitriol against Brutus and Cicero was nothing unusual. He delighted in humiliating people with his accurately acerbic wit and teasing games. He incorporated such comments into his open affairs with their wives and daughters. This was in a world where pride and reputation were almost everything personal life was about and the family were the rest. If this was not enough Caesar was showing alarming signs of megalomania in a society which despised kings and distrusted dictators. This would explain why two of his most loyal and trusted generals, Trebonius and Decimus Brutus, took part in his assassination.

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<sup>54</sup> Plutarch, *Makers of Rome*. 'Brutus' 1-53 pp.223-270.

<sup>55</sup> Clarke, pp.1-78.

<sup>56</sup> Clarke, p.33; Cicero, An excerpt of a letter to Atticus, 10<sup>th</sup> April 44BC quoted by Dillon and Garland, p671.

<sup>57</sup> Cicero, An excerpt of a letter to Atticus, 10<sup>th</sup> April 44BC quoted by Dillon and Garland, p671.



*The design of the coins Brutus had minted shows the assassin's daggers on either side of the pictured justification – the cap of liberty. Public domain. Courtesy of Warwick University*

Suetonius goes as far as to say that Caesar's "deeds and sayings" would "justify the conclusion that he deserved assassination."<sup>58</sup> He frequently insulted senators, arbitrarily curtailed their privileges, sacked tribunes, reduced Republican power, acted illegally and played the tyrant with his vetoes and supposed "advice" to magistrates.<sup>59</sup> He fuelled the fears about his dictatorship by calling Sulla a dunce for resigning from the dictatorship and stated that the Republic was nothing, a mere name without substance.<sup>60</sup> He had begun to be worshipped as a divinity, taking on many aspects of divine worship. He had stolen gold from the capitol and replaced it with bronze and paid his army and entertainments bills with the profits from acts of extortion and sacrilege.<sup>61</sup> He insulted the Republic and its believers and reduced their power by making new senators of people from the lower orders, even Gauls.<sup>62</sup>

One wonders if Caesar did this to aggravate the senate, to have a laugh or to intimidate them. The story of the Gaulish senators became exaggerated and many believed they were the recently conquered Barbarians. They seemed to have been from Romanised Cisalpine Gaul, an area that had gone over to him when he crossed the Rubicon. This seemed to affirm a policy of peaceful romanisation. Other evidence for this was in the way he structured those Roman colonies set up

<sup>58</sup> Suetonius, 76 p.41.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid* 76-80 pp.41-44;

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 77 p.42.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid* 54 p.33

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid* 76 p.42

for his veterans. In the East where one quarter of the colonies were established, they were isolated outposts of Roman civilization: in the West they became part of the romanising process.<sup>63</sup> Was he a megalomaniac remaking everyone into an image he thought was best? Or was he actually a visionary wishing to bring everyone into a state of equality within the empire? Was the romanising process a way to benefit Rome or to weaken his Republican enemies? When they murdered Caesar the Republicans were removing a threat to themselves, not to Rome. The best evidence that Caesar's assassins were not acting in Rome's best interests is in the reactions to Caesar's assassination. Cicero, the most able man in the senate, had been the leading critic of Caesar's increasingly dictatorial ways, yet like many in the senate he tried to avert the approaching conflict after his murder. Outside the senatorial class and military hierarchies others publicly expressed through graffiti bitter jokes and general griping, unease and resentment over some of Caesar's policies, increasing power and worship, but the populace were a long way from deciding to overthrow Caesar and reinstall an ideal republic. This was the idea of a few aristocratic leaders who in terms of large numbers of committed supporters, could at best count on the loyalty of some legions to them as the loyalty of soldiers to their commanders – but those legions were in the provinces. With less trust and reliability, they could align with disaffected provincials who were always ready to revolt against current Roman rule for local advantages. The conspirators may have noticed the mood swinging against Caesar after he was declared dictator for life and counted on this for public support. They were worried that if he went on his expedition he would be surrounded by military men and impossible to kill. If he returned victorious his reputation would make his kingship inevitable. The actual murder seemed well planned but their seizure of power was not.

There are only two primary sources that describe Caesar's assassination. One is Cicero an eyewitness who says only a little in passing in a letter to his friend Atticus four weeks after the event. The other is Nicholas of Damascus who visited Rome a few years after the event and interviewed eyewitnesses and wrote up a detailed account.<sup>64</sup> This was probably done on the wishes of Herod the Great, Rome's staunch ally and a man much concerned with his survival and Roman politics. The three major sources for descriptions of the actual murder Suetonius, Appian and Plutarch all wrote many years after the event, but they agree overall and sometimes supply the same details. They also agree with the snippets of

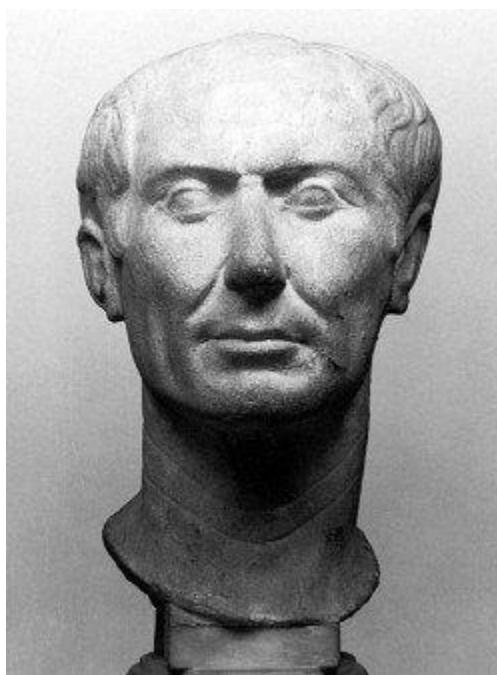
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<sup>63</sup> Grant, pp.192-193.

<sup>64</sup> His account is introduced and reproduced "the Assassination of Julius Caesar, 44BC Eyewitness to History" [www.eyewitnesstohistory.com](http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com) (2004).



information Cicero, who was an eyewitness, gave. They seem to have based their accounts on Nicolaus of Damascus, but not totally, as several little details differ. Caesar is not described as wearing a purple robe in Nicolaus's account, but he is in Appian's. Nicolaus says that Brutus visited Caesar before the murder encouraging him to go to the senate and giving his words, but others say this was Decimus Brutus. The role of the awaiting gladiators, the distraction of Mark Anthony and several other details are not in Nicolaus's account and must come from similar, now unknown documents. There are some discrepancies. Nicolaus writes of Caesar taking thirty-five stab wounds, many of which sound like mortal blows. Appian's account sounds similar but Suetonius writes of twenty-three stabbing wounds, only one of which was fatal. Even so, the accounts tell essentially the same story.



*The bald head shows that this bust depicts Caesar in his last years. It is believed to date from his lifetime. The facial expression suggests his wit and self-confidence.*  
*Public Domain*

Caesar had ignored or belittled warnings of a murderous conspiracy, including one note given to him as he walked to the senatorial chambers on the day of his death. He held it unread with other documents. He nearly did not go to the senate, but Decimus Brutus, believed to be a firm friend, reminded him that the senators had been waiting an hour and assured him that there was nothing to worry about. Big

burly Anthony, was to have been sitting near Caesar as pro consul and being a brave man of action, would have protected him, but he was distracted by Trebonius, one of the conspirators, at the senate doors.<sup>65</sup> As he sat, Caesar was surrounded by the assassins, who had daggers hidden in their togas. When they attacked Caesar fought back, whirling around with his only weapon, a sharp stylus while they ripped at his purple toga so as to stab him. In the confusion several assassins were wounded, either by Caesar, their own weapons or by the misjudged blows of their compatriots. Suetonius writes that “some say that when he saw Marcus Brutus about to deliver the second blow, he reproached him in Greek with: You too, my son?”<sup>66</sup> Even when he fell to the ground at the foot of Pompey’s statue they continued the knifing. Caesar’s last act was to cover his bared legs with his toga so as to not seem unseemly in death. The doctor who examined him found that of the twenty three wounds, only one the second blow which knifed him in the chest, would have been fatal. Does this suggest the confused nature of the attack, or a reluctance to murder?

While Caesar was being stabbed to death by a crowd of about twenty senators, each of them striking a blow, the other senators, including Cicero, watched in shock and confusion, not jubilation, they fled. The city reacted with fear, with many fleeing and murders being committed in the streets.<sup>67</sup> The senate had this opportunity to back the conspirators and form a Republican government, but they did not use that opportunity; nor did they seem to want to restore the old ways by any practical measure. Many Romans rallied to Mark Anthony after his speech praising Caesar, where he had also read Caesar’s will. Caesar had distributed great wealth among the citizenry, and willed his gardens to the city’s populace.<sup>68</sup> These were the immediate benefits of his death. Mark Anthony as consul, was backed by one of Caesar’s most loyal and powerful supporters in both civilian and military matters. This was the Caesar’s former pro-consul, praetor, governor and general, Aemilius Lepidus. At the time of Caesar’s murder Lepidus held the appointment of Master of Horse, so he commanded soldiers, a legion in Rome and others nearby. Combining this force with Anthony and his supporters, this meant that they held more power than the conspirators, who had a large team of gladiators – and apparently nobody else. The supporters of Mark Anthony

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<sup>65</sup> Appian, 117 p132.

<sup>66</sup> Suetonius, 82 p46 .

<sup>67</sup> Suetonius, 82 p.46, 85 pp. 47-48.; Plutarch, *Fall of the Roman Republic*. ‘Caesar’ 66 p.306, 67-68 pp.306-308.; Plutarch, *Makers of Rome*. “Brutus’ 18 p.238. Appian, 118 p132

<sup>68</sup> Plutarch, *Makers of Rome*. 20 ‘Brutus’ p.240.

would also have had the support of other nearby troops not directly under their commands, Caesar's legionaries, many of them were already in the city awaiting their entitlements.

Although he was Caesar's co-consul, his ascension to power as Rome's first man really started with Caesar's funeral speech. Shakespeare's famous scene from *Julius Caesar* where Brutus, then Anthony orate over Caesar's body has a reputation for being magnificent drama and poor history, but this is closer to history than it might initially seem. The funerals of Roman aristocrats were public events in which the youngest of the dead individual's heirs were expected to give an oration extolling the virtues of the deceased.<sup>69</sup> As Octavian, was not yet in Rome and Anthony as Caesar's deputy was, he took on the oration and used it skilfully. As in the play, he lured the conspirators into letting him give Caesar's funeral oration in public and then publicly reading his will. Not the most subtle Roman, Mark Anthony used a crane to dangle a rotating life sized wax dummy of Caesar with his twenty three bloodied stab wounds made vivid and he also held up Caesar's bloodied toga to make his point.<sup>70</sup> Fortunately Shakespeare did not follow history exactly on using these two overly dramatic props. As in the play Anthony's reading immediately caused a riot against the conspirators and confirmed his position as Caesar's immediate political heir in fact as well as by wish. The same reading made Octavian upon his arrival in Rome Caesar's financial heir.

Because of Plutarch's biography of Mark Anthony which focuses on his failings so as to teach the readers a moral lesson, he usually appears in popular histories and mass culture as foolish, impulsive, blind to realities, self-indulgent and self-destructive. Mark Anthony was supposedly was a powerful and impulsive man without the acumen to use power wisely. His later romance with Cleopatra is the main source for this image and it did play a leading part in turning his career into a political disaster. In the long term he was one of the biggest losers by Caesar's death. However Caesar was an astute judge of character and had promoted him to high office. In the immediate aftermath of Caesar's murder and in the months that followed he showed considerable astuteness – except in his disastrous dealings with Caesar's great nephew Octavian.

Apparently they disliked each other at their first meeting. This took place at Mark Anthony's house, in the month after Caesar's death, when Octavian seemed

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<sup>69</sup> Adrian Goldsworthy, *Augustus*. pp65-66.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, p86.

unimportant. Mark Anthony's equivocating with Caesar's assassins were not actions that would endear him to Octavian, his opposite in character. In his biography *Augustus: From Revolutionary to Emperor* Adrian Goldsworthy gives portraits of these two men. Despite coming from the same locale, era and class they were apparently as opposite as is possible. Goldsworthy describes a burly, reckless, extravagant self-indulgent hedonist, given to florid oratory, flouting convention and exhibitionism as he wandered around the country with an entourage of actors and actresses, one of them his mistress.<sup>71</sup> The bust of Anthony reproduced in this work also reinforces this, giving an impression of a burly, happily spontaneous sensualist. Although it is not quite spelt out, ancient sources dealing with Anthony give an impression of egregious sedulousness, vitality and good health.

In contrast Octavian was cautious, calculating, austere and quiet. The way he wore platform shoes suggests that like many dictators he was shorter than average or saw himself that way. He was of a thin, if well regulated build, but was frequently sick. Like Anthony he did not miss opportunities to get money, but he used that money to buy influence and power, not for self-indulgence. In contrast to Anthony's exhibitionistic affairs, at the age of seventeen he chose to spend a year in celibacy to regain his health and to protect and develop his speaking voice.<sup>72</sup> The voice was an essential tool for oratory, and skilful oratory was essential for political advancement. Apparently Romans believed that sexual involvement weakened the voice. Octavian did go into a marriage with a young aristocratic girl but divorced her two years later, swearing that he had never been sexually involved with her. This was a man who may have had a low sex drive or a thwarted one, putting all his energy into politics. His frequent serious illnesses and also sadistic behaviour during the proscriptions are evidence for both possibilities, which are not mutually exclusive – or permanent. Later in life as ruler he enjoyed writing bawdy lines, gambling and had a reputation perhaps undeserved, as a womaniser.

Opposites in politics and warfare sometimes attract especially when they desperately face the same enemy, one thinks of Cromwell and Fairfax, Stonewall Jackson and Jeb Stuart, Curtin and MacArthur, Eisenhower and Patton, but this type of unity rarely appears when they want the same thing which is in limited supply, in this case sole political power. When Octavian counted on Anthony's help to gain the tribuneship but found that Anthony had blocked this and then

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<sup>71</sup> Adrian Goldsworthy, *Augustus: From Revolutionary to Emperor*. London; 2014. p93.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*,

denied him his basic legal rights, the feud had started.<sup>73</sup> It worsened when Octavian found that Anthony had been spending some of the inheritance Caesar had left him. Despite respites and uneasy alliances between them, this conflict would last thirteen years, causing widespread misery, wastage and death until Octavian alone survived as first man in Rome. This early treatment of Octavian and a general underestimation of his calculating, ruthless character would be one of Anthony's biggest mistakes, one that would overshadow his considerable achievements and would ultimately be a crucial factor that cost him his life.

And yet Mark Anthony would reveal himself as a man prone to mistakes when faced not with an obvious crisis such as emerged with Caesar's assassination, but with temptations involving his considerable appetites. When in the East and in a very similar situation to Caesar and dealing with the same woman, he proved himself a lesser man than Caesar. After arriving in Egypt Caesar had intervened in the dynastic intrigues between Cleopatra and her brother-husband. Seeing who the winner was likely to be he backed her, made her his mistress and made the wealthy, strategically important kingdom of Egypt seem an ally. In reality it was well on the way to being a client state with a future as a province looming. The legend of Cleopatra first meeting Caesar by being concealed in a rolled up carpet sent as a gift to his headquarters in Alexandria contains a more subtle truth than the apocryphal facts. However she managed it, Cleopatra was able to get past the world of courtly restrictions and her brother-husband's control and use her charms to sway Caesar to her side. This is the type of thing an adolescent girl with a sense of drama and her own sex appeal might do. The story matches Cleopatra's tactics later in life, with her ostentatiously staged events and sexual wiles. Caesar would not be entranced by her to the extent that she controlled him or situations they were in together: he controlled her – and therefore controlled Egypt. In contrast Mark Anthony would be controlled by her and Egypt. Octavian was essentially right about Anthony, the east would take him over, giving him the wealth to indulge every extravagant taste his extravagant personality craved at the cost of the virtues he had displayed when Caesar was alive and then as proconsul.

With Caesar's murder the circumstances were falling into place for Mark Anthony's decline and eventual destruction, although initially and superficially that did not seem to be so: Caesar's death seemed to make him ascend to the

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<sup>73</sup> Suetonius, 10 p.55.



*Caesar and Cleopatra. This depicts the legendary incident of their first meeting. Painting by Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904) 1866. Public Domain/Wikipedia Commons*

peak of his power. As consul and leader of the Caesarean movement Anthony was at the peak of his power. He continued Caesar's popular short term policies, notably expanding Roman citizenship to the Sicilians and continuing the land grants and settlements to Caesar's veterans, on occasion personally supervising the latter.<sup>74</sup> His compromise with the assassins avoided an immediate and dreaded Civil War and bought him time to assess their strength, popularity and abilities - and then gradually weaken all three. To assuage those who feared he was another dictator he abolished the title of dictator.<sup>75</sup> For the same reasons he then made it clear that he would follow the Republican constitution and give up the consulship

<sup>74</sup> Syme, p.108 p111.

<sup>75</sup> Syme, p.107; Scullard, p.160.

at the year's end as was expected by Rome's laws. He did not however, leave himself defenceless, getting the senate to give him or setting himself up for the governorship of Macedonia, which would give him command of six of the best Caesarean legions.<sup>76</sup> He strengthened his bond with his ally Lepidus through marriage and given positions. Lepidus got both a lucrative governorship in Hispania and Gaul and the respected position of Pontifex Maximus. Technically a religious position with great ceremonial power, it held great prestige, political influence and provided an almost sacrosanct protection. By giving this position to an ally rather than taking it himself Mark Anthony was showing that he was not an absolute ruler while at the same time denying the power that came to the Pontifex Maximus to anyone he could not trust. He was therefore protecting his position. Mark Anthony was careful to rule firmly without indulging in any of the taunting and regal behaviour that Caesar indulged in and wisely did not launch the great but extremely risky, prolonged and expensive expedition that Caesar had planned to conquer the Parthians and then the Germans.

While Caesar's will had left the conspirators unpopular, they were still a danger and by giving them overseas appointments without significant military forces Mark Anthony was removing them as threats.<sup>77</sup> He was also removing another threat of Civil war as Octavian had arrived in Rome intent on revenge and was planning to kill them.<sup>78</sup> They were usually willing to go as most of the conspirators quite rightly felt unsafe in Rome and left the city. The conspirator's major support was in their legions and in rebellious provinces, not Rome's citizenry. The Republicans would soon show that they had enough support to start another Civil War but not enough to win it. Ronald Syme aptly describes why:

The *nobiles*, by their ambitions and their feuds, had not merely destroyed their spurious Republic: they had ruined the Roman People. There is something more important than political liberty; and political rights are a means, not an end in themselves. That end is security of life and property: it could not be guaranteed by the Constitution of Republican Rome. Worn and broken by civil war and disorder, the Roman People was (sic) ready to surrender the ruinous privilege of freedom and submit to strict government... *The Roman Revolution*. p513.

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<sup>76</sup> Syme, p.107; Scullard p161.

<sup>77</sup> Syme, p106; Scullard, p.161.

<sup>78</sup> Suetonius, 10 p.55.

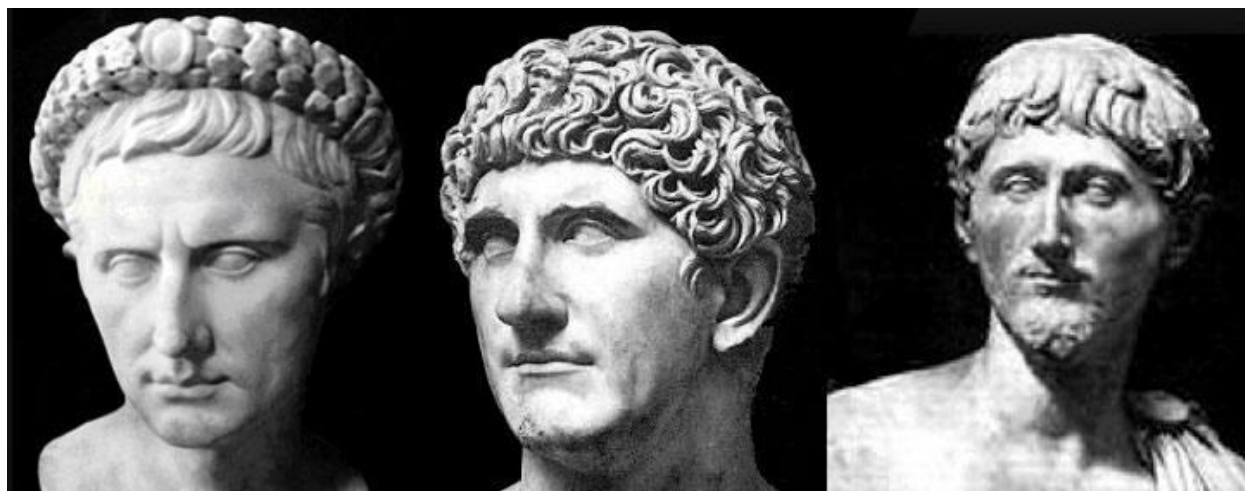
What Syme here describes was a long term effect that had been going on for a generation before Pompey and Caesar's war. Between them Marius and Sulla had devastated Rome in their struggle for power and then each of them during their times in power ruled it by fear and murderous proscriptions and punishments. After two major civil wars within living memory few Romans wanted another: but what they wanted counted for little.

Mark Anthony was placed in an invidious position over the conspirators and he did make mistakes. He was extravagant with Caesar's fortune, much of which was left to Octavian - and he may have forged Caesar's name to some documents. During his consulship his involvement with the legions in Macedonia was his biggest mistake. Quite reasonably this seemed like a good idea. He quite logically assumed that as he was Caesar's proconsul and heir and as he had fought at his side in several wars, these Caesarean legions would be loyal to him, not to the other side, Caesar's assassins. He forgot the emerging other alternative, Octavian. Although he later changed his proffered position to Gaul he would take those legions with him to counter and then defeat the third most important leader among the assassins, Decimus Brutus, who now commanded an army in Gaul. Doing this would demonstrate to the restless Caesarian forces in Rome that he was no ally of the assassins. He would leave his brother Caius and loyalists to himself in control of Macedonia's day to day organisation and the forces that would remain. This seemingly reasonable and predictable plan soon turned into a disaster that nearly destroyed Anthony there and then and would ultimately ensure his brother's death and Octavian's rise to power.

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## Chapter Two



*The triumvirates: Octavian, Mark Anthony and Lepidus*

Octavian would be a major cause of the unfolding civil war. On hearing of his great uncle's murder he rushed to Rome from the city of Appollina on the Adriatic. The suddenly gained prestige of his name and position as heir would within just over a year make him a junior partner in a new triumvirate with Anthony and Lepidus, but his arrival in Rome was initially little noticed. He had come from a minor if respected branch of the Caesar family.<sup>79</sup>

His origins are not as lowly as some claim. His grandfather was a town banker, not as claimed by his enemies, a common money lender. Similarly his father, who had died when Octavian was four, was not a nonentity, but had been respected for his oratory and dedication in the senate. He had just finished a term as governor of Macedonia and was returning to Rome to further advancement when he suddenly died. He had gained gratitude and respect by overseeing the extermination of the last of Spartacus's slaves. These remnants had escaped Crassus's legions and turned bandits, hiding out in the hills of southern Italy.<sup>80</sup> Octavian had been little noticed before Caesar's death. Perhaps because he was only a seventeen year-old orphan adopted by Caesar, was in his shadow and had achieved nothing – yet. Just before Caesar's murder he had given Octavian the task

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 1-6 pp.51-56.

<sup>80</sup> Barry Strauss, *The Spartacus War*. London, 2009. pp.179-180.

of being involved in his next military expedition and sent him into Illyria as part of that process: Octavian studied military manoeuvres and oratory there.<sup>81</sup> He seems to have been underestimated by nearly everybody, except by his great uncle and at times by one his great uncle's major surviving enemies, Cicero.

Soon after arriving in Rome Octavian emerged as an astute judge of finance, politics and character.<sup>82</sup> He had arrived in Rome expecting Anthony's help in making him consul, but did not get it. Did Anthony laugh off the idea of a teenage consul? It did seem impossible as consuls were legally required to be at least forty-two years old. By custom they were supposed to have had a strong political and/or military record. They were also appointed long before taking office and when Anthony's and Dollabella's dual consular term ended, they were scheduled to be replaced by two more Caesarean generals, Pansa and Hiratus. Did Anthony see the impossibility of Octavian's request and therefore think him foolish about everything? Did he see Octavian's immense ambition without discerning his considerable abilities? His statement that young Octavian owed everything he had to the family name of Caesar suggests that this was so.<sup>83</sup> Subsequent events would rapidly prove Mark Anthony wrong. Being rich from his great-uncle's inheritance he worked out that money attracts financiers and did deals with bankers. Combining that with his family name made him powerful and he astutely selected and courted able lieutenants. All these factors increased his power and reputation for astuteness.

Two of these leading lieutenants, Agrippa and Rufus, were not of wealthy patrician stock, but they demonstrated great ability and would rise with Octavian and with Agrippa would repay the advantage and loyalty given with the same. They were with him in Apollonia when news of Caesar's murder reached them and were probably childhood friends. They would be joined by others. One of these men who rose with Octavian was Maecenas. He was from a wealthy and noble background and he would also loyally serve and advance with Octavian. With money from such men and the remnants of his great uncle's bequest that Mark Anthony had not spent Octavian was able to buy support among the troops, the poor and disaffected.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Suetonius 8 p54.

<sup>82</sup> Syme, p.129.

<sup>83</sup> Goldsworthy, *Augustus*. p6.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*

Mark Anthony and Lepidus's policy of reconciliation with Caesar's assassins had averted civil war, but at the cost of alienating many among the Caesareans from them, particularly the plebeians and the veterans. This disaffection gave Octavian a base to build on. He was out to avenge Caesar, either from genuine grief and loyalty or as part of a power play. Given that he briefly made a pact with Decimus Brutus, one of Caesar's assassins and a leader among the Republicans, ended up driving Caesar's mistress Cleopatra to suicide and had their son Caesarion strangled, his loyalty to Caesar's memory can only be questionable. However this was in the future, soon after arriving in Rome he made it clear that he was Caesar's adopted son and had this made official. In ancient Rome adoption had the serious equivalent of being a biological son. Within seven months after his arrival in Rome he had established a formidable political machine that was able to challenge Mark Anthony, Lepidus and their supporters.<sup>85</sup> Whatever his conscious intentions, by leaving Rome Mark Anthony was allaying fears that he was a dictator and giving Octavian space, time and opportunity to show his true colours, which Octavian promptly did. Anthony may have thought that the world of Roman politics would destroy or at the least control Octavian. By crushing the Republicans in Gaul Anthony had shown that he was no collaborator with Caesar's assassins, but their able enemy. By becoming governor of Macedonia Anthony also became commander of Caesar's Balkan Army located there; those six legions were amongst Rome's very best.<sup>86</sup> Was this also to calm fears that he was a dictator in the making? Was being out of Rome an unwise move?

Initially this Macedonian army seemed a more stable and loyal force than Rome's erratic, unsettled mob. In Rome Anthony had to intrigue, not his best skill: that was commanding in both the civilian and military fields.

In Macedonia and Gaul he commanded where he thought he could rely on the forces there again. He had won his greatest triumphs in the East and clearly hoped for more. His ally and lover Cleopatra, was a powerful figure there. After two thousand years it is impossible to say to what extent Anthony's move to the east was based on love or lust for Cleopatra, or if she alone influenced his decisions in a crucial way, but clearly there were other important political factors involved. By keeping Rome as his base Octavian was able to add substance to his

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67 *Ibid* p127.

pose as the heir to noble Roman traditions, played on the idea of once noble Roman Anthony being corrupted by the wealth, luxury and sensuality of the strange East, personified by the femme fatale and witchlike Cleopatra. Despite being a propaganda image there may be some truth in it. Prior to Caesar's assassination Anthony had usually inspired loyalty. Conflict with Cicero and then Octavian, his disastrous Parthian campaign and his own self-indulgence would weaken his charismatic appeal even before the largely self-inflicted disaster at the sea battle at Actium. His reputation for foolish behaviour seemed eradicable after that battle. Underestimating Octavian, his squandering financial advantages, being infatuated with Cleopatra and his bungled suicide all add to the image.

Unlike both Pompey and Anthony and like his great uncle, Octavian grasped the importance of holding Rome despite the obvious dangers originating in the erratic nature of the city's politics. Although both Sulla and Julius Caesar had managed this, capturing the city with attacks and marches from the provinces was always risky. When a delegation of four hundred of his soldiers arrived in the senate with a request to follow instructions and give Octavian consular power or feel their brandished swords the senate seems to have woken up to the fact that there was more to this young man than filial piety and study. When they rejected this less than subtle request and the new already chosen consuls succeeded Mark Anthony, he went campaigning in Gaul waited till that was over and then marched on the city. Making himself consul in 43 BC, he declared that Caesar was a god and that the assassins of Caesar would be brought to trial. Instead they were tried convicted and condemned to death in absentia. After the verdict the notorious proscriptions began. Even before this, from the day Caesar was murdered onwards almost all of those Republicans in Rome not executed were disempowered, either by massive fines, by wisely retiring to their estates or going to the provinces or by going into hiding. Whichever choice they made they were keeping out of politics and leaving the political world for Octavian.

While Anthony served in Macedonia Octavian had to deal with another crisis that became a war. The veterans loyal to Octavian wanted land allotments in Italia. There was not enough land left so Octavian, like his great uncle, like Mark Anthony and virtually everyone else in politics, realising that Roman power came from keeping the legions happy, started dispossessing the owners of small farms so that he would have land to distribute. Led by Mark Anthony's brother Lucius, the farmers and some already settled veterans, farmers and townspeople rebelled. A serious war broke out, but Octavian won. The farmers of central Italia were clearly

early losers by Caesar's assassination. Mark Anthony was unable to help, having troubles of his own.

When he arrived in Macedonia, virtually unknown, he soon found he was distrusted and disliked and jeered for offering them smaller bonuses than Octavian was offering legionaries in Italia. Was this spreading news white anting his position? Was the news spread by Octavian's agents? Whatever the origins Anthony mishandled the situation. He insisting officers tell who was hostile and then executed those rumoured to be mutinous. This only caused more sullen hostility.<sup>87</sup> To advance on Decimus Brutus he had to transport these legions one at a time across the Adriatic to Brundisium. Once they were there Octavian's waiting agents set to work, bribing these already discontented legions and fermenting a mutiny. The two legions to arrive first went over to Octavian and Mark Anthony could only keep the rest of his troops loyal with massive payments. He gathered his other forces in Italia and with the remaining Macedonian legions marched north to attack Decimus Brutus – who was soon praised by the senate and sent an army, led by both of that year's consuls Pansa and Hiratus and also amazingly by Octavian.<sup>88</sup> Few amongst the Caesarian side expressed outrage or cynicism at this move. The admirer of Caesar's assassins, Cicero allied with Octavian and sent messages of support to Decimus Brutus. He probably had some part in organising support for the Republicans still in Italia.

At the town of Mutina in Gaul Anthony had Decimus Brutus besieged and nearly starved into submission when Octavian and his allies broke the siege and defeated Anthony, but at the cost of the lives of both consuls, who had done so much to win the victory. Octavian had been criticised in his army for not doing much on the first day, so on the second he took a very active part, taking the eagle symbol of a legion from its bearer, and holding it aloft as he lead an attack.<sup>89</sup> The deaths of the consuls was very convenient for Octavian, who was now sole commander of the army. One wonders... so did Rome's citizens, especially as the leading senator back in Rome who was telling people there was nothing to worry about to stay calm as there would be no mass killings, also died within a week of Octavian's return, The cause was stress according to the ancients.

Decimus Brutus's remnants were weakened by starvation and disease and many joined Octavian. Anthony retreated, gained reinforcements and defeated

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<sup>87</sup> Goldsworthy, *Augustus*. pp103-107.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*,

<sup>89</sup> Goldsworthy, *Augustus*. p119,

Decimus Brutus, who now suffered the same fate as Pompey. Like Pompey arriving in Egypt six years before, he begged sanctuary from a supposedly sympathetic neutral leader who ordered that the losing leader's head be cut off and sent it to the Romans, (probably meaning Anthony) in the hope of currying favour.<sup>90</sup> Anthony approved, but soon lost by this action. In Macedonia mutinous legionnaires had sided with Brutus and handed their commander, Anthony's brother Caius over to Brutus. After hearing of the killings of Cicero and a kinsman Brutus had Caius executed in retaliation. Caius intriguing amongst his former troops to regain their loyalty must also have been a factor,<sup>91</sup>

With the legions of Lepidus, Anthony and Octavian Appian records several instances of disaffection and near mutiny due to these conflicts.

These three warlords were finding that their legions disliked fighting each other and the remnants of the legions of Decimus Brutus felt the same. Legionaries were happiest when fighting barbarians. There were also other problems. e Caesarians fighting each other while the Republicans coalesced was an obvious disadvantage. So was the instability in Rome. In October 43BC while all three were still near Bologna Lepidus was able to initiate talks with both Anthony and Octavian. These three formed a triumvirate. Their aim was to govern the empire, suppress the Republicans still in Italia and then defeat the remaining Republican armies in the east and also the last supporters of Pompey. Under the able leadership of Sextus Pompey, who had retained a massive fleet, these forces were making a comeback in the provinces and on the seas due to the chaos and loss of authority caused by the civil war. While Anthony was finishing off Decimus Brutus's forces Octavian now repeated his great uncle's march of six years before, crossing the Rubicon and accepting the surrender of Rome. Unlike Caesar there was no clemency: executions happened on the way, and apparently without trial. Not everyone welcomed the approaching army.

Octavian was taking steps to make his takeover smooth. He had his Great uncle deified, which as he had already made himself his son, meant that he was the son of a god and the stories of the Julio-Claudian family being descended from the Trojan Aeneas, himself descended from the gods, only reinforced this sense of sanctity, respectability and power. This may also have served a dual purpose: anyone snickering and talking of the grandfather being a small town banker not a god was clearly an enemy who would get their name on

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, p126,

<sup>91</sup> Plutarch 26 27 pp246-247.

the subsequent death lists. This deification was also shifting Roman leadership away from the idea of limited service given by a meritorious and patriotic individual to the religiously based rule of a sacred person. Not only convenient genealogies but convenient marriages would unite the triumvirate. Later Octavian would ditch his fiancée and then briefly marry Mark Anthony's stepdaughter and married off his sister Octavia to Mark Anthony to make the bonds between them stronger. When the marriages failed the bonds weakened.

Cicero hated Mark Anthony to the extent that he saw him as more of a tyrant than Caesar. This had temporarily aligned him with Octavian, but with the defeat of Decimus Brutus and the realignment in the triumvirate Cicero was sidelined and dangerously so. He said different things about Octavian at different times and did not totally underestimate Octavian's abilities, but he was unwisely inconsistent in his dealings with him. He did underestimate the level of his ambition and his ruthlessness. When he wrote to Decimus Brutus that Octavian was a boy to be used, rewarded and then set aside. Cicero's wording was ambiguous, perhaps deliberately so, suggesting both political manipulation and the fate of catamites.<sup>92</sup> When this letter became public knowledge it became Cicero's death warrant, although not all the links are known and some time elapsed before Octavian was in a position to kill Rome's republicans, real and suspected. Cicero saw Octavian's desire for good governance as being based in reason, justice and a balance of power. For Cicero one of the highest aims was scholarship combined with a concern with justice. These aims were noble in themselves but when used in Rome's best interests this was the greatest that humanity could ever achieve.<sup>93</sup>

Perhaps he saw Octavian's ambition as patriotic and believed he had these necessary qualities. If so he should have reconsidered one of his writings where he questions concepts of justice and injustice and sides with expediency. In an example he gives a rogue gains a good reputation with success and a virtuous man is reduced to the gutter with his reputation destroyed. Cicero then rhetorically asks which would we prefer to be?<sup>94</sup> Perhaps Octavian learned better than Cicero knew before his last days when trying to flee his approaching execution Octavian had clearly become the teacher.

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<sup>92</sup> Galsworthy, *Augustus*. p122.

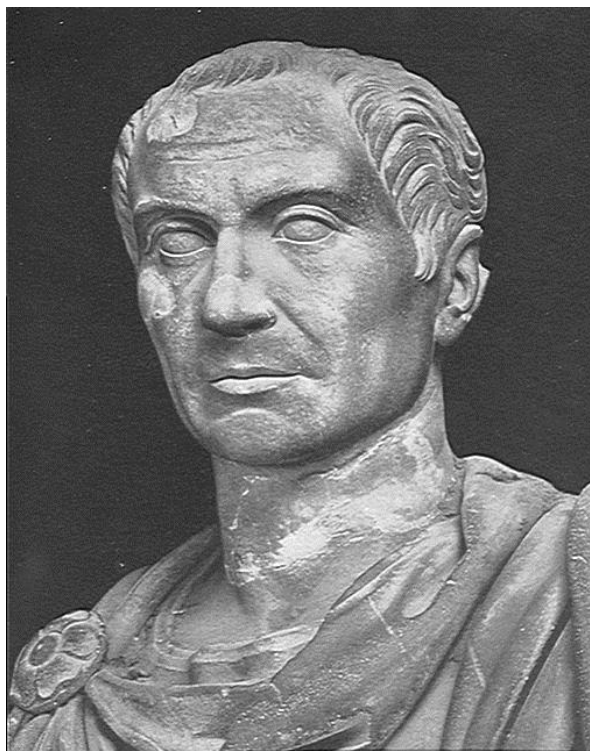
<sup>93</sup> Cicero, "On the State (III) The ideal Form of Government." Michael Grant Translation Introduction and Notes *Cicero on the Good Life*. London: The Folio Society, 2003. pp337-353. This is an excerpt from a larger work, most of which is lost.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid* 18.31 p347.



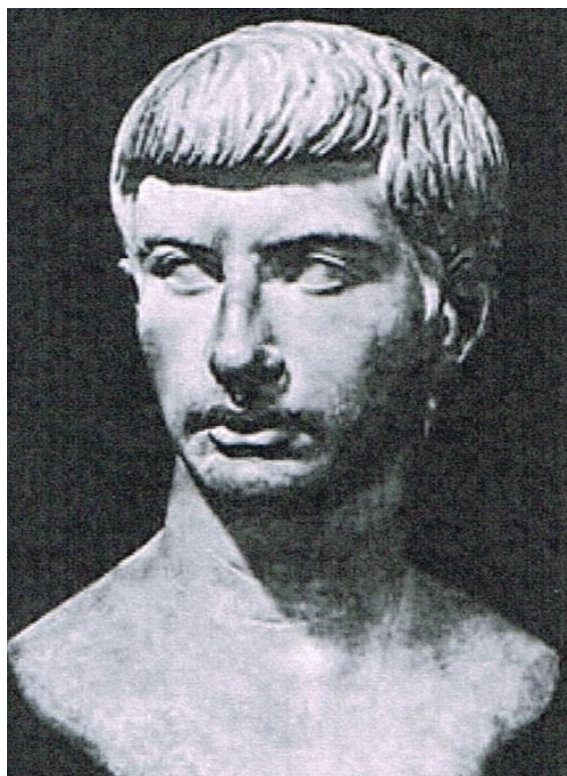


*Tiberius*

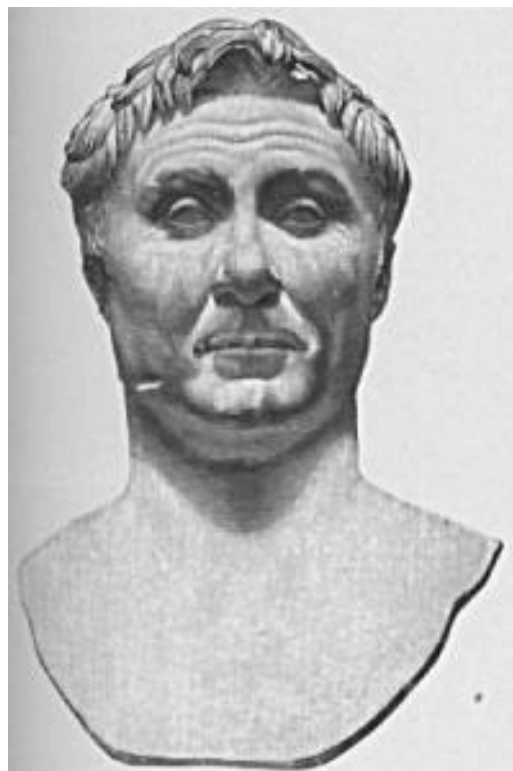


*Cassius*

*Brutus*

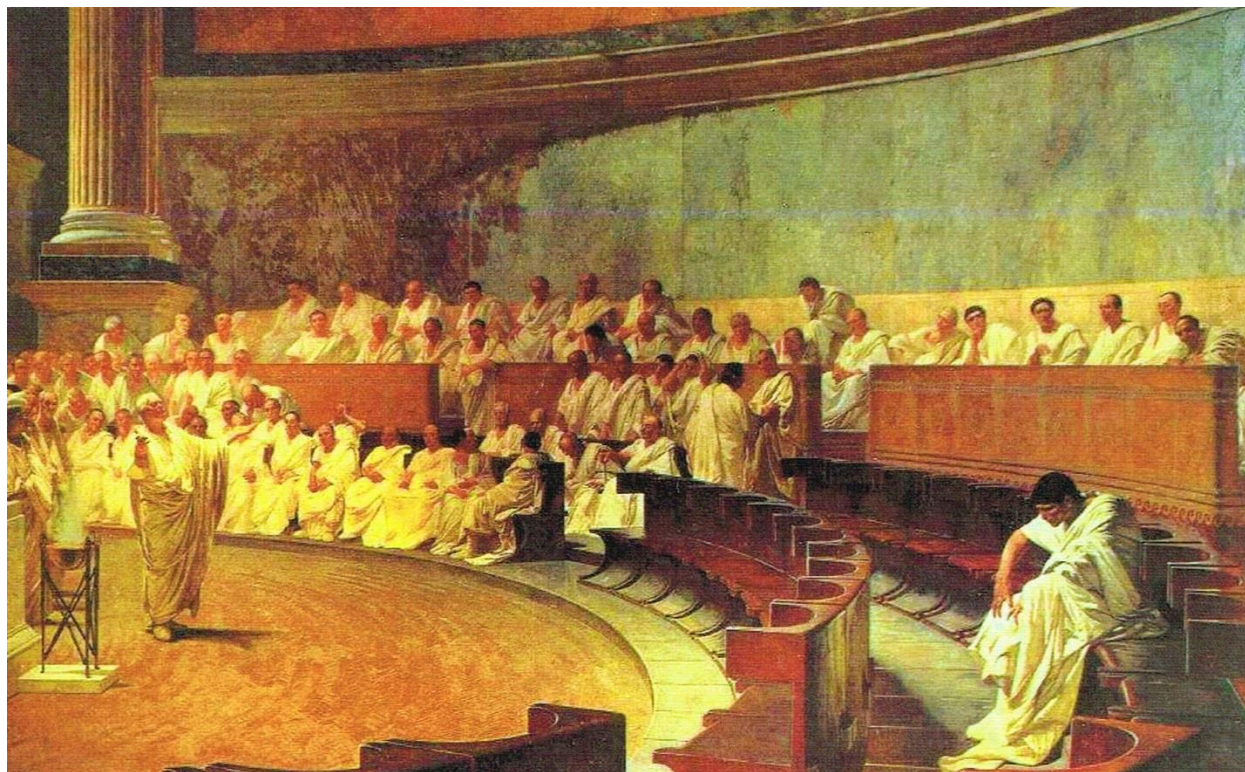


*Pompey*

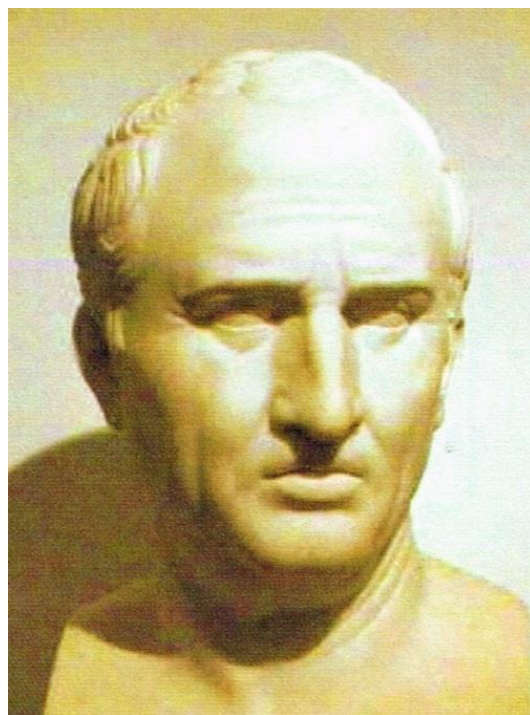


*All four portraits taken from the public domain*





*'Cicero denounces Catiline' An 1882-1888 fresco by Cesare Maccari. (1840-1919.) Both illustrations are from the Public Domain/Wikipedia*



*Cicero*

When Anthony had insisted that Cicero be added to the proscriptions for execution Octavian found that Cicero's devotion to the Republic lessened his political value and so he did a deal and agreed to have his ally executed.<sup>95</sup> Mark Anthony actually laughed when Cicero's severed head and cut off hand were brought to him, he had them put on display. Despite the repulsiveness of this killing Cicero was no innocent pacifist in the world of Rome's power struggles. During his consulship, when the Catiline conspiracy became known he accepted emergency war measures and vigorously opposed the conspirators.<sup>96</sup> He ended up having them executed without trial.<sup>97</sup> He actively after witnessing it have already been mentioned. He had aligned with Decimus Brutus and had been a power player amongst the warlords for decades. He was clearly one of the biggest losers by the assassination of Caesar, falling from leading senator

and Republican leader to fleeing fugitive from his former student. Many others were wisely doing the same as the triumvirate's proscriptions were being posted up throughout Rome, where killing squads searched for them and the new names going up.

Octavian who had initially seemed a courteous, studious, rather quiet young man would soon put together lists of Republicans, suspected Republicans and those aligned with them to be hunted down and killed. This was done through public death lists and notices of rewards for those who brought in the heads of the accused. Despite his recent alliance with Decimus Brutus and Cicero, the name Octavian Caesar never appeared on any list.

Even slaves could and did denounce their masters. The Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre in 1573, the reign of Terror in France in 1789 and the uprisings in Russia in 1917 have often been denounced, but the victims in these cases often had at least the right to trial and for a combination of unfairness, greed and sheer savagery meted out and to innocent people in a supposedly civilized nation the proscriptions stand out.

Although Lepidus and Mark Anthony also put together the death lists of Republicans and also pocketed some of their confiscated wealth, Octavian seemed to have become the main enthusiast. Suetonius does not name his sources but he does say that several historians of the time stated that Octavian had three hundred

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<sup>95</sup> Plutarch, *Makers of Rome*. "Mark Anthony" 19 p.287.

<sup>96</sup> Sallust, *The Conspiracy of Catiline*. Harmondsworth, 1963. p196, p209-212.

<sup>97</sup> Galsworthy, *Augustus*. p129.

Romans from the higher classes executed in one incident alone. He also gives other similar incidents in his life of Augustus. During the rule of the triumvirate when a Roman knight transcribed his speech he had the man stabbed to death on the spot for taking too keen an interest in the proceedings.<sup>98</sup> A consul was so fearful of Octavian's wrath that he committed suicide and Suetonius claimed that when a praetor clutched tablets under his robe he was suspected of concealing weapons there for an assassination attempt. Arrested for this he suffered torture and Octavian himself tore out his eyes and had him executed. Suetonius, while giving Octavian's account in which the praetor physically attacked him and was exiled, also recalls other cruel measures against those begging for mercy.<sup>99</sup> In some of these cases these people were defeated rebels, in others suspects and some were merely rich for the picking and when the legions needed pay being rich was excuse enough. The high, somewhat ridiculous taxes and extortionist tricks that the triumvirate enforced at the same time show that money was the real motive.<sup>100</sup>

The ancient sources state that about sixty were involved in the conspiracy to murder Caesar. According to Appian around two thousand knights and three hundred senators died due to the prescriptions.<sup>101</sup> This would have been the main group the triumvirate focused on, but how many wealthy merchants, estate owners, officers, civil servants, women, children, foreign residents, slaves and plebeians were killed remains unknown. Less than three or four thousand seems unlikely. This unknown figure would have been much higher if the triumvirate had their way. Many courageous protective acts by individuals protected family and friends. Others had fled early and Sextus Pompey had encouraged flight and taken in refugees.<sup>102</sup>

Adrian Galsworthy recounts that children were generally safe unless they owned property.<sup>103</sup> According to one story a husband was spared after his wife agreed to sexual involvement with Mark Anthony and in another story Octavian, Anthony and his wife Fulvia added names to the death lists so as to get the art collections of the victims.<sup>104</sup> One such collector had the misfortune to have some extraordinarily beautiful vases which ended up decorating somebody else's home.

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<sup>98</sup> Suetonius, 'Augustus' p65.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid* pp56-57.

<sup>100</sup> Syme, pp192-196

<sup>101</sup> Plutarch, p287n

<sup>102</sup> Syme, p192

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*,

<sup>104</sup> Galsworthy, *Augustus*. p132;

The horror stories of denounced children vanishing and that a wife denounced her husband because she wanted to marry her secret lover were probably true as the proscriptions became a great excuse for any type of advancement, any revenge, any materialist grab by the envious. Who was to stop it? The only force in Italia at this time was the legions of the triumvirate and who amongst them would stop the confiscations that were gaining them their pay and their entitlements? Amongst the common people those with spirit had already rebelled against the land confiscations and they had been crushed by Octavian. The world would see a similar and larger situation unfold in Indonesia between 1965 and 1969 when an attempted revolution failed and the army hunted down arrested and massacred hundreds of thousands of suspected Communists. Those with wealth that could be taken, dissidents and rivals in business, romance and education were all reported to the army and usually suffered death without questions being asked.

The triumvirate's proscriptions would have damaged the Caesarian cause as much as it helped through control by fear and replacing much of the old nobility with plundering opportunists, new men loyal to the triumvirate. If the proscriptions had solved the triumvirate's financial problems and reinforced obedience to the triumvirate within Italia, it would have strengthened rebellion against them in the provinces. This would have happened through increasing the numbers of the rebels and their finances with the arrival of the refugees and also by strengthening the Republicans' resolve and their belief that they were good men fighting tyrants. Surely amongst the Republicans the refugees would have brought stories of their murdered relatives and confiscated estates, adding to the bitter will to fight. As the assassins and their few supporters had already fled Rome few amongst the refugees would have been solidly Republican supporters – before the proscriptions.

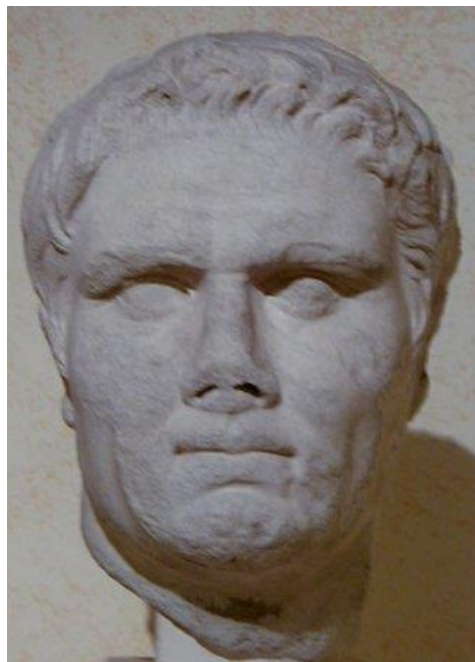
Within three years of Caesar's murder those surviving Republicans under the command of Cassius or Brutus were defeated in Greece, on the battlefield at Philippi, where those two leaders committed suicide. Soon after the victorious triumvirate of Anthony, Lepidus and Octavian soon unravelled in yet another power struggle. Lepidus was sidelined with rule over a North African province. This makes him look inconsequential and astute, but was he? He tried to stay out of the developing power struggle, but in 36BC was removed from military and civilian commands in a dispute with Octavian over Sicilian territorial control.<sup>105</sup> Perhaps because Lepidus had held the respected position of Pontifex Maximus since Caesar's assassination and killing him while he held that position would have

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<sup>105</sup> 'Lepidus' *Wikipedia*.



been too naked a power play, Octavian left him alive, if held in obvious public contempt which was expressed by making him the last public speaker on every issue. Whatever his faults, Lepidus managed the rare Roman achievement of



*Mark Antony*



*Cleopatra*



*While chroniclers describe Mark Antony as handsome and Cleopatra as beautiful, their coins show something different. The three portraits of Mark Antony here give an impression of strength, but also suggest that years of self-indulgence added weight.*

surviving many years in public office until his death from natural causes in 12BC; after that Octavian took the position.<sup>106</sup> Lepidus at least survived in wealth, respect and comfort. Giving a year or two each way, he lived until about the age of seventy-five. The power struggle between Mark Anthony and Octavian would have almost certainly resulted as both men thought that they have personal control of the Roman Empire, yet Cleopatra became a wild card in the game, determining to a large extent the locale and shape of the oncoming struggle. Mark Anthony, being married to Octavia, may have gotten away with a discreet affair or a casual fling, but the Queen of Egypt could not be treated that way and was not. By 41BC the relationship was obvious, children would result and Octavia was seeing little of her husband. Whatever Octavian felt as a brother seeing a sister mistreated, he was also being insulted and having his power undermined. Mark Anthony's behaviour made him look like a poor judge of character in his choice of brother in law and there was an insult to the family in Anthony's behaviour, which was no light thing in the world of Roman politics.



*This bust of Cleopatra, while not showing a dazzling, beguiling beauty does show a woman, more attractive than her coins. Plutarch, relying on old stories handed down, did say that physically she was not astoundingly beautiful, but that her voice and manner were entrancing.*

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<sup>106</sup> Syme, p469; Scullard, p224.



*Octavian. Public Domain*

The clash of personalities and sexual politics was made worse by Anthony's military choices. Soon after his relationship with Cleopatra began he launched a disastrous invasion of Parthia which led to the deaths of twenty-four thousand troops, over half by disease.<sup>107</sup> Modern historians may wonder at these figures given by Plutarch, especially as he does not give sources, but the number of units mentioned does suggest an extremely large number of troops if the legions were up to full strength. Although he won some battles, he gained nothing and much of the defeat was his caused by his rashness and wrong choices. Another eight thousand died on the winter retreat through snow covered mountains while Anthony rushed ahead to the warm Mediterranean to coast drink the time away while frantically awaiting Cleopatra's arrival.<sup>108</sup> This type of behaviour would be repeated at Actium. His costly military failures alone made the more militarily cautious Octavian look good. Anthony's continuing mistreatment of Octavia, his awarding of Rome's eastern client nations and provinces to Cleopatra and his public coronation of their children over other such lands, were virtually treasonous. This

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<sup>107</sup> Plutarch, pp317-318.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, pp318-319.

behaviour combined with his blatantly obvious squandering of provincial wealth that was meant for Roman rule added to this. Instead of going to Rome, this money went on Cleopatra, their court and himself. All these factors combined to lead to yet another prolonged civil war. He virtually gave Octavian a propaganda victory with these ostentatious coronations and ostentatious signs of wealth. While Octavian and his supporters were clearly not stalwart Republicans, they knew that monarchy was still anathema to Romans, at best something lesser peoples in the empire indulged in, but a practice Romans tolerated, but quietly despised. This would have also raised the question of if Anthony ever won against Octavian and ruled in Rome, would he do so as an eastern king? Even when his power was uncontested in later years, Octavian never went this far.

There was at least some truth in Octavian's propaganda efforts about Cleopatra's corrupting control over Anthony. Even aside from the coronations, even before the Parthian campaign he was showing signs of making disastrous decisions. This tendency worsened in the Actium campaign, when he was making unwise decisions in his choice of encampment, which led to supply problems and the spread of disease. By agreeing with Cleopatra to fighting at sea, not on land, he was giving away his initial numerical advantage of a hundred thousand trained infantry to Octavian's eighty thousand of lesser quality. He was also giving away the advantage of his military experience in land battles, where despite Parthia his record was generally good. Octavian was courageous, dedicated and wise in the choice of commanders, but from Mutina on he had a way of not being in command in many battles where he should have commanded. If he did not have Anthony's record of success, he did not have his list of disasters.

Even Anthony's generals warned him that his unwieldy vessels were understaffed, and those crewmen they did have were mostly inexperienced conscripts, many of them boys. Mark Anthony ignored them.<sup>109</sup> In contrast Octavian's navy, while half Anthony's size, were fully manned, mainly by trained sailors and his ships were constructed of a better fighting design, being lighter and sleeker for fast manoeuvrability. Plutarch blames Anthony's disastrous choices on complying with Cleopatra's insistence and he states that this led to defections to Octavian before the battle, including Ahenobarbus, Anthony's leading lieutenant. By 31 BC after the disaster at the naval battle at Actium Anthony was discredited and marginalised, holding on to waning power on the Empire's eastern fringes as he fought a losing war with dwindling allies and forces. It was not so much the

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<sup>109</sup> Plutarch, p328.



defeat he suffered at Actium as the way he had fled before the issue was decided. Because Cleopatra sailed away with the treasury and her fleet, Anthony followed to join her, leaving his supporters to fight a stubborn but losing battle.<sup>110</sup>

Despite the large numbers of soldiers and ships present if not active, Actium was perhaps not a major battle involving all forces, but the effects were massive. The trickle of defections to Octavian before the battle became a flood after it. In their last months Cleopatra and Anthony were virtually waiting for Octavian to strike the killer blow. Anthony even offered to commit suicide if Octavian would spare Cleopatra. At this time she was negotiating with Octavian, or trying to. After Actium Octavian did not have to negotiate: it would have been to his disadvantage to do so. He had made Cleopatra into a beguiling demon able to lure noble Romans into degenerates who threatened Rome; to deal with her would have weakened his propaganda and his credibility, making him look like her next victim. His intention to have her in chains, being dragged behind his chariot in a Roman triumph would have crushed any such suspicion. Her suicide to avoid this meant that Octavian had to be content with using her children in his wretched propaganda display. Cleopatra may have been the biggest loser by Caesar's death.

Cleopatra gained a reputation as an extraordinarily beautiful siren, a calculating harlot and an evil entrancer who had ruined Anthony. It was an image Octavian exploited and spread and that image still has popular appeal.<sup>111</sup> Her coins and Plutarch's comments reveal a different image. The reality was that she was not alluringly beautiful, although her manner was beguiling. Far from being a sensual temptress she is only known to have been sexually involved with two men, Caesar and Anthony, both of whom were her husbands. Her marriage to her brother may have been nothing more than ceremonial. If she was calculating and ruthless she had to be to ensure that she, her family and the Ptolemaic Empire, militarily weak in comparison to Rome's forces, survived in the cutthroat world of Roman power struggles. In contrast Octavian, was what he labelled her, a beguiler, and a totally ruthless intriguer. He was the major developer if not the outright creator of her legend, He was a schemer able to beguile a great many people about himself and was a skilled propagandist and a cultivator of the literati. In a similar way, more by Octavian's propaganda efforts than by any clear reality Octavian turned the

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<sup>110</sup> Plutarch,

<sup>111</sup> Lucy Hughes-Hallett, *Cleopatra: Histories Dreams and Distortions*. London; 1990. Hughes-Hallett's book is not a biography, but a detailed examination of the legend and image of the seductress Cleopatra.

conflict of Actium, distinguished by betrayals, desertions, foolish choices, refusals to fight and the determined last ditch efforts of Anthony's abandoned supporters, into a mighty and glorious victory.<sup>112</sup>

After Anthony and Cleopatra were dead Octavian was secure as Rome's first man and unquestioned leader. He would stay that way until his death aged seventy-six in 14 AD. Scullard describes how Octavian gained ever increasing power without rebellion. He proceeded to gain this position:

‘by trial and error, feeling his way his way forward with patient care; by thus testing and responding to public opinion he was enabled to create the Principate and establish it on a secure basis. *From the Gracchi to Nero.* p215.

Octavian's titles would change from Caesar to first citizen to consul to imperator to princeps to Pontifex Maximus to Augustus to Father of the Nation, but Octavian was always the man in control. While given spoken respect and traditional ceremonial rites the positions of power within Rome's republican government became ceremonial or advisoral positions. Until the overthrow of Nero over ninety years later there would be no more successful Roman rebellions within the city or within Italia. This lack of civil conflict would be a major factor in keeping Octavian's extremely high reputation going in subsequent decades and centuries: it has never really fallen. Augustus would be worshipped as a god: this expectation was placed on all Romans and residents within the empire. This level of worship and power became standard with his hereditary successors.

Clearly in terms of power, prestige and wealth Octavian gained more than anybody else by Caesar's assassination. At the time of Caesar's death he was a barely noticed student. Fourteen years later he was the undisputed master of the Roman Empire. As such he could have any material thing that ancient world could provide – but is this the same thing as being happy? Any appetite needs depravation for sharpening: even the tastiest and rarest luxuries become dulled and commonplace when they are staples. Glory can become tedious when it becomes a daily ritual and how much true loyalty can an emperor rely on in a world where treachery has proven to be commonplace? His friend from his teenage years, Rufus, eventually betrayed him. There was at least one serious plot to kill him, this was in 22BC. Others may have been planned. How many true friends can an emperor have when they know he can have them executed on any capricious whim

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<sup>112</sup> Symes, p297.

or unjustified suspicion? How valuable is the prestige gained by subjection and terror, especially when given by those who hope for favours or promotion? One can almost hear Romans saying to their children “Worship the Emperor, flatter him if he speaks to you or you could end up on the rack with him poking out your eyes.” Augustus was not a foolish man and the obsequious opinions, flattery and convenient beliefs of those around him must have been obviously hollow to him. After Anthony’s final defeat he would frequently reject such honours as a triumph, titles or praise. Once in undisputed power there seems to be a restlessness to him as if he could never relax with his victories. He was frequently absent from Rome. He visited Greece for extended periods. He also went on campaigns; for over two years in northeast Spain and then in Germany. He would also know personal unhappiness. His wife had stillborn children and he had to exile his only surviving child for immorality. He knew that this disgraced the family name. He would outlive his favoured nephew Marcellus, who was his apparent heir. He would also outlive the next heirs, both his grandsons. Instead he had to make his strange and unpopular stepson Tiberius his heir. This must have left him wondering in old age if everything he had accomplished would unravel. Tacitus suggests that because Octavian was reconciling with his grandson, his wife Livia had them both killed so that Tiberius would be emperor. He does present inconclusive evidence for this.<sup>113</sup>

Clearly Livia and her son Tiberius born in the year of Phillippi were also big winners. However what applies to Augustus as emperor applies even more so to Tiberius. Evidence that Tiberius was happy as emperor remains scarce. His retreat in old age to a pleasure palace at Capri suggests otherwise. Augustus’s other lieutenants Agrippa, and Maecenas who rose with him from Caesar’s murder onwards, were also big winners. Agrippa in particular owed much to Caesar’s murder. Under Augustus Maecenas was a advisor and a wealthy patron of the arts. Before Octavian’s rise Agrippa was barely noticed; even before his leading role at Actium he was one of the most powerful men in Rome. After that battle he would be second to his father in law Octavian in power, respect and reputation.

So who lost by Caesar’s assassination?

Apart from their lives, the Republicans lost more than they had ever dreamed possible. As a political tendency they were virtually exterminated. With the ascension of Augustus their ideas became an archaic dream. Where the forms of republicanism did survive it was not as a viable political force, but as remnants

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<sup>113</sup> Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*. Harmondsworth, 1977. pp33-34.

from the past, in ceremonial titles, pallid pageants, statues of founding fathers and past heroes. All these superficialities were to honour origins and ancestral deeds that formed the basis for the empire. The consulship and the senate would continue – but as little more than rubber stamps for the emperors.

So who else lost by Caesar's Assassination?

Obviously Mark Anthony, Cleopatra and her son by Caesar, Caesaron, and those lieutenants still loyal to these leaders all lost. While replacing Caesar brought them immediate gains, in the long term unfolding events led to their fall and their deaths. Caesar's murder also led to the death of Cicero: when Cicero lost his life the senate lost much of its remaining vitality. They lost perhaps the most able senator, writer and eloquent speaker in its history.

Then there were so many amongst Rome's common people who lost by the unravelling events even before the war between Octavian and Mark Anthony began. The smaller farmers who were dispossessed so that Octavian's legions could claim their land, the proscription victims, the overtaxed, plundered and sometimes murdered or enslaved provincials under the rule of Brutus, the legionaries who killed each other at Mutina or Philippi or who drowned at Actium...

So who, apart from Octavian and his lieutenants, gained by Caesar's assassination?

Lepidus gained by becoming a member of the triumvirate. Ancient texts do not reveal any great political ability, but he did display loyalty and military competency. This was because being in command of some of the few military forces around Rome, Anthony needed him to ensure stability and to keep the Republicans there in check. Somehow, despite being Anthony's ally, he survived into a respected old age. Few others amongst the followers of Caesar or Anthony could state that.

Less obviously than Octavian and his lieutenants the Egyptians eventually gained. Cleopatra's conflict with her brother, then with Octavian, meant that Egypt was in turmoil and war. How much this affected the lives of those outside Alexandria remains difficult to judge. There would have been Egyptian fatalities at Actium, and in both previous and subsequent battles, but after that? Octavian made a good start by clearing Egypt's blocked canals and waterways. That might sound trivial – to anyone outside Egypt, where the waterways meant the difference between abundance and famine. When Octavian conquered Egypt he restored

peace and stability and they would last for hundreds of years. As a major supplier of grain for Rome, Egypt would have a stable prosperity – and a hefty tax hit.

Also less obviously the peoples of Eastern Asia and Eastern Europe gained.

These were the populations that Julius Caesar was preparing to conquer. They more than anyone else, gained by Caesar's death, even if they did not know it. He was quite capable of genocide, as his own writings show. He reproduced a census where the Gaulish and Germanic tribes had fought him revealed that of the total of 368,000 before the conflict, only 110,000 survived.<sup>114</sup> Of that grand total only around 92,000 were warriors. As in most genocidal conflicts, enslavement, dispossession of the land and cultural and religious obliteration came with the war and no known evidence emerges to show that Caesar's planned last campaign would have been different to his earlier ones.

This assumes that he would have conquered. By avoiding this campaign the Roman legionaries gained: unlike most of the ordinary soldiers sent to fight in Russia in later campaigns they stayed alive.

So who else gained by Caesar's assassination?

Caesar's posthumous reputation almost certainly did gain because he died with almost perfect timing. In a recent popular history magazine's assessment of the ten greatest military commanders of all time Julius Caesar came first.<sup>115</sup> This would not be so if he had lived and carried out his last campaign, which was days away from starting. Like Spartacus, Mark Anthony, Napoleon, Custer and Hitler, who all won many remarkable campaigns but lost in the end, he would almost certainly have been remembered for a catastrophic defeat.

When his intentions are examined it could only have been one of the greatest disasters in military history, ancient or modern. Montgomery of Alamein in his assessment of Caesar's military abilities praises his charismatic ability to inspire troops through his optimism, wit, cheerfulness, courage and oratory. He also praises his abilities in training, boldness, swiftness in decision making, mobility and rapidity in action. However he qualifies this with strong criticisms. Caesar was rash, he made hasty and often incorrect choices. He also sometimes wasted time and had a way of throwing away the advantage of surprise. He underestimated the

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<sup>114</sup> Caesar, an excerpt from *The Gallic War*. I.29. 1-3. Reproduced by Mathew Dillon and Lynda Garland, p.559.

<sup>115</sup> James Hoare, *10 Greatest Military Leaders*. pp56-57.

importance of cavalry and never learned from this mistake, repeating it. His reconnaissance and lines of supply and communication were often neglected or badly organised. His use of traditional Roman infantry methods also meant that the enemy knew what to expect.<sup>116</sup>

Any one of these faults could have doomed the expedition he was planning, let alone any combination of them. Perhaps even a perfect commander could not have done what Julius Caesar intended. Montgomery concluded his assessment of Caesar by rightly wondering how sane Caesar was in his last months, when he planned his next campaign.

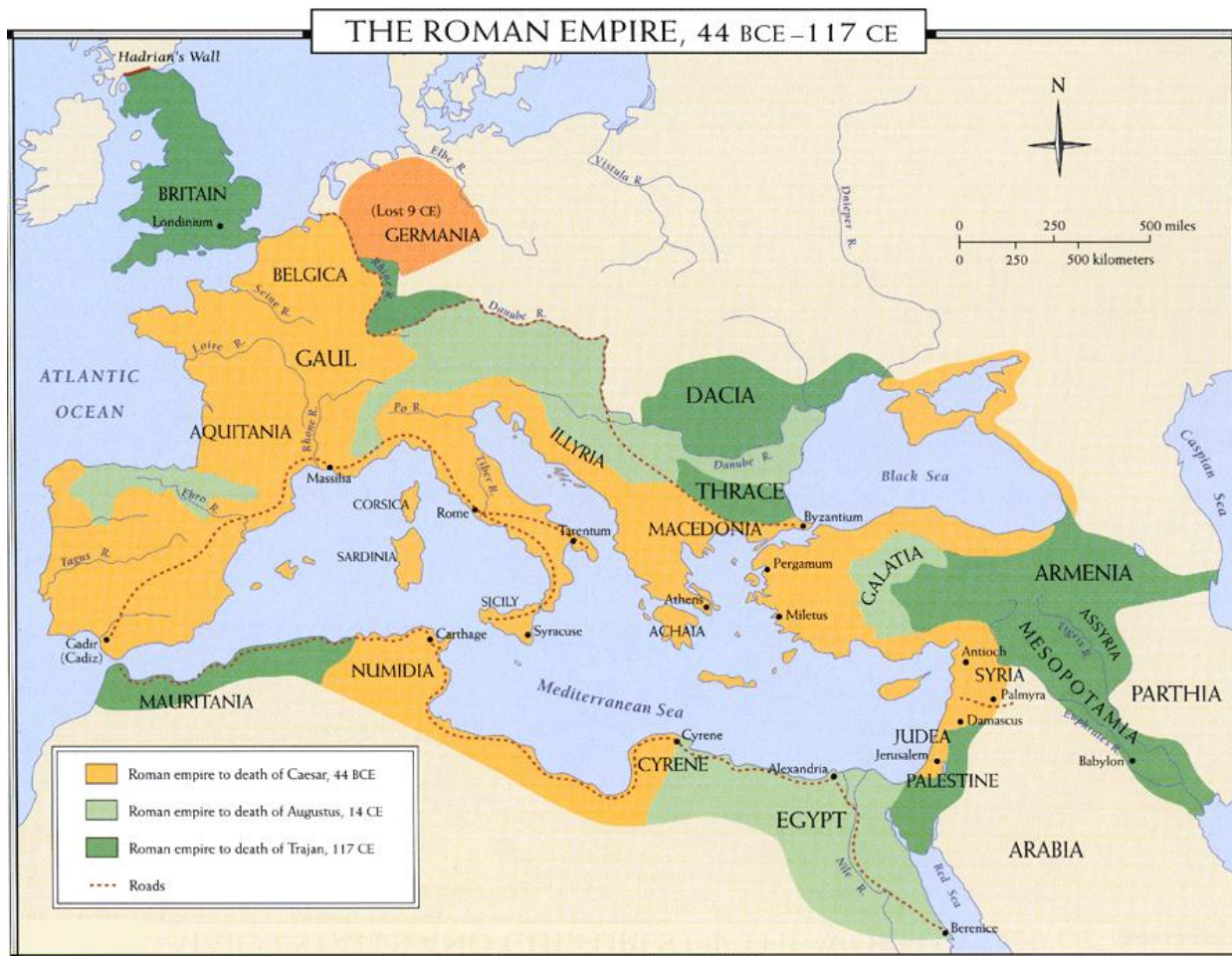
He intended to conquer the Dacans and the Parthans, then march through the Caucasus, then continue tramping across what is now the Ukraine and subdue the Germans, before emerging safe in Gaul, doing a gigantic half circle.<sup>117</sup> If he had gone to his war with the Parthans he may well have suffered defeat and death as Crassus did before him and as Mark Anthony suffered defeat and a loss of reputation after him. The emperor Julian also followed Rome's Parthian pattern of campaigning, as he lost his life three hundred years after. Even assuming that Caesar would have won there, (and who ever really wins wars around the Euphrates?) a subsequent march through the high, rugged snow filled Caucasian Mountains would have at best left an army weakened before traversing Russia's steppes. Even Mark Anthony had lost eight thousand dead in a winter march through the comparatively milder winter weather in modern day Turkey and Armenia. Unless Caesar planned to winter on the coast of the Black Sea he would have had to winter in either the Caucasian Mountains or Russia's steppes: any type of wintering in Russia would have been a disaster. The Swedes in the early eighteenth century, Napoleon, the Allies of the Crimean War, the Allies in the Russian Civil War and Hitler all found that out the hard way. Even assuming that he somehow survived all this, the march through Germany's forests would have been a disaster, as Varius demonstrated when he tried this and lost his legions late in Octavian's reign.

The circumstances of his death gains sympathy for Caesar; an unarmed old man being stabbed to death by a brutal gang of ingrates cannot do anything else. Even so, he was the man who had gladiators kill each other and people torn apart

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<sup>116</sup> Montgomery p107.

<sup>117</sup> Plutarch, 'Julius Caesar' *Fall of the Roman Republic*. p.298.



*This map shows that despite his loss of Germania, Augustus added almost as much territory to Rome's empire as all of Rome's subsequent emperors would. Egypt would be particularly important, not only for its gold, but for its grain supplies as it would provide a high proportion of the empire's food dole. The Danube would provide a clear, easily defensible border and by gaining access to the Bay of Biscay, the Nile Delta and the northern Egyptian coast the western Black Sea and the North-Western Red Sea Augustus expanded the possibilities for seaborne trade and fishing. Although it would be many decades before these possibilities fully developed emissaries from India came to Rome during Augustus's lifetime.*

*Public Domain*

by wild beasts for relaxation - when he was not exterminating or enslaving hundreds of thousands.

Did anyone both gain and lose by Caesar's assassination?

The Roman citizenry gained and lost. They had lost their real right to take part in government, to elect their leaders and change their laws.

Both contemporary and later writers would describe Augustus's rule from 30BC until his death forty-four years later as a golden age. Compared to what had gone before and what would happen after the first few years of Tiberius's reign they had a point. However the image is limned. Militarily there was the destruction of three legions in Germany followed by the permanent abandonment of the German province. This was one of Rome's worse military disasters ever. A war of conquest in North West Spain lasted ten years, ending in 19bc when "Agrippa patent and ruthless imposed by massacre and enslavement the Roman peace upon a desolate land."<sup>118</sup> In 25BC the Salassi, an Alpine tribe were subdued and forcibly added to the empire.<sup>119</sup> Storms destroyed two of his fleets.<sup>120</sup> In Judea, Illyria and Pannonia major revolts had to be suppressed in 6AD. In that same year and the next Rome endured a famine and an earlier famine combined with epidemic had struck in 22BC, which Romans inexplicably blamed on Augustus not being consul.<sup>121</sup> As usual throughout the empire's history in Augustus's reign there were the natural disasters of floods and earthquakes, onerous taxation and subsistence in slums. In terms of the succession Romans had much to worry about and Tiberius, who seemed an able if moody deputy, eventually justified such concerns.

Octavian did bring peace, prosperity and stability to Italia so the Romans did eventually gain benefits from Caesar's assassination. These benefits came only after nearly twenty years of turmoil and war. They came at the cost of replacing Republican liberties with the deification of the national leader as a God. This happened after the establishment of a dictatorship far more extreme than Caesar's Republican opponents ever opposed.

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<sup>118</sup> Syme, p333

<sup>119</sup> Syme p229

<sup>120</sup> Jerry Toner, *Roman Disasters*. Cambridge, 2013. p43.

<sup>121</sup> Toner, p76



### *Author's Note*

Since this work was first published new illustrations and information has been added. A new proof reading lead to corrections, improvements and additions. Illustrations have been enlarged, so pagination will be different from earlier editions. The old fashioned way of signifying a page number, keeping a p before the number has been retained to avoid confusion with computerised or internet sources. A new edition with much more detail remains months away.

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