

the Republic. But Caesar believed that the time when the Roman Senate could be described as an “assembly of kings” was long past, and that to restore the Republic would be to restore chaos.

From his crossing of the Rubicon to his death, Caesar worked to accomplish certain goals. He wanted to end the constant wars, to bring order back to the empire, and to knit together the entire empire into a cohesive unit. To achieve these goals, he wanted to create a strong central government in Rome that could consider the big picture, not simply its own narrow interests. He hoped to establish a strong, diversified government, moving the Roman world forward under his guidance.

Before the dust had settled over the elaborate festivals surrounding his homecoming, he turned all his formidable energy to a massive legislative agenda. He ruled that judges could only come from the patrician and **equestrian** ranks and applied a term limit law to governors. He outlawed professional guilds, except for very ancient ones, as many so-called guilds were subversive political clubs.

He ordered the taking of a census, which helped him to regulate the purchase of state-subsidized grain and reduced the number of recipients to a fixed number, all of whom were entered into a special register. He restricted the purchase of luxuries, and passed laws favoring families with several children as a way of repopulating Italy. He passed a far-reaching law restructuring debt that ultimately eliminated about a fourth of all debts owed. He continued plans for granting land to about 15,000 of his poorer veterans.

Caesar gave full voting rights to the inhabitants of his former province south of the Alps, revised the tax laws of Asia and Sicily, and resettled many Romans in new homes in the Roman provinces. Caesar’s colonial policy, with his generosity in granting citizenship to individuals and communities and even including some provincial aristocrats in his enlarged Senate, was to rejuvenate both the Roman legions and the Roman governing class. It goes without saying that these measures were vigorously opposed by the *Optimates*.

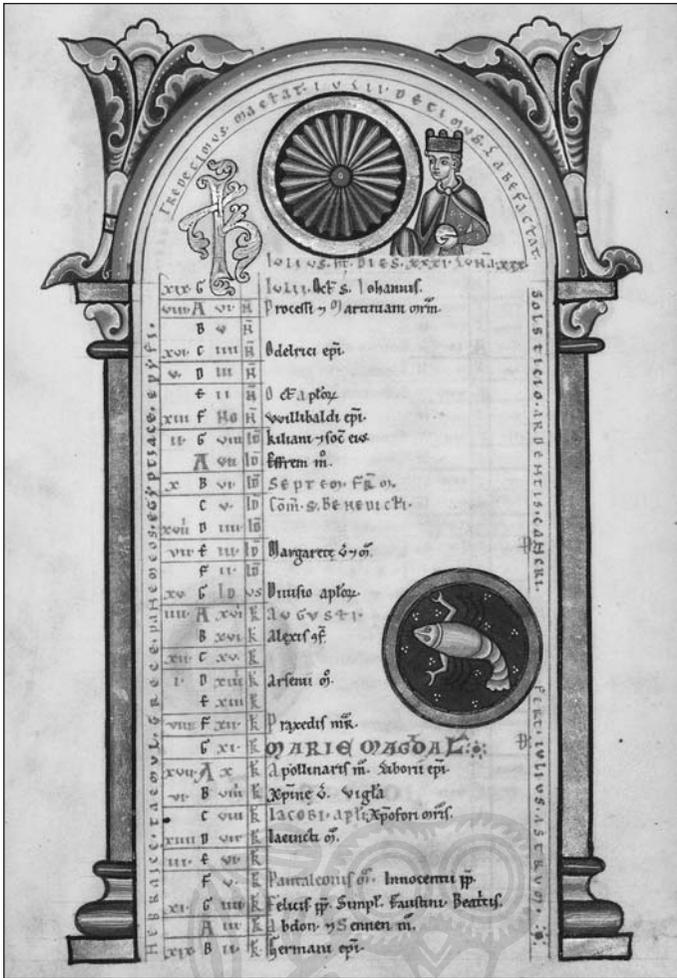
Caesar introduced measures to reduce congestion in Rome and carried out numerous building projects, among which were the Forum of Caesar with its Temple of Venus Genetrix (see illustration on p. 2).

His plans to drain the Pontine Marshes, cut a canal through the Isthmus of Corinth, rebuild Carthage and Corinth, and various other projects were frustrated by his death.

He did, however, live long enough to reform the calendar, which was badly in need of help. The old Roman calendar was based on the moon, which is, to put it mildly, rather erratic. Caesar based his calendar, like the Egyptian one, on the sun. He set the length of the year to 365.25 days, adding a leap day at the end of February every fourth year. To bring the calendar into alignment with the seasons, he arranged that three extra months be inserted into 46 (an extra month at the end of February, and two extra months after November). Thus, the Julian calendar officially was installed on January 1, 45. This calendar is still the basis of the Western world's calendar.

The Senate named him dictator for life and *Pater Patriae*, granted him a golden chair in the Senate (Suetonius *Divus Julius* 76), and renamed the month Quintilis in his honor. However, despite the pardons he granted to his old senatorial enemies, and despite the obvious benefits Rome was gaining from his rule, Caesar failed to win over his enemies. The proud *Optimates*, many of whom had patrician blood as old as that of Caesar, could not tolerate one-man rule. Their ancient fear of kings resurfaced and was hardly calmed by a visit from Cleopatra and her son, whom she had named Caesarion. Caesar was still married to Calpurnia, of course, and by law no Roman could marry a foreigner and any child of a less formal union could not rule. Caesar had never claimed the boy as his son, but the Roman people deeply resented the presence of Cleopatra and the boy. After Caesar's death she returned to Egypt.

Five months after his return to Rome, Caesar was planning a campaign against the vast Parthian Empire in Asia Minor. Caesar was aware of the distrust and suspicion, and in some cases outright hatred, with which numerous persons, especially the *Optimates*, regarded him. Suetonius says (*Divus Julius* 75) that when plots were formed against him he preferred to quash them rather than to punish them. When word of the senatorial conspiracy and its meetings by night were reported to him, he issued a proclamation that he was aware of this. He thought it enough to give public warning to those who spoke



Month of July. The Getty Museum's collection includes a beautifully illuminated calendar from Hildesheim, Germany, that dates from about the 1170s. The image for the month of July, named for Julius Caesar, includes a portrait of the Roman leader in the upper right hand corner. The crab in a medallion in the middle of the page is the zodiacal sign of Cancer. While the Julian calendar was a major reform, it nonetheless introduced an error of one day every 128 years, which meant that every 128 years the tropical year shifts one day backward with respect to the calendar. As this made the method for calculating the dates for Easter inaccurate, a reformed calendar designed by Aloysius Lilius replaced the Julian calendar in 1582. As this was done at the directive of Pope Gregory XIII, the reformed calendar came to be known as the Gregorian calendar and over the centuries was adopted as the international civil calendar. Some Orthodox Christian churches like the Russian use the Julian calendar today to calculate the dates of moveable feasts, such as Easter. Others who still use the Julian calendar include the Berber people of North Africa and the Greek Orthodox monks on Mount Athos.

ill of him not to translate their spiteful words into action. Plots and conspiracies were nothing new, and danger was an atmosphere in which he had lived his entire life. He evidently depended upon the *fortuna* that had carried him so far. On the Ides of March, three days before his departure for the east, he had called a meeting of the Senate to be held in the Theater of Pompey, as the Curia or Senate House was being remodeled.

Various senators, led by Gaius Cassius Longinus, other former Pompeians who had been pardoned by Caesar after the battle of Pharsalus, and **Decimus Brutus**, a trusted friend whom Caesar had made his second heir, conspired to kill him on this day. They desperately desired the aid of **Marcus Junius Brutus**, who was not only descended from the Lucius Junius Brutus who led the expulsion of the Roman kings in 509 but also was known to be adamantly opposed to any form of monarchy. Marcus Brutus was very close to Caesar, however, and had received many honors and favors from him. In spite of this Cassius and Decimus Brutus persuaded Marcus Brutus to take part in the assassination, insisting that it would be in the country's best interest.

According to legend both Caesar's wife and a soothsayer tried to dissuade him from attending this meeting. Decimus Brutus, however, fearing that if they did not kill Caesar on this day, their plot would become known and would be frustrated by Caesar's many followers, persuaded him to attend. According to Plutarch (*Life of Caesar* 65) at least two people tried to hand Caesar a scroll telling of the plot, but he did not read either soon enough.

Decimus Brutus detained Mark Antony outside the meeting place in a lengthy conversation, so that he could not come to Caesar's aid. While the onlookers stood in stunned silence, the conspirators stabbed Caesar numerous times, so that the deed would fall on all of them equally, instead of on one or two.

Caesar fell, and the senators burst forth from the bloody scene. Antony and Lepidus quietly withdrew to plan revenge. Brutus and the other conspirators marched to the Capitol brandishing their bloody daggers and expecting praise. Some did join them, and according to Plutarch, would later pay the price for the murder that they did not

commit, but simply wanted to appropriate to their record. The general reception of the assassins was not encouraging however, and they remained in the Capitolium overnight.

Cicero had largely withdrawn from public life and had busied himself during this time with writing some of his very best works. He had taken no part in the conspiracy. He had written to a friend named Nigidius that Caesar had spontaneously granted him whatever he might have wished for and showed him the greatest consideration. Cicero had added, however, that this could not make up for the complete upset of the established order (*Ad Familiares* 4.13). He was elated when he heard of Caesar's murder, expecting a restoration of the old Republic that only he could believe would really occur.

On the day after the assassination Brutus made a speech to the Roman people explaining why the death of Caesar, whom he described as his friend and benefactor, was necessary. The people heard it in silence. No sign was given of approval or disapproval, and no one could gauge how the populace was feeling or what it might do.

The senators found themselves with some thorny problems. They hated to condemn the conspirators, who were their colleagues and who had their sneaking sympathy, as murderers. If they hailed them as deliverers, however, Antony hastened to remind them that such a hailing would render Caesar accursed and all his acts by which everyone had benefited null and void. Some of those whom Caesar had helped would not even be senators anymore; many would lose their offices. In this crisis Cicero returned to the Senate and proved that he had not wasted his time in Greece. He recalled that in Athens of old a "forgetting" had sometimes been proclaimed; this meant that both sides agreed to forget the recent past and take no vengeance for it. (Political enemies still use this procedure after they have exhausted all possible means of doing each other in; it does not mean much today, and it did not mean much then, but it is a great way of getting past the moment.) That satisfied the Senate, which was soon to learn that the ordinary Roman had little patience with such political refinements. The people's anger at the murder of Caesar was growing, and the public funeral oration that the Senate allowed Antony to give for Caesar stoked this fire that needed no stoking. Antony reminded the

people of all Caesar's mighty deeds and capped this moving speech by reading Caesar's will, in which he had left to the Roman people his extensive gardens and to each Roman from his fortune a monetary gift equaling several weeks' wages. That did it. The people marched with firebrands on the homes of the conspirators, who promptly fled Rome. Afterward the Romans set up in the Forum a solid column of Numidian marble almost twenty feet high, and inscribed upon it "*Patri Patriae.*" At the foot of this they continued for a long time to make sacrifices and vows. Here they settled some of their disputes by an oath in the name of Caesar (Suetonius *Divus Julius* 85).

Antony was now the most powerful man in Rome. Cicero denounced him in a fiery set of speeches known as the Philippics, so named because the Greek Demosthenes had presented Philip II of Macedon with a similar set of uncomplimentary remarks. Particularly galling for the subject of these orations was Cicero's comparison of Antony and Caesar, all of which was to Caesar's credit. "There was in Caesar intelligence, reason, understanding, learning, concern for people, thought, hard work; he carried on a war, ruinous to the free Republic, but nevertheless great. Having planned for many years to rule, by great labor and great danger he achieved what he sought; by entertainments, monuments, and gifts he softened the uncritical multitude. He conquered his own men with rewards, his opponents with kindness. What else can I say? He trained a free people to obey him partly by fear, partly by long patience. Antony, I can compare you with him only in desire to rule; with his other qualities you are in no way worthy to be compared!" (Cicero *Second Philippic Oration against Mark Antony*, 116–117). This summary left no one doubting that Cicero considered Antony to be totally lacking in Caesar's good points and to be in possession only of the one quality of Caesar's that he deplored—desire to rule. This rang a bell in the minds of many leading Romans, raising again the specter of a *rex*. Cicero's influence went far to block Antony's power play and to drive him from Rome for the moment.

Antony managed to overcome the chagrin he felt when he discovered that Caesar's grandnephew Octavian, a lad of 18 years, was named as his heir. To deal with the conspirators who had killed

Caesar, Antony needed three things: soldiers who were loyal to Caesar's memory and therefore to Octavian, cash from Caesar's estate, and the legitimacy that Caesar's name carried. Therefore he formed with Octavian and Caesar's Master of Horses, Lepidus, the Second Triumvirate. This Triumvirate, unlike the first, was a duly established legal entity that ruled Rome after Caesar's death and that pursued and killed in battle his assassins.

By decree of the Roman Senate on January 1, 42, Caesar was officially deified, the first Roman to be so honored. Shortly after this Octavian began to build the Temple of the Divine Julius. The Ides of March was called the Day of Parricide, and the Senate never again met on that day. In the same year at Philippi, Antony and Octavian defeated the last of the conspirators who had killed Caesar. The final civil war, between Octavian and Antony, who was aided by Cleopatra, ended at Actium with Octavian's victory and led to his becoming Augustus, first emperor of Rome.

To assess Julius Caesar's contributions to Rome and to Western civilization is almost impossible, because it is very difficult to imagine a world without him. He sounded the death knell of the old Roman Republic and laid the foundation of the Roman Empire, which would dominate a major part of three continents physically for the next five hundred years, and which still profoundly influences much of world thought today.

Caesar is a fascinating study. His political achievements required an ability amounting to genius in widely different fields, including administration and generalship, besides the minor arts of manipulation and propaganda. In all these Caesar was a master. But other aspects of Caesar also made him an arresting figure. He had original ideas on most subjects, some so original as to sound downright peculiar. He abhorred waste in any form, and found war, especially civil war, so very wasteful that he would try many avenues and run many risks trying to prevent it. He pardoned his enemies because he felt Rome needed them. This unusual procedure set the stage for his assassination. In contrast Sulla, who had shown no mercy to opponents, abdicated when he was tired of rule and died peacefully in his bed.



Temple of the Divine Julius. In 42, the triumvirs authorized the construction of a temple to honor the deified Julius Caesar. It seems, however, that Octavian Augustus alone built the temple and then dedicated it in 29. It is built on a high platform that doubled as a rostra. Known as the Rostra Juli, the speaking platform mirrored the original rostra by the Curia. The Rostra Juli showcased the beaks of the ships defeated by Octavian and Agrippa in the Battle of Actium, while the earlier rostra featured those from Rome's first naval battle at Antium. The Roman architect Vitruvius described the temple as having closely spaced columns—with the high platform, these would emphasize the structure's verticality and echo the look of the Forum of Julius Caesar and the Temple of Venus Genetrix located there. Among the original temple's remains are foundation blocks, some pieces from the entablature, and other odd pieces. The reconstruction as seen in this photograph is a recessed semicircular niche for the altar that marked the site of Caesar's funeral pyre. To this day, people leave flowers here. The interior room or cella of the temple housed a colossal statue of Julius Caesar, which according to Suetonius placed a star on Caesar's head. This would serve as a symbol of his deification or apotheosis. Augustus held victory games for Caesar in July of 44 during which time there appeared a comet. This shooting star was immediately cited as a sign of Caesar's being made a god.

© Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, Inc.
www.BOLCHAZY.com

Caesar's political ambition was great, even overwhelming, but his unique approach to it seems encapsulated in the words Sallust puts in his mouth and that bear repeating: "It is proper for all men, Senators, who are deliberating on doubtful questions to be free from hatred, friendship, anger and pity. The mind will not easily see the truth, when such things cloud its view; neither can anyone satisfy his passions and his best interest at the same time. . . . To different persons different degrees of license are allowed. If obscure persons act in excessive anger, few know of it. But for those in the highest positions there is less liberty, and it becomes us to indulge neither partiality nor aversion, and least of all animosity" (Sallust *Bellum Catilinae* 50). To say such things is one thing; to carry them out in the face of vitriolic attacks when one has unlimited power is quite another, and it is this behavior that makes Caesar unique in the annals of history. His generosity to defeated opponents even when they were in conflict with his political ambitions is astounding.

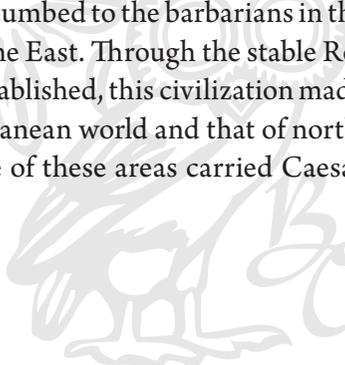
Another manifestation of Caesar's genius beyond the reach of his political ambition was his literary output. His speeches, letters, and pamphlets are lost. Only his accounts (both incomplete and supplemented by others) of the Gallic War and the Civil War survive. As Cicero repeatedly asserted, Caesar also ranked as a masterly public speaker in an age that also featured Hortensius, Brutus, and the incredibly gifted Cicero himself. His funeral orations for his wife and his aunt were carefully calculated as political propaganda. His accounts of his wars, written as terse factual reports, subtly lead the reader to see his acts in the light he chooses. It is interesting to note that he took time in the midst of overwhelming military, administrative, and legislative duties to write the *Anticato*, a reply to Cicero's eulogy of Cato. Caesar had the political acumen to realize that Cato's manner of life and death had made him posthumously an enduring political force and had enshrined all Cato's words and actions in a golden glow. This astute political countermove of Caesar's was not successful. Cato remained the symbol of the lost Republic and of the determination to get it back, and served as an inspiration to the opponents of Caesar and his successors. But the overriding fact about Caesar's extant works is that they are fine examples of literary art, even to readers who thoroughly understand their practical purpose.



Caesar Swimming. This image of Julius Caesar swimming is also taken from the French manuscript painted by the Boucicaut Master in Paris in 1415 (see page 42). Forced to flee from his sinking boat, Julius Caesar swims to another ship holding a letter raised above the water in his hand. Boccaccio did not reveal the contents of this letter but did detail the events leading to Caesar's desperate plight. Having chased his Civil War foe Pompey to Egypt, Caesar entered Alexandria, Egypt. The Romans set fire to the Egyptian king's boat and unintentionally destroyed some 40,000 books when the flames spread to the famous royal library. Caesar had withdrawn to the island of Pharos but beat a hasty flight from the enraged Egyptians. Caesar was forced to abandon his sinking ship and swim to safety. Later after defeating the Egyptian army and capturing the Egyptian king, Caesar granted control of Egypt to the king's sister Cleopatra.

Perhaps the most outstanding characteristic of Caesar was his energy, both intellectual and physical. He wrote his work on the Gallic War while dealing with serious revolts among the Gauls. He wrote his books on the Civil War and the *Anticato* in the tumultuous years between his crossing of the Rubicon and his death. His physical energy was no less remarkable. Examples of this are his swift movements and unexpected arrivals at strategic spots during his campaigns as well as his remarkable travel in all seasons. In the winter of 57–56 he visited his third province, Illyria, as well as Cisalpine Gaul. Between the campaigns of 55 and 54 he not only conducted business in Cisalpine Gaul, but also went to Illyria to deal with the Pirustae, a feisty tribe in what is now Albania. In 49 he marched within a single campaign season from the Rubicon to Brundisium and from Brundisium to Spain. A year or so later he managed a narrow escape during the siege of Alexandria by swimming for his life. His physical vitality lent credence to the rumors of his many love affairs.

This admired, feared, and reviled man of genius changed the course of history in the Western world. His methods were certainly questionable, but it is doubtful that anyone today would argue that the world would be better off if he had allowed the Roman aristocracy to go on ruling as it saw fit. Had he not prevailed and made the vast changes he made in his relatively short rule, the entire Greco-Roman civilization could have easily succumbed to the barbarians in the West and to the Parthian Empire in the East. Through the stable Roman rule that he and his successors established, this civilization made a lasting impact on both the Mediterranean world and that of northern Europe. The subsequent influence of these areas carried Caesar's achievements around the globe.



© Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, Inc.
www.BOLCHAZY.com