

Caesar must surely win praise for his prompt, even-handed attention to pressing social problems. One of the most deep-rooted was that of debt, which had long affected all levels of society, as the widespread support for ~~Caesar's rising popularity~~. An already serious situation was made critical, however, by the outbreak of the civil war. As confidence evaporated, lenders began to demand repayment of their loans, and real estate values collapsed. A serious shortage of coinage for circulation developed, because people hoarded whatever they had; there was in effect no paper money, nor banks as we know them. Desperate borrowers began to agitate for a complete cancellation of debts. Lenders, by contrast, were appalled by the loss they would suffer if such an extreme solution to the crisis were adopted.

By early 48 at the latest, Caesar grasped the seriousness of the situation and both sides' fears. His approach was the moderate one of trying to offer some relief to each. Consequently, he ordered that property must be accepted for repayment at its prewar value, and he reintroduced an old law which prohibited anyone from holding more than 60,000 sesterces in cash (compare this amount to what Pompey's men received in 62). Even so, these measures were not enough to placate borrowers, some of whom raised an armed rebellion which had to be put down by force. Caesar did then act further to help borrowers by canceling interest payments due since early 49, for example, and permitting tenants to pay no rent for a year. Overall, it is true, he came nowhere near to eliminating the problem of debt, but he was responsive and creative enough to alleviate it in a balanced way.

Equally in need of attention was the calendar. The Roman civic year had only 355 days, with provision for an extra month to be inserted from time to time in order to match the solar year. This "intercalation" had been so neglected in the recent past, however, that by the early 40s the Roman year and the solar year were about three months apart. Caesar therefore adapted the Egyptian solar calendar to Roman use. To catch up, the year 46 was lengthened to a unique 445 days, and thereafter each year would have 365 days, with an additional day to be inserted in leap years between February 23 and 24 (as a second February 23; nothing was added at the end of the month). This "Julian" calendar was to be modified again only after another millennium and a half by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582, when it effectively attained the form still in common use today.



Figure 8.4 Julius Caesar as dictator was the first living Roman with the audacity to permit his image to appear on coins. The issue shown here, by the moneyer Lucius (Aemilius) Buca in 44, dates to the final weeks of his life; it portrays him wearing a crown and describes him pointedly as "perpetual dictator." Among the symbols on the reverse, the clasped hands affirm the trust between Caesar and his army, while the globe represents Roman aspirations to world power.

Caesar was naturally concerned to settle his veterans, and at the same time ready to dispel fears that he would proscribe and confiscate for this purpose ~~the Italian land~~. In fact his attitude towards defeated enemies was typically one of forgiveness (*clementia*), and even though there does appear to have been some confiscation of land in Italy, it must have been on a limited scale. Not many veterans were settled there (15,000 perhaps) and, ~~unlike Sulla's men~~, they were widely dispersed. Instead, most veterans, along with many of the poor from the city of Rome, were settled overseas—on land that either belonged to the Roman state already, or was confiscated from communities which had joined the fight against Caesar in Spain, Africa, and the East especially. Caesar's two most ambitious settlement projects were perhaps the new colonies founded on the vacant sites of Carthage and Corinth, both destroyed in 146.

Like all Roman colonies, his foundations were certainly intended as centers of Roman strength and culture, but altogether there seems no cause to claim that he had in mind very specific ideas of either garrisoning or romanizing the empire when he selected their sites. Even the number of his colonies is unclear, given that few had developed far by the time of his death; others established later in his name may, or may not, have been among his plans. ~~It may be possible to discern in Caesar's measures a new impetus to raise the status of approved provincials and to make them Rome's partners rather than merely subjects. Even so, to see this as a well-formulated aim, consistently applied, would be excessive. His attitude towards provincial government shows the same ambivalence. In line with his *lex Julia* of 59 regulating it, he could act considerably. In particular, we know that he abolished the oppressive system whereby a syndicate of publicani collected tax in Asia after making the winning bid at an auction in Rome; he now permitted the communities to collect it themselves. On the other hand, there is no sign that he planned any large reform of provincial government.~~

### CAESAR'S IMPACT UPON THE CITY OF ROME

There was much in the city of Rome to claim Caesar's attention. To reduce unemployment, many of its poor were offered a fresh start in the new colonies overseas. Others who depended on the free grain available monthly to any Roman citizen (~~facilitated by *Lex Julia*~~) were liable to suffer when Caesar limited these rations to a total of 150,000. If he had contemplated cutting costs further by simply abolishing the free ration, ~~as Sulla had done~~, he no doubt concluded that the blow to his popularity would be too great. He did arrange for better supervision of the supply of grain to the city, and he is said to have been planning improved access to it generally, with a new harbor at Ostia and a canal from Tarracina.

Major new projects for public buildings also acted to reduce unemployment in the city. ~~One of these, the *Forum Julium* (north of the original *Forum Romanum*), was sufficiently advanced for Caesar to dedicate it in 46; its purpose was to pro-~~

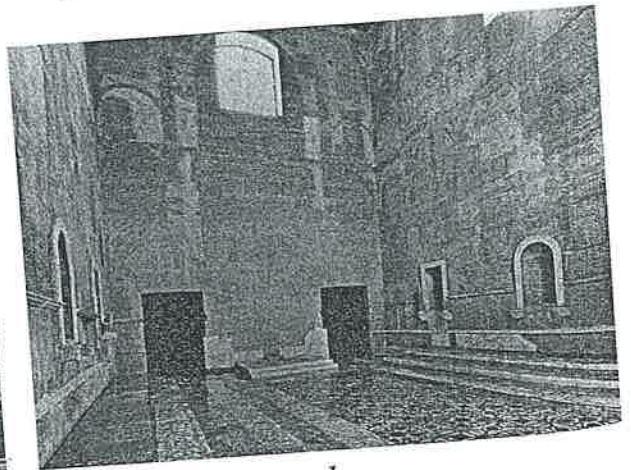
~~still demonstrate decisively how he intended both to enhance the city's appearance and to leave his own permanent work on it. Such buildings, after all, would bear his name prominently. There were said to be other grandiose schemes for a huge temple of Mars, a theater to rival Pompey's, and a library on the model of those in leading Greek cities. Although these ideas remain impossible to assess because Caesar never implemented them, it is quite plain that he wanted to make Rome a center of culture and education.~~

From the measures he took, therefore, there can be no doubt that Caesar wanted to reward his supporters and to glorify the city of Rome as well as himself. More broadly, we can see that he wanted to bring stability and prosperity to the entire Roman world. There seems little question that, in the limited intervals of time open to him, he did take encouraging steps in the right direction. Even so, there is no knowing how he would have continued.

Figure 8.5a,b This structure is today a prominent feature of the north side of the Forum Romanum. Once Rome's senate house, in the seventh century it became a church. During the 1930s, however, all the successive accretions were removed. The senate house thus revealed [a] had been erected after a fire in A.D. 283; the conspicuous horizontal openings either side of the front doors were for medieval tombs. It reproduced the design of the building commissioned by Julius Caesar as dictator and dedicated by Octavian as the Curia Julia in 29 B.C. (the very ancient senate house which this in turn replaced — enlarged by Sulla, and then torched as Clodius' funeral pyre in 52 — had been situated nearby). The interior of the restored structure [b], viewed here from the front doors, is a tall, open chamber measuring 84 by 58 feet (26 by 18 m). Only the floor now offers an impression of the fine marble that originally covered most of the walls too. Along either side are three broad steps where senators sat on benches; at the far end is a dais for the magistrate presiding. When the senate was in session, only members could enter, but the front doors had to remain open, allowing spectators a chance to follow the proceedings from there.



a



b

## POLITICAL PROSPECTS FOR ROME AND FOR CAESAR

Caesar's work was cut short by his own closest associates, the senators. He seems not to have appreciated how badly he needed their continued support and respect. He did considerably increase the senate's size. Under him, the total membership of around 600 ~~set by Sulla~~ was expanded to 900. Inevitably, many of the new members were men he wished to reward, and they came from a somewhat wider variety of communities and social backgrounds than hitherto. Of course, traditionalists found fault and exaggerated their grumbles. For certain, the new members must have included men from many Italian communities that had gained Roman citizenship within the past forty years or so, and were seeing one of their own become a senator for the first time. There is no question, too, that Caesar did introduce a few members from Spain and Gaul.

quaestors  
official in  
charge of  
treasury

To maintain the senate's size, and again to reward his supporters, Caesar doubled the number of quaestors ~~set by Sulla~~ from twenty to forty annually, and the number of praetors from eight to sixteen. Elections lost significance after Caesar gained, and used, the right to fill offices by nomination. By the same token, his dictatorships freed him from the need to pay attention to other magistrates, or to consult the senate except as a formality. Hence he poured scorn on Sulla for resigning the dictatorship, mocked the tribunate whose veto could not obstruct him now, and even dismissed the Republic itself as "nothing, a mere name with neither form nor substance."

officials

The senate itself—out of fear, or flattery, or even contempt—encouraged his growing arrogance by voting him a stream of ever more extraordinary powers and honors, most of which he accepted. By the beginning of 44, the image of his head was appearing on coinage, a distinction never before accorded to a living Roman (Figure 8.4). Antony had also been chosen, though not yet instituted, as priest of a temple authorized by the senate for worship of Caesar as a god. Public worship of a living ruler was a Greek practice (see Chapter Ten), but it had no real precedent at Rome and was completely contrary to the very concept of a republic.

Much the same may be said of kingship. Once again, it is unclear how badly, if at all, Caesar wanted this distinction. The Greek world had indeed had kings, some of whom impressed Romans. Admittedly, too, elements of Rome's own archaic kingship had been carried over into the Republic. For Caesar to go as far as to take the title of *rex*, however, would be a giant leap, certain to offend almost everyone with any regard for the Republic. As it was, he never did actually claim kingship, though he may have toyed with the possibility. Moreover, the fact that Cleopatra and her baby son Caesarion came to Rome in 46 and remained there can only have fueled suspicions that Caesar had it in mind to found a dynasty.

By early 44, there was no further authority that fresh honors could confer on Caesar. He already had absolute power. As he well knew, he was hated for that and for the way he used it. After all, a dangerous consequence of his clemency—mercy

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(*clementia*) was the survival of many of his enemies, plenty of them still in the senate. Even so, to him the Republic was dead, and he could see no secure alternative means of regulating the state's affairs for the future except through himself. His adoption of the title "perpetual dictator" during February 44 confirmed this conclusion. ~~In any event, reform would now have to be put off until his return from the Parthian campaign.~~

To many senators, this new title and the prospect of Caesar's long absence marked the end of all hope, the final provocation. They had to act before his departure on March 18, and so determined to kill him publicly in the senate at the last meeting he would attend, on the Ides (fifteenth) of March—just as Romulus had been killed when he became a tyrant, according to one tradition. The leaders of the sixty or so members in the plot were two praetors, Marcus Junius Brutus and his brother-in-law Gaius Cassius Longinus. Both had taken Pompey's side and been pardoned by Caesar. Both claimed descent from ancient families with a tradition of championing Rome's liberty; a celebrated Brutus had led the expulsion of the last king, Tarquinius Superbus.

Caesar fell at the foot of a statue of Pompey. Assassination by his peers was a tragic end for a man who had fought so long and hard to become unrivaled first man in Rome. But along with that insatiable ambition a certain naiveté was detectable. Somehow Caesar always seemed to imagine that, while he must be accorded special rights in deference to his *dignitas*, the rest of the state could, and would, continue to function around him in the regular, legal way. Eventually it could not. By early 44, even many of his supporters in the senate found it intolerable that they must all remain deprived of their *dignitas* for the foreseeable future. Hence they concluded that his personal interest could not continue to be so privileged above that of everyone else.

### SUGGESTED READINGS

- Meier, Christian. 1995. *Caesar: A Biography*. London: HarperCollins.  
 Mouritsen, Henrik. 2001. *Plebs and Politics in the Late Roman Republic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Balanced analysis of the political role of the masses in a society both aristocratic and democratic.