

army from a militia equipped by, and loyal to, Rome, into a professional army equipped by, and loyal to, its commander. He used the threat of armed force to overcome Senate opposition to the distribution of land in North Africa to his troops—a tactic unheard of during the early days of the republic. But at least Marius did not yet take the opportunity to seize Rome. He contented himself with being elected consul six years in a row between 105 and 100 B.C., though Roman law prohibited consuls from holding office two consecutive terms.

### Sulla

In 88 B.C., King Mithridates VI of Pontus (northeastern Asia Minor) led Greece and Asia Minor, both severely oppressed by corrupt proconsuls, tax collectors, and moneylenders, into revolt against Rome. Mithridates slaughtered 80,000 Italian men, women, and children living in his territory. Both the Senate and the *comitia tributa* claimed supreme authority to put down the revolt, and each selected its own general. While the *comitia tributa* chose Marius, the Senate selected Lucius Cornelius Sulla, who had once served as Marius's quaestor but was now his rival.

After failing to find and kill Marius, who fled to North Africa, Sulla set sail for the East. Marius then returned to Rome in Sulla's absence, allowing his troops to loot and murder and even execute a few Optimates, including a consul. Having put down Mithridates' revolt in 86–85 B.C., Sulla then returned to Rome to rout Marius's army, which had been weakened by the leader's death from pleurisy. Thousands of Romans died in the civil war, including many senators; the Senate had been reduced from its usual 300 members to about 150.

In 82 B.C., the Senate appointed the victorious Sulla dictator for an unlimited term, another unconstitutional act, and assigned him the task of revising the Roman political system. Sulla transferred almost all government functions to the Senate, leaving the popular assemblies and the tribunes virtually powerless. He removed equites from juries, returning nearly all judicial power to the Senate. To hobble popular leaders, he prohibited men from holding the same office twice within a ten-year period. To weaken the position of tribune, by depriving it of ambitious leaders, he prohibited former tribunes from running for higher offices and restricted the tribune's veto power.

Worst of all, Sulla "proscribed" (listed for execution) his own enemies and the enemies of his friends. His soldiers killed 30,000 to 50,000 people, so many that even the Senate begged him to stop. The victims included forty senators (*Populares*) and 1,600 equites, whose property Sulla confiscated and distributed among his 120,000 troops. Indeed, some Romans may have been killed purely for their property. Sulla expanded the Senate from 150 to 600 members, packing it with his own supporters.

But Sulla was not personally ambitious. He wanted only to "cleanse" Rome by restoring the Senate to a dominant position. In 81 B.C., he voluntarily surrendered power. After serving as consul in 80–79 B.C., he returned to his rural estate and died peacefully in 78 B.C. If Rome had escaped a permanent dictatorship, it was due solely to the fact that Marius and Sulla still possessed a few scruples about openly assuming such power. Rome would not be so fortunate in the future.

## THE SECOND ROMAN CIVIL WAR: POMPEY VERSUS CAESAR

### Pompey's Conquest

The First Civil War accelerated the trend toward factionalism and personal ambition. In 70 B.C., and again in 67 B.C., Pompey (Gnaeus Pompeius) and Marcus Licinius Crassus were elected consul (partly through vote-buying), though Pompey was below the legal age for that position. Though they had supported Sulla during his dictatorship, Pompey and Crassus won the favor of the masses by repealing nearly all of Sulla's laws. They reduced the senatorial representation in juries to one-third and restored the tribunician power.

In 67 B.C., over Senate objections, the *comitia tributa* gave Pompey temporary dictatorial power to clear the Mediterranean of the pirates who had proliferated as a result of the Senate's neglect of the navy. With a fleet of nearly 1,000 ships, the pirates had captured or looted nearly 400 towns. Proceeding methodically, Pompey cleared the sea of pirates in three months, thereby ending the threat to Rome's grain supplies.

As part of an effort to put down yet another revolt led by Mithridates, Pompey then spent four years conquering the remaining part of the Seleucid Empire, which included Syria, Armenia, Phoenicia, Pontus, and Cilicia (southeastern Asia Minor). He also conquered Judea (Israel), an independent kingdom that had successfully revolted against the Seleucids a century earlier. Thousands of Jews threw themselves to the ground before Pompey and begged him not to desecrate the Great Temple of Jerusalem by entering it since no Gentile could enter the temple without desecrating it. This display only convinced Pompey that the temple must contain great riches, so he barged in, even marching into the Holy of Holies, its innermost sanctum. The Roman historian Tacitus later declared: "It is a fact well known that he found no image, no statue, no symbolical representation of the Deity; the whole presented a naked dome; the sanctuary was unadorned and simple." When the dumbfounded Pompey emerged from the temple, he exclaimed in wonder, "It is empty; there is nothing there but darkness!" Pompey's reaction typified Roman confusion concerning the Jews and their worship of an invisible, omnipotent God. Nevertheless,

Pompey's conquests greatly added to the wealth and power of both Rome and himself.

### The First Triumvirate

When Pompey returned to Rome in 62 B.C., the Senate refused to grant his soldiers the land he requested for them. Pompey had made the mistake of disbanding his army too quickly, leaving him with no leverage over the Senate. In frustration, Pompey then formed what historians call the First Triumvirate, an alliance with Crassus and Julius Caesar, in 60 B.C.

Famous for putting down Spartacus's slave rebellion, with a little help from Pompey, Crassus was the second wealthiest man in Rome. (Pompey was the wealthiest after he returned from his eastern conquests.) Crassus had amassed his vast fortune partly by purchasing the estates of Sulla's victims at a discount and partly by purchasing other houses at an even greater discount during the periodic fires that plagued the wooden city. Whenever a fire erupted, Crassus's slaves negotiated with the neighbors of the fire victims. As the fire spread closer to their homes, the desperate neighbors sold their homes for next to nothing. Once Crassus's agents had purchased the houses for him, his specially trained fire brigades, standing nearby, could then begin to extinguish the fires. Public fire departments did not yet exist.

Though a member of one of the oldest aristocratic families in Rome, Julius Caesar established himself as a champion of the masses. (Nearly proscribed by Sulla as a young man, Caesar was the nephew of Marius and had subsequently married the daughter of one of Marius's allies.) Tall, fair, thin, and epileptic, Caesar possessed a broad face and lively, dark brown eyes. Though he was bald, he tried to cover it up by combing his thin strands of hair forward (a gambit that has never worked in any era). He valued luxury and developed a reputation as a womanizer, even having affairs with the wives of his fellow triumvirs. His enemies also accused him of having had an affair with King Nicodemus of Bithynia in order to secure his patronage. One political opponent called Caesar "the Queen of Bithynia . . . who once wanted to sleep with a monarch, but now wants to be one." Once, when Caesar was listing his obligations to Nicodemus before the Senate, Cicero interrupted, saying: "Enough of that, if you please! We all know what he gave you, and what you gave him in return." Caesar first became associated with Crassus in 65 B.C., when Caesar borrowed large sums of money from him, cash that Caesar then used to curry favor with the masses by funding lavish gladiatorial games.

The triumvirate secured Caesar's election as consul in 59 B.C. When Caesar's colleague proved uncooperative, Caesar threatened him so fiercely he stayed home the rest of the year, leaving Caesar, in effect, as sole consul. Caesar also once had Cato the Younger forcibly removed from the Senate

House to stop a filibuster. Caesar repaid his fellow triumvirs for their support in obtaining the consulship by securing legislation that remitted taxes to Crassus's equestrian supporters and granted land to Pompey's veterans. Caesar then requested and received the proconsulship of Cisalpine Gaul (northern Italy), Transalpine Gaul (southern France), and Illyria, while Crassus secured command of the army in the East, and Pompey received an absentee command in Spain that allowed him to remain in Rome.

In 53 B.C., Crassus was killed while attempting to conquer Parthia, a new Persian empire east of the Euphrates River. Crassus had foolishly advanced into open country east of the Euphrates, where the Parthians, under Suren, surrounded the Romans and pummeled them with arrows supplied steadily by a train of 1,000 camels. Unwilling to risk a night attack on the enemy, Crassus then abandoned 4,000 wounded soldiers, fleeing to Carrhae under cover of night. Lacking adequate supplies, Crassus was forced to negotiate. The Parthians killed him treacherously, under a flag of truce. Ten thousand of his soldiers were taken prisoner. Fortunately for the Roman position in Syria, Orodes, the king of Parthia, then had Suren killed as a potential rival.

### Caesar's Conquests

Caesar, who had wept as a young man because he had accomplished nothing at the same age at which Alexander the Great had conquered a vast empire, now spent nine years subduing the rest of Gaul (what is now France, Belgium, southern Holland, Germany west of the Rhine, and most of Switzerland). One of the greatest generals in history, Caesar always made a careful reconnaissance, and in a hard-fought battle always sent all the horses away, including his own, so that his soldiers would know that without victory there was no chance of escape. He inlaid his soldiers' weapons with silver and gold, which gave them such pride in their arms that they were especially careful not to be disarmed in battle. Ordinarily lax, he insisted on strict discipline whenever the enemy was in the vicinity. He made a point of becoming acquainted with all his centurions, of heeding their advice, and of rewarding loyal service. Caesar himself was so loyal to his troops he once disguised himself as a Gaul in order to reach them when the enemy had surrounded them. Caesar's intense loyalty to his soldiers, whom he called "comrades," was matched only by their fidelity to him. Caesar's legions never mutinied throughout the Gallic War, a record of loyalty unmatched by any other army of the period.

In 57 B.C., Caesar annihilated the Helvetii near Bibracte, routed the Germanic Ariovistus in Alsace, and destroyed the Nervii on the Sabis River. In 55 B.C., and again the following year, Caesar's attempts to invade what is now Great Britain, also inhabited by Celtic tribes, were thwarted by storms, which prevented him from receiving vital supplies

and cavalry units. Caesar then put down several revolts among the Gallic tribes in France.

Caesar's greatest victory in the Gallic War came at Alesia (near modern Dijon) in 52 B.C., a victory that broke the back of Gallic resistance. While besieging an impregnable Gallic town situated atop a hill and manned by 80,000 Gauls, Caesar was himself surrounded by an even larger force. He instructed his soldiers to construct a double ring of siege works, the inner ring alone extending ten miles. Caesar himself occupied a good observation post, from which he could follow the action in each part of the battlefield and dispatch reinforcements wherever they were needed. The brilliantly conceived siege works allowed Caesar to maintain the siege of Alesia while warding off the large Gallic army that surrounded his own. The shortage of food in Alesia became so severe that one Gallic leader even seriously suggested eating those too young and too old to fight. When the Gauls on each side of the Romans launched a simultaneous night attack, many of them fell into camouflaged pits and impaled themselves on sharpened stakes. Nevertheless, by attacking the Romans at their weakest point, the Gauls nearly succeeded. Only Caesar's timely dispatch of reinforcements prevented them from breaching the Roman line. Caesar then made a sortie and routed the larger force, sending the survivors scrambling to their individual homes and forcing the surrender of the smaller force in Alesia. Plutarch estimated that Caesar's legions killed as many as 1 million people and enslaved another million during the course of the Gallic War.

In conquering Gaul, Caesar acquired a fortune in plunder, which he used to bribe Roman officials and to curry favor with the Roman people. In preparation for another campaign for the consulship, Caesar kept his name before the Roman public by publishing his *Commentaries on the Gallic War*, a memoir in which Caesar wrote of himself in the third person to present the illusion of objectivity. Caesar's *Commentaries*, one of our most important sources concerning the early Gallic and Germanic tribes, was written so well it is still used as a Latin primer. Its simple but nonrepetitive prose is as free of colloquialisms as it is of pedantry. Even Cicero, whose style was far more florid, admired Caesar's lucid, graceful writing, remarking of his sentences: "They are like nude figures, upright and beautiful, stripped of all ornament and style as if they had removed a garment." Cicero also considered Caesar a great orator, calling his rhetorical style "elegant as well as clear, even grand and in a sense noble."

### Civil War

But Pompey and the Senate had grown jealous of Caesar's victories. The death of Julia, Caesar's daughter and Pompey's beloved wife, in 54 B.C., combined with the death of their common ally Crassus the following

year, had removed powerful motives for cooperation between the former triumvirs.

In 49 B.C., two enemies of Caesar were elected consul with Pompey's tacit consent. The Senate then ordered Caesar to disband his army and return to Rome. A tribune vetoed the order but was physically removed from the Senate chamber, a violation of the sanctity of tribunes. When Caesar balked at the Senate's order, the Senate retreated, voting overwhelmingly (370–22) in favor of a compromise proposal that both Caesar and Pompey disband their armies, but the proposal was vetoed by a different tribune. In fact, Caesar even proposed surrendering all but two legions and relinquishing command of Cisalpine Gaul and Illyria. Pompey was willing to accept this compromise, but the consuls refused.

Fearing for his life should he disband his army, his sole protection against his enemies, Caesar crossed the Rubicon River with his army. He understood that this act was tantamount to a declaration of war against the Senate (hence the phrase "crossing the Rubicon" to signify the performance of an act that cannot be reversed). Indeed, Caesar hesitated at the river, but then declared, "Let the die be cast!" and plunged the republic into another civil war.

Pompey and most of the Senate fled eastward. After defeating the large armies of Pompey's legates in Spain, Caesar crossed the Adriatic Sea to face Pompey himself. Caesar besieged Pompey's army at Dyrrachium (in Epirus), but Pompey's force broke through and slaughtered 1,000 of Caesar's men. Caesar thought Pompey could have won the civil war had he pursued and annihilated Caesar's army after the battle. But, fearing an ambush, Pompey allowed Caesar to retreat eastward.

### The Battle of Pharsalus

Caesar was able to reorganize his troops, restore their morale, and make a decisive stand at Pharsalus in Thessaly in 48 B.C. According to Caesar's admittedly subjective account, Pompey's overconfident officers "were already starting to squabble openly among themselves about rewards and priesthoods and were assigning the consulships for years to come, while some were claiming the houses and property of people in Caesar's camp. . . . They were thinking not of how to win but of how to exploit the victory."

If so, Pompey's officers greatly underestimated Caesar's legions. Though outnumbered more than two to one (47,000 to 22,000), Caesar's troops were more experienced and more loyal than Pompey's. Many offered to serve without pay; none deserted, though Caesar allowed any centurion who wished to join Pompey to do so. When deprived of food and supplies at one point, Caesar's stalwarts had eaten grass, prompting Pompey to exclaim: "I am fighting wild beasts!"

When Pompey attacked with his left wing, composed of cavalry and archers, Caesar dispatched fresh, carefully selected reinforcements to face them. They managed to encircle and massacre Pompey's left wing, thereby turning his flank and initiating a rout of his whole army. Caesar had instructed his infantrymen to thrust their lances at the faces of Pompey's cavalrymen rather than hurling them. As Caesar expected, the handsome, inexperienced, young cavalrymen shrank from facial disfigurement. Six thousand of Pompey's troops were killed in the battle; the rest surrendered. Generally magnanimous, Caesar would not allow the slaughter of any soldier who surrendered, shouting to his army: "Spare your fellow Romans!" Surveying the Optimate dead, Caesar cried, "They would have it thus!"

Pompey fled to Egypt. Wishing to please Caesar, Egyptian officials used treachery to assassinate Pompey and sent his head to Caesar. But Caesar wept at the sight and ordered the murderers put to death. He then dallied with Cleopatra VII, the Macedonian queen of Egypt, who, on their first meeting, had herself smuggled to him in a carpet, from which she emerged nude.

Caesar did not defeat the last of Pompey's scattered forces until 45 B.C. When defeat was certain for his republican army in North Africa, Cato the Younger, the great grandson of Cato the Elder, fell on his sword at Utica. After putting down a revolt in Pontus, Caesar celebrated a triumph. One of the decorated wagons in the triumphal procession bore a banner that declared: "Veni, Vidi, Vici" ("I came, I saw, I conquered").

### CAESAR'S RULE

From 48 to 44 B.C., Caesar was first the unofficial, and then official, dictator of Rome. He was magnanimous—in retrospect, more than was wise—even appointing some of his former opponents to high offices and restoring the statues of Pompey that had been pulled down by some of Caesar's more zealous followers. In addition, Caesar put down the street gangs that had paralyzed the city. He reduced Rome's debt through more efficient administration. He rebuilt much of the city. He reduced the number of the unemployed from 320,000 to 150,000 through a public works program and through the decree that at least one-third of the laborers in the latifundia must be free men. He established both Italian and provincial colonies for his veterans and for 80,000 poor Romans, the fulfillment of the Gracchi's dream. Caesar also canceled all interest on debts incurred during the recent civil war, an inflationary period. He planned a public library. As *pontifex maximus* (chief priest), he introduced the "Julian calendar" of 365 and one-fourth days, the calendar employed in Europe until Pope Gregory XIII modified it (removing one leap day every two centuries) in 1582. Caesar also restored

order in the provinces. He removed many incompetent and corrupt proconsuls from office and ejected them from the Senate. In a momentous move, Caesar extended Roman citizenship to numerous non-Italians for the first time, namely, to the people of Cisalpine Gaul and to the chieftains of Transalpine Gaul. He even admitted some Gauls into the Senate, thereby accelerating the assimilation of Gaul. Rome was beginning to conceive of the empire more as a community and less as a field of exploitation.

### CAESAR'S ASSASSINATION

But Caesar's arrogance offended some aristocrats. With the consent of a fearful Senate, he placed statues of himself among those of the ancient kings. He wore semiregal dress, sat on a golden throne in the Senate House, and allowed the Senate to rename the month of Quintilis after himself (July). One statue depicted him with a globe beneath his feet. When the senators came to him bringing honors, he remained seated, like a patron receiving clients. Finally, one of Caesar's underlings, Mark Antony (Marcus Antonius), attempted to crown Caesar at a festival. Although Caesar refused the crown three times, the incident further alarmed some senators, who perceived Caesar as testing the waters for a return to monarchy.

Although the Senate agreed to extend his dictatorship from the initial ten years to life in February 44 B.C., some senators began plotting his assassination. One month later, a group of conspirators, led by Marcus Junius Brutus and his brother-in-law Gaius Cassius Longinus, stabbed Caesar to death with daggers—ironically, in Pompey's Theater, where Caesar had called a meeting of the Senate. The senators attacked Caesar with such frenzy that they wounded each other and drenched themselves with Caesar's blood. Brutus supposedly stabbed him in the groin. Caesar fell dead at the foot of Pompey's statue, his body riddled with wounds.

Caesar had often refused a bodyguard, saying it was better to die once than to live in constant fear of death. Clutched in Caesar's dying hand was a detailed warning of the assassination plot given him by an acquaintance of Brutus and his friends. Caesar had attempted to read the note several times but had been interrupted by supplicants each time. He was fifty-five years old and planning a campaign against the Parthians when he died.

Cassius was a praetor who had distinguished himself by repelling a Parthian invasion of Syria in 51 B.C. Brutus was a descendant of the legendary Lucius Brutus, who had expelled King Tarquin from Rome (and who had supposedly killed his own sons for conspiring to restore Tarquin). Brutus idolized his uncle, the republican martyr Cato the Younger, even marrying his daughter Porcia. Though Brutus had taken Pompey's side in the civil war, despite the fact that Pompey had executed his father,

because he considered Pompey more likely to restore the republic, the victorious Caesar had befriended Brutus. One rumor even claimed that Brutus was really Caesar's son, though this was probably untrue. (When Brutus was born, Caesar was barely fifteen. However, Caesar did have an affair with Brutus's mother, Servilia, when Brutus was twenty-two. This misunderstanding probably accounts for the Roman historian Seutonius's claim that Caesar's last words were "And you, son?" Shakespeare later substituted the more plausible "Et tu, Brute?")

It was said that Brutus, the Stoic republican, had acted because he hated dictatorship, and the fiery Cassius because he hated the dictator. While Caesar's supporters had placed crowns on his statues, to encourage the people to make him king, Brutus's fellow republicans had scrawled messages on his desk every day reminding him of his ancestral duty to oppose monarchy. Nothing so moved a Roman as an appeal to family tradition.

Caesar's death plunged Rome into chaos that led to a third Roman civil war. In turn, that bloody war would eventuate in the rise of the first Roman emperor, Caesar's grandnephew Augustus.

### CAESAR'S LEGACY

Caesar's conquest of Gaul extended Roman civilization into northern Europe. The Romans were so successful in assimilating Gaul that France would play a leading role in the preservation of classical civilization during the Middle Ages. Though conquered by the Germanic Franks in the fifth century A.D., France would remain a Latin nation, as reflected in its language even today.

While Caesar's conquests made him an object of emulation for future generals, his crucial role in the downfall of the Roman republic made him the greatest villain of modern republicans. The Founding Fathers of the United States uniformly despised Caesar. In a famous part of Patrick Henry's Stamp Act Speech of 1765, Henry compared King George III with Caesar, declaring: "Caesar had his Brutus, Charles the First his Cromwell, and George III [cries of "Treason!"] may profit by their example." In 1771, John Adams compared the Tory Thomas Hutchinson, the new royal governor of Massachusetts, with Caesar: "Caesar, by destroying the Roman Republic, made himself a perpetual Dictator; Hutchinson, by countenancing and supporting a System of Corruption and Tyranny, has made himself Governor." Both Adams and Thomas Jefferson compared Alexander Hamilton with Caesar. Adams wrote: "When Burr shot Hamilton, it was not Brutus killing Caesar in the Senate-House, but it was killing him before he passed the Rubicon." Though Hamilton's references to Caesar in his correspondence were uniformly negative, Jefferson claimed that

Hamilton had once told him, "The greatest man that ever lived was Julius Caesar." Ironically, Hamilton wrote to George Washington implying that Jefferson was a Caesar: "It has aptly been observed that Cato was the Tory—Caesar the Whig of his day. The former frequently resisted—the latter always flattered the follies of the people. Yet the former perished with the Republic, [while] the latter destroyed it." A month later, Hamilton wrote an article in the *Gazette of the United States* in which he stated concerning Jefferson: "But there is always a first time, when characters studious of artful disguises are unveiled; when the vizor of stoicism is plucked from the brow of the Epicurean; when the plain garb of Quaker simplicity is stripped from the concealed voluptuary; when Caesar coyly refusing the proffered diadem is seen to be Caesar rejecting the trappings, but tenaciously grasping the substance of imperial domination."

Nor did these recurrent attempts to brand one's political opponent as a Caesar—a cunning, ambitious individual seeking to overthrow the republic—end with the founding generation. When Andrew Jackson withdrew funds from the national bank in order to destroy it, an act many considered unconstitutional, Henry Clay compared Jackson's action with Caesar's entrance into the Roman treasury, sword in hand, to collect the funds necessary to prosecute his military campaign against Pompey. The Whigs' attempts to brand Jackson as another Caesar were so numerous and so passionate that one newspaper blamed the first presidential assassination attempt in American history on the overheated rhetoric. While the deranged house painter Richard Lawrence almost certainly acted from a more personal motive (insanity, perhaps caused by sniffing too much lead paint) than from adherence to Whig rhetoric when he unsuccessfully attempted to shoot Jackson, the Whigs had clearly demonstrated Caesar's continued utility as the leading bogeyman for republicans of every political persuasion.