

## Rebellion of the reactionaries

Caesar's politics had completely altered the traditional power structures in the senate. Holding high offices below him did not go hand in hand with more political influence as it used to. Decisions were made by Caesar alone. And even those who had helped finance his rise to power felt betrayed.

## 01

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# Caesar crosses the Rubicon

His victories in Gaul had won Caesar so much influence that he seemed almost overpowering. That made even his former allies uncomfortable. Pompey allied with Caesar's enemies and demanded his return to Rome. Under no circumstances could Caesar let that happen because losing his office meant losing his legal immunity and possible conviction. His enemies had enough on him to arraign him. This, however, was not acceptable for Caesar and irreconcilable with his pride. He turned to his loyal soldiers. In the night from 10 January to 11 January 49, he and his legions crossed the Rubicon, the small river on the border of his province of Gallia Cisalpina and Italy. The civil war had begun.



Caesar crossing the Rubicon. Reproduction of an unknown painting.  
Source: Wikicommons / Wolpertinger.

## 02

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## Clementia Caesaris

This was not what Pompey had expected. He moved eastwards, where he had many clients. Others, like senator Lucius Domitius and his soldiers, stayed. They tried to defend the city of Corvinum, but it was futile. Caesar's troops were superior. Surprisingly though, Caesar refrained from murdering the defeated optimates in the city. Instead, he offered them to join his ranks. Many took the offer. With his clemency, the famous *clementia Caesaris*, he brought all those still wavering over to his side. Mercy (*clementia*) was merely an instrument used by the dictator for propaganda.



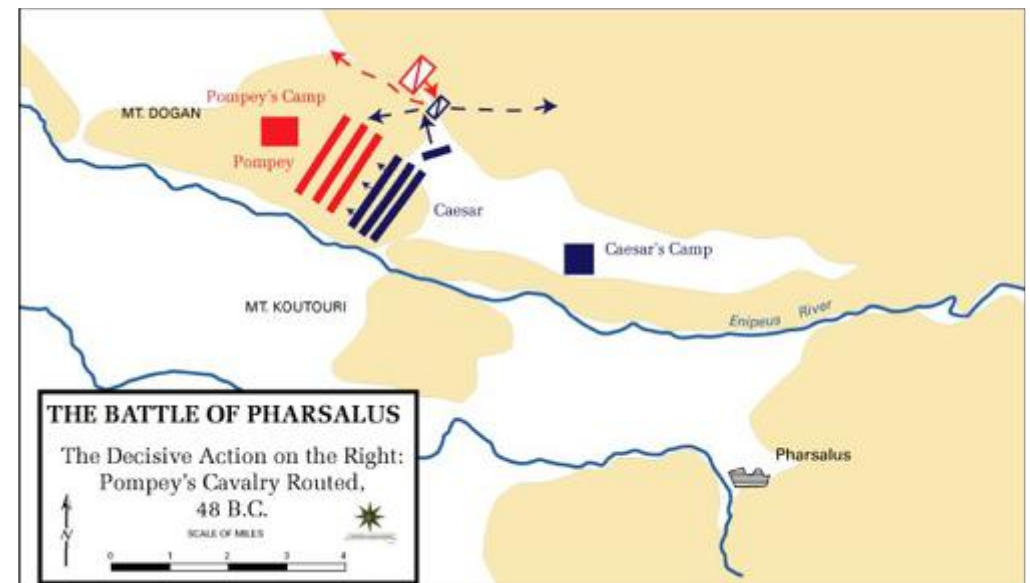
Denarius of P. Sepullius Macer, 44. Obverse: Temple dedicated to Clementia. Reverse: Horse acrobat. From CNG auction sale, Triton XVI (2013), 908.

## 03

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## Clash of the enemies

It only took Caesar a few months to bring the western Empire under his control. Meanwhile, Pompey was able to secure the eastern territories and North Africa. The two armies finally met in northern Greece. On 9 August 48, Caesar crushed Pompey's army.



Battle of Pharsalus, 48 BC. Source: Wikicommons.

## 04

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## Egypt

Pompey fled to Egypt. But Pharaoh Ptolemy XIII chose the more promising side. On his arrival in Alexandria, Caesar was greeted by his enemy's cut-off head.



Pompey's death. Painting by anonymous painter, 2nd half of 18th century. Musée Magnin, Dijon. Source: Wikicommons.



## 05

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## How Caesar met Cleopatra

In Egypt, 53-year-old Caesar met Cleopatra, an intelligent young woman of 21 years of age. He installed her as pharaoh. And there was more to come: She also became his lover and mother of his only son Caesarion.



Cleopatra before Caesar, painting by Jean-Léon Gérôme, 1866. Source: Wikicommons.

## 06

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## Veni, vidi, vici?

Even though the Battle of Zela earned him not only a swift victory but also the phrase 'Veni vidi vici', it still could not win the successful general the respect of the other Roman senators.



Julius Caesar on his triumphal chariot, painting by Andrea Mantegna,

## 07

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## Dictator for life

After the civil war, there were no serious enemies left in the senate. Caesar staffed all offices with his followers. In December 49, he was proclaimed dictator for ten days, in 44 dictator for life. He was even offered the royal diadem, which he rejected.



Caesar refuses the diadem, illustration from John Clark Ridpath's 'History of the World', (1894). Source: Wikicommons.



## 08

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## The old powers are dead

Caesar introduced a new calendar and initiated large-scale projects for buildings and settlements. But no matter what he did, there was one thing he just could not do: Win the respect and approval of the aristocracy. This was largely due to the problem that high offices had lost their appeal. Even high-ranking officials could not make an impact anymore as Caesar was the de facto autocrat.



Caesar memorial, Bonn (Germany). Photo: Wikicommons / Jotquadrat / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/deed.de>

09

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# Cheaper by the dozen

Caesar had become untouchable. He amassed honours and privileges. The laurel wreath on the Sella Curulis perhaps alludes to his privilege of sitting in between the two consuls during sessions of the senate.



Denarius of C. Considius Paetus, 46. Obverse: Apollo. Reverse: Sella Curulis, Caesar's laurel wreath on top.

## 10

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## Caesar everywhere

On top of losing their political power, angry senators were confronted with Caesar wherever they went. One statue of him was put up next to the memorials of the seven kings of Rome. Another one in the Temple of Jupiter, bearing the inscription 'To the invincible god'. An ivory statue of Caesar became part of every procession held in honour of the gods. The old elites were furious.



Statue of Iulius Caesar, Via dei Fori Imperiali, Rome. Photo: Wikicommons / Vassil.

## 11

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## Enough!

Perhaps this one, last privilege was the straw that broke the camel's back. Since 13 February 44, Caesar was authorised to mint his effigy on coins. This was unheard-of in Rome, this was unthinkable. Plus, Caesar was wearing a sort of crown on these coins, inherited from the Etruscans and presumably reminiscent of the triumphator, who, however, had only worn it on the day of his triumph. This image became iconic. In the dispute about Caesar's succession it was repeatedly taken up and minted by the followers of Octavian and Marc Antony.



Denarius of Q. Voconius Vitulus, 40 or later. Obverse: Deified Caesar.  
Reverse: Calf.



## 12

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## A fervent believer in the Republic

More than anyone else, Marcus Iunius Brutus had conveyed the clear message on his coins that he would not tolerate a tyrant. This coin of his shows Lucius Iunius Brutus, the legendary first consul and founder of the Roman Republic. The reverse portrays Gaius Servilius Ahala, who was known for killing a man because he suspected him of striving for autocracy.



Denarius of M. Iunius Brutus, 54. Obverse: Head of Brutus, consul in 509. Reverse: Head of Gaius Servilius Ahala.

## 13

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## Caesar's end

On the Ides of March, 15 March 44, some 60 senators assassinated the man who had used his money to turn their political system of clientilism against them and upset the order of the Roman Republic.



Caesar's death. Painting by Jean-Léon Gérôme, between 1859 and 1867. Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. Source: Wikicommons / Walter Art Museum / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>