

Julius Caesar's Rise to Power

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Abstract

Beginning in 69 BCE. Caesar rose in the Roman *cursus honorum*,² first as quaestor then to the rank of aedile and subsequently pontifex maximus (one in-charge of state religion) in 63 BCE marking his beginning of ascendancy of power.³ Historian Robert C.L. Holmes says Caesar lived through the barbaric invasion of Rome undertaken by General Sulla forcing him to escape and ultimately join the Roman forces with the North Europeans in the Gallic Region of modern day France.⁴ His command during the successful repression of the invading Helvetii tribe, pressured the existing senate of Rome into acknowledging his leadership and military prowess.⁵ Historian Plutarch states that along with his military acumen, the political backing of the financially affluent Marcus Licinius Crassus and the then consul of Rome, general Pompey allowed him to gain a strong foothold in the Roman senate system.⁶ Researcher Phillips states that Caesar's mighty conquest of Gaul (58-50 BC), was followed by his refusal to disband his war legions against what contemporary practice suggested, thus opposing the senate; breeding a civil war in ancient Rome which became the epicentre of his renowned military exploits.⁷ Caesar consequently attained the highest position in Rome, that of consul, in 59 BCE with the guarantee of being given a province to rule, by the senate.⁸ These military achievements allowed Caesar to create and enforce his influence not only on the populace but paved the way for convenient eradication of his competitors. "He (Caesar) played on Pompey's frailties cleverly and offered to resign his command."⁹ Apprehensive of the resulting complications and the threat to stability of the administration, "...the Senate dared not entertain such an offer."¹⁰ The subsequent win against Pompey in 49-45 BCE made him the most powerful man in Rome and thus, the senate had to accept his motion of being made 'Dictator' followed shortly by 'Dictator for Life.'¹¹ He reinvented the concept of dictatorship which was previously a set period of time to resemble the autocratic regime now known to the modern public, as the sole ruler for as long as one lives.¹²

INTRODUCTION:

"Veni, Vidi, Vici." or 'I came, I saw, I conquered' - Gaius Julius Caesar¹

Beginning in 69 BCE. Caesar rose in the Roman *cursus honorum*,² first as *quaestor* then to the rank of *aedile* and subsequently *pontifex maximus* (one in-charge of state religion) in 63 BCE marking his beginning of ascendancy of power.³ Historian Robert C.L. Holmes says Caesar lived through the barbaric invasion of Rome undertaken by General Sulla forcing him to escape and ultimately join the Roman forces with the North Europeans in the Gallic Region of modern day France.⁴ His command during the successful repression of the invading Helvetii tribe, pressured the existing senate of Rome into acknowledging his

¹ Östenberg, Ida. "VENI VIDI VICI AND CAESAR'S TRIUMPH." *The Classical Quarterly*, vol. 63, no. 2, 2013, pp. 813-827., doi:10.1017/S0009838813000281.

² (Latin word for the levels of administrative positions of ancient Rome)

³ *A Timeline of the Life of Julius Caesar*. www.sjsu.edu/faculty/watkins/caesarjulius.htm.

⁴ Ibid.

leadership and military prowess.⁵ Historian Plutarch states that along with his military acumen, the political backing of the financially affluent Marcus Licinius Crassus and the then consul of Rome, general Pompey allowed him to gain a strong foothold in the Roman senate system.⁶ Researcher Phillips states that Caesar's mighty conquest of Gaul (58-50 BC), was followed by his refusal to disband his war legions against what contemporary practice suggested, thus opposing the senate; breeding a civil war in ancient Rome which became the epicentre of his renowned military exploits.⁷ Caesar consequently attained the highest position in Rome, that of consul, in 59 BCE with the guarantee of being given a province to rule, by the senate.⁸ These military achievements allowed Caesar to create and enforce his influence not only on the populace but paved the way for convenient eradication of his competitors. "He (Caesar) played on Pompey's frailties cleverly and offered to resign his command."⁹ Apprehensive of the resulting complications and the threat to stability of the administration, "...the Senate dared not entertain such an offer."¹⁰ The subsequent win against Pompey in 49-45 BCE made him the most powerful man in Rome and thus, the senate had to accept his motion of being made 'Dictator' followed shortly by 'Dictator for Life.'¹¹ He reinvented the concept of dictatorship which was previously a set period of time to resemble the autocratic regime now known to the modern public, as the sole ruler for as long as one lives.¹²

The varied achievements in the military and political realms have led historians to debate the underlying reason for Caesar assuming the role of dictator. Ancient Roman historian, Adrian Goldsworthy, claims that the rise and consolidation of Julius Caesar's rule was due to military victories, political alliances, and strategic scheming.¹³ Historian Appian of Alexandria¹⁴ an advocate of the second century, Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, Roman biographer and antiquarian¹⁵ and Howard H. Scullard, Professor of Ancient History at King's College London have backed the claim that the *military* conquests of Caesar played a more significant role in getting him the title of the supreme dictator for life as the Romans determined their leader's worth with the number of war conquests they held.¹⁶ Appian¹⁷ and Suetonius¹⁸ both glorify Caesar's military strategies, by comparison and by Caesar's approach to adversities respectively.

⁵ *Caesar in Gaul*. penelope.uchicago.edu/~grout/encyclopaedia_romana/britannia/miscellanea/caesar.html.

⁶ Phillips, Freedom-Kai, "A general's self-depiction: The political strategies of Gaius Julius Caesar as seen in the *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*" (2004). Senior Honors Theses & Projects. 109. <https://commons.emich.edu/honors/109>

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *A Timeline of the Life of Julius Caesar*. www.sjsu.edu/faculty/watkins/caesarjulius.htm.

⁹ Collins, H. P. "Decline and Fall of Pompey the Great." *Greece & Rome*, vol. 22, no. 66, 1953, pp. 98–106. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/641489>. Accessed 12 Dec. 2023.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Plutarch, M., & D., R. W. H. (1900). *Life of caesar*. Blackie.

¹² *Teach Democracy*. www.crf-usa.org/bill-of-rights-in-action/bria-8-4-b-democracy-and-dictatorship-in-ancient-rome.

¹³ Goldsworthy, Adrian, and Adrian Goldsworthy Ltd. *Caesar*. Hachette UK, 2013.

¹⁴ Welch, Kathryn. *Appian's Roman History*. Classical Press of Wales, 2015.

¹⁵ Suetonius, G., & Ihm, M. (1993a). *De Vita Caesarum: Libri VIII*. Teubner.

¹⁶ Galasso, Vittorio Nicholas. "Honor and The Performance of Roman State Identity." *Foreign Policy Analysis*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2012, pp. 173–89. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24910815>. Accessed 12 Dec. 2023.

¹⁷ *Appian on Caesar and Alexander - Livius*.

¹⁸ https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Suetonius/12Caesars/Julius*.Html. penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Suetonius/12Caesars/Julius*.html.

This argument is countered by historians Maria Wyke,¹⁹ Greek and Latin professor at University College London and Richard Billows,²⁰ Professor of history at Columbia along with Michael Parenti,²¹ PhD in Political Science from Yale writing about the overweighting influence of his *political* intrigues resulting in his rise as he built his imperial system from the grassroots.²² Wyke makes her stance by highlighting Caesar's "self promotion in pursuit of *fama*"²³ while Billows²⁴ and Parenti accentuate Caesar's "struggle for popular reforms"²⁵ as the reason for his rise to power.

Yet another perspective by Plutarch depicts Caesar as a 'power hungry and arrogant man'²⁶ whose rise to power was to do more with his ambition of becoming the sole dictator and ruler than his military and/or political exploits.²⁷ Professor of ancient history in University of London M. Cary²⁸ also inferred that "the germs of his monarchical ambition were laid in his long term as a virtual autocrat in Gaul"²⁹ highlighting that Caesar's own ambitions were the greatest and the most significant propellant in his career to become the dictator of the Republic.

Taking into consideration the above mentioned arguments, the research question that this investigation aims to answer is- "*To what extent were Caesar's military tactics more effective than political propaganda and leadership in the establishment of his dictatorial regime? (44 BCE)*" which will evaluate the military, political and strategic aspects of the ascension.

The worthiness of this research lies in the fact that exploring the rise of Caesar marks a significant turning point in comprehending the intricacies of the concept of dictatorship, referred to as 'Caesarism,' the term being the early synonym of Fascism and/or Bonapartism.³⁰ Caesar set precedent to become a dictator by having multitude military accomplishments, public favour and eradication of opposition which was followed throughout centuries by people with similar ambitions. Thus, investigating his dictatorship provides more insight into the authoritarian form of governance. Additionally, it explores his initiation of economic and social policies that as believed by Parenti 'have become a common standard for rulers.'³¹

A range of sources were consulted to arrive at a reasoned conclusion. Julius Caesar's autobiography,³² research by Kurt A. Raaflaub, Professor Emeritus of classics and history at Brown University,³³ and Arthur

¹⁹ Wyke, M. (2008). *Caesar: A life in western culture*. The University of Chicago Press.

²⁰ Billows, R. A. (2012). *Julius Caesar: The colossus of rome*. Routledge.

²¹ Parenti, M. (1970, January 1). *The assassination of Julius Caesar: A people's history of ancient rome : Parenti, Michael, 1933- : Free download, Borrow, and streaming. Internet Archive.*
<https://archive.org/details/assassinationofj00mich/page/n7/mode/2up>

²² *Chris Gray: Review - the Assassination of Julius Caesar*. www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/backiss/vol8/no4/gray.html.

²³ "Caesar: A Life in Western Culture by Maria Wyke, an Excerpt." *Caesar: A Life in Western Culture by Maria Wyke, an Excerpt*, press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/921532.html.

²⁴ Billows, Richard A. *Julius Caesar: The Colossus of Rome*. Routledge, 2008. Bowker.

²⁵ "Book Review: Maybe Caesar Wasn't Such a Bad Guy, After All." *People's World*, 22 Nov. 2003, www.peoplesworld.org/article/book-review-maybe-caesar-wasn-t-such-a-bad-guy-after-all.

²⁶ Montgomery, D. (2020, September 27). *How does Plutarch describe Caesar?*. Gzipwtf.com. <https://gzipwtf.com/how-does-plutarch-describe-caesar/>

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ M.Cary, *A History Of Rome*, Macmillan, London, 1949.

²⁹ M.Cary, *A History Of Rome*, Macmillan, London, 1949.

³⁰ Yavetz, Zvi. "Caesar, Caesarism, and the Historians." *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1971, pp. 187–188. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/259642>. Accessed 18 Dec. 2023.

³¹ *Chris Gray: Review - the Assassination of Julius Caesar*. www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/backiss/vol8/no4/gray.html.

³² Caesar, Julius. *The Complete Works of Julius Caesar*. 2017,

³³ Raaflaub, Kurt. *War And Society in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*. 1999,

Kahn, visiting Professor of Classics, assisted in understanding various aspects of the dictatorship.³⁴ Books by Robert M. Max, Professor of Classics in University of California,³⁵ and Fergus Millar, Professor of ancient history at UCL and PhD from Oxford³⁶ provided insight into Caesar's political schematics. Books by Tom Stevenson, Associate Professor at University of Queensland,³⁷ William G. Sinniger, Classicist and Roman historian,³⁸ Nathan Rosenstein, specialist in Roman Republic and Early Empire³⁹ assisted in understanding the military factors resulting in Caesar's rise. Ambition as an important factor was best explained by Adrian Goldsworthy, D. Phil. in ancient military history from the University of Oxford,⁴⁰ Theodore Mommsen, German historian and writer,⁴¹ and Plutarch, biographer and author.⁴² Articles by Vittorio Nicholas,⁴³ published in the Foreign Policy Journal, research papers by Kelly Baird⁴⁴ and Herbert W. Benario, followed by blogs like "Caesar: The First Leader of Rome,"⁴⁵ "A Timeline of the Life of Julius Caesar"⁴⁶ also helped in furthering the analysis.

However, as bias and selective evidence is ingrained in the historians' methodology, this will be handled through corroborating information from varied historians and perspectives with different ideologies, backgrounds and institutions.

INVESTIGATION:

MILITARY TACTICS:

Military tactics formed the backbone of Caesar's prowess in his ascension as corroborated by historian Suetonius claimed Caesar "treated his troops with a mixture of severity and indulgence" and would maintain their vigilance by keeping them in action despite no real need, to purposely tire them out to push their limits and shape them into better soldiers.⁴⁷ Nathan Rosenstein supports the greatness of Caesar's military regimen as the basis of his military policy. His readiness "...to declare the lapses in their (soldier's) discipline" that had "...gotten them into trouble"⁴⁸ effectively conveyed the reflective and self accepting nature of Caesar as a quality that allowed him to grow rather than be stunted after a lost battle.⁴⁹ Suetonius further states that even the Roman public held military successes higher than "... the lives of its soldiers" showing the importance of military accomplishments as a tool to gain the support of the public and an

³⁴ Kahn, Arthur David. *The Education of Julius Caesar*. Schocken, 1986.

³⁵ Rosenstein, Nathan, and Robert Morstein-Marx. *A Companion to the Roman Republic*. John Wiley and Sons, 2011,

³⁶ Millar, Fergus. *The Emperor in the Roman World, 31 BC-AD 337*. 1977,

³⁷ Stevenson, Tom. *Julius Caesar and the Transformation of the Roman Republic*. Routledge, 2014,

³⁸ Baird, Kelly. "Lessons in Leadership: Julius Caesar, Niccolo Machiavelli, and Napoleon Bonaparte." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, Elsevier BV, 1996. *Crossref*, doi:10.2139/ssrn.3226610.

³⁹ Rosenstein, Nathan. *Rome at War*. Univ of North Carolina Press, 2005,

⁴⁰ Goldsworthy, Adrian, and Adrian Goldsworthy Ltd. *Caesar*. Hachette UK, 2013.

⁴¹ Theodor Mommsen, *Roman History*, Volume 3

⁴² Plutarch. *Plutarch's Life of Julius Caesar*. 1915.

⁴³ Galasso, Vittorio Nicholas. "Honor and The Performance of Roman State Identity." *Foreign Policy Analysis*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2012, pp. 173–89. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24910815>. Accessed 12 Dec. 2023.

⁴⁴ *ibid*.

⁴⁵ "Caesar: The First Leader of Rome." *Omnia Rome and Vatican Pass*, romeandvaticanpass.com/en-us/blog/caesar-first-leader-rome.

⁴⁶ *A Timeline of the Life of Julius Caesar*. www.sjsu.edu/faculty/watkins/caesarjulius.htm.

⁴⁷ Suetonius, *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, A. Thompson and E. Forester trans., Vol I, LXV

⁴⁸ Rosenstein, Nathan Stewart. *Imperatores Victi: Military Defeat and Aristocratic Competition in the Middle and Late Republic*. 1990. *Bowker*, doi:10.1604/9780585139869.

⁴⁹ Rosenstein, Nathan Stewart. *Imperatores Victi: Military Defeat and Aristocratic Competition in the Middle and Late Republic*. 1990. *Bowker*, doi:10.1604/9780585139869.

essential step for dictatorial control.⁵⁰ Caesar's approach to the battlefield and the concept of Roman virtue validate the training of his soldiers. "The pragmatic concerns of an active commander sufficiently explain Caesar's emphasis on obedience."⁵¹ Mirroring his claims, Tom Stevenson points out that "professionalism" with his legions and "decisive and bold" decision-making as a commander were qualities that made Caesar a successful military general and subsequently as dictator.⁵²

Raaflaub mentions that during the war in Gaul, Caesar was accused of genocide, leading the senate to propose a committee to investigate his actions.⁵³ Even though these allegations turned a section of the senate against him, yet as mentioned by Stevenson, this astute mix of "...brilliance and recklessness"⁵⁴ in Caesar's personality demonstrated that the general was not beyond human capabilities of mistake yet his triumphs reigned over them, bringing him crucial public support.

Franz Steiner Verlag⁵⁵ talks about the effective and long lasting battle intelligence initiative which set Caesar apart from all the other generals in his era as he "... played a major role in developing and exploiting the Roman war machine, and the...use of military intelligence."⁵⁶ His incorporation of prisoners of war, messengers, "explorators"⁵⁷ (personal bodyguards) made his information network extremely effective and focused. This pioneering and unconventional method was instrumental in enabling Caesar an effective control and consolidation of Rome and went a long way in establishing his dictatorship.

Furthermore, the conquest of Gaul has also been considered by both ancient and modern historians as the theatre of achievements where he became the cynosure of the Roman public and senate. The extensive occupation of land undertaken by Caesar translated into public support as the Romans, as stated by W.J. Tatum⁵⁸ valued "the complex of *gloria*, *virtus* and *honor*... and especially Roman militarism and imperialism."⁵⁹ The Roman 'virtus' was centred around border goals and conquests which was enhanced by Caesar's vision mentioned in his self documentaries to help his growing prestige as a leader desired by Rome.

Therefore, "under Caesar's leadership, the territories of the Roman Empire extended as far as Europe, Asia and Africa"⁶⁰ bringing Roman imperialism to its pinnacle. His belief was that with increased land and military victories, there would be a consequent increase in popularity which would permit him a strong foothold in the senate as a people's elect. His successes gained him legions which elevated his status while simultaneously boosting his hierarchy in Rome.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ "Caesar in Gaul and Rome: War in Words – Bryn Mawr Classical Review." *Caesar in Gaul and Rome: War in Words – Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, bmc.brynmawr.edu/2006/2006.09.32.

⁵² "Julius Caesar and the Transformation of the Roman Republic – Bryn Mawr Classical Review." *Julius Caesar and the Transformation of the Roman Republic – Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, bmc.brynmawr.edu/2015/2015.07.27.

⁵³ "Caesar and Genocide: Confronting the Dark Side of Caesar's Gallic Wars" by Kurt a. Raaflaub. crossworks.holycross.edu/necj/vol48/iss1/6.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ "Germanicus Caesar | 400013446." *Franz Steiner Verlag*, www.steiner-verlag.de/en/Germanicus-Caesar/9783515134460.

⁵⁶ Amiram Ezov. "The 'Missing Dimension' of C. Julius Caesar." *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte*, vol. 45, no. 1, 1996, pp. 64–94. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4436407>. Accessed 17 July 2023.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ Tatum, W. Jeffrey. *Always I Am Caesar*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2008. *Bowker*, doi:10.1604/9781405175258.

⁵⁹ "Always I Am Caesar – Bryn Mawr Classical Review." *Always I Am Caesar – Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, bmc.brynmawr.edu/2009/2009.03.56.

⁶⁰ "Exhibition Introduces Military Genius of Julius Caesar (With Photos)." *Exhibition Introduces Military Genius of Julius Caesar* (With Photos), www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201212/06/P201212060364.htm#:~:text=His%20conquests%20are%20partly%20attributed,structures%20such%20as%20the%20Colosseum.

Thus, Caesar's military exploits played an impactful role in his ascendancy as it allowed him the first strong foothold in the continuous power struggle of the senate exemplified by Pompey's competitiveness;⁶¹ it gave him an advantageous edge over the other ambitious political figures. Riggsby, professor of classics in university of Texas quotes Caesar's self documented accounts of Gaul and claims that Caesar "succeed[s]ed in ways typical of Roman aristocrats...by being uniquely outstanding..."⁶² This goes to show Caesar's commitment to presenting himself as an exemplary military leader that had the capacity to bring 'gloria, virtus and honor'⁶³ to Roman imperialism. This careful manoeuvring of military brutality whilst keeping himself as an ideal candidate for leadership thus brought him to concoct an interplay between militarism and politics as is reflected in his self documentations of Gaul and the Civil Wars and words of other historians.

POLITICAL PROPAGANDA AND LEADERSHIP:

Plutarch believed that the Roman political system during Caesar's reign was "very fluid and a ripe occasion for a situational leader to promote his rule."⁶⁴ Caesar was not only a skilled military commander but also a prolific politician and his main political propellant was propaganda. K.A. Raaflaub has vehemently stated how Caesar's works, the *Comentarii de Bello Gallico* and *Civil War*, were used by the dictator to further his political agenda.⁶⁵ Syme elaborates that "...the purpose of propaganda was threefold-to win an appearance of legality, to seduce the supporters of a rival party and to stampede the neutral or non-political elements."⁶⁶ Caesar wrote extensively about his campaigns in Gaul, crafting a narrative of his victories and portraying himself as a heroic figure as believed by British historian C.E. Stevens, to promote himself as a suitable candidate for election.⁶⁷ The *Comentarii de Bello Gallico* that has details about the annexation of Gaul, glorifies and exaggerates his conquest in comparison to the actual struggle.⁶⁸ Caesar applauds his achievements over the Belgae tribe whom he considers to be "...the bravest/strongest" in order to prove his worth as a general and showcase his leadership qualities in the war and increase in prestige.⁶⁹ The war itself, as Canfora believes, was documented by Caesar as a means to '...spread propaganda back home' while he himself was physically occupied in Gaul.⁷⁰ Fuller acknowledged, "...Gaul...at the time...was little more than a stepping stone... [which] was why he ...would winter in Cisalpine Gaul in order to retain touch with political events"⁷¹ highlighting his personal priority of political

⁶¹ Collins, H. P. "Decline and Fall of Pompey the Great." *Greece & Rome*, vol. 22, no. 66, 1953, pp. 98–106. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/641489>. Accessed 13 Dec. 2023.

⁶² "Caesar in Gaul and Rome: War in Words – Bryn Mawr Classical Review." *Caesar in Gaul and Rome: War in Words – Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, bmc.brynmawr.edu/2006/2006.09.32.

⁶³ "Always I Am Caesar – Bryn Mawr Classical Review." *Always I Am Caesar – Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, bmc.brynmawr.edu/2009/2009.03.56.

⁶⁴ Plutarch. *Plutarch's Life of Julius Caesar*. 1915.

⁶⁵ Raaflaub, Kurt A. "Caesar, Literature, and Politics at the End of the Republic." *The Cambridge Companion to the Writings of Julius Caesar*, edited by Luca Grillo and Christopher B. Krebs, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2017, pp. 13–28. Cambridge Companions to Literature.

⁶⁶ Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford 1939) 154.

⁶⁷ Stevens, C. E. "The « Bellum Gallicum » as a Work of Propaganda." *Latomus*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1952, pp. 3–18. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41519700>. Accessed 15 Dec. 2023.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Caesar, Gaius Iulius. *Commentarii De Bello Gallico ...* 1519,

⁷⁰ *Julius Caesar's Propaganda in the Civil War*. 19 Feb. 2021, www.ipl.org/essay/Julius-Caesars-Propaganda-In-The-Civil-War-PCU3TLUZT.

⁷¹ Baird, Kelly. "Lessons in Leadership: Julius Caesar, Niccolo Machiavelli, and Napoleon Bonaparte." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, Elsevier BV, 1996. *Crossref*, doi:10.2139/ssrn.3226610.

ascension rather than military glory when away from home. Caesar's physical absence from Rome put him at a disadvantage, thus the war of propaganda was concocted, through which Caesar sought to maintain his image on the Roman public. This, according to Canfora, was also a means for Caesar to "...protect(ion) his reputation"⁷² which was threatened by the breakdown of the erstwhile first triumvirate of Pompey, Crassus and Caesar, with all three turning into political competitors.⁷³ Plutarch also believed that "Caesar had long ago resolved upon the overthrow of Pompey"⁷⁴ whom he had used for acquiring military acumen to rise in the echelons of power in Rome. "Pompey's death meant that the primary opposition to Caesar's rule was eliminated, and he was free to consolidate his power over Rome."⁷⁵

The Gallic Wars imbued Caesar's personal treasuries with "...immense personal wealth...[which helped]...expand his influence within Rome."⁷⁶ Caesar "completely dedicated himself to politics"⁷⁷ upon his return to Rome in 60 BCE, employing all available human and financial resources to work his way up the political ladder. As *pontifex maximus* which he was elected to in 63 BCE, it was his duty to maintain *pax deorum*.⁷⁸ Being elected *pontifex* meant that Caesar was a likeable political candidate by the Romans since one could only be elected by a popular vote. His popularity further led him to be deployed "to Europe to quell the revolts and stabilise the area. Caesar proved successful and gained further political support that he needed"⁷⁹ for achieving his ultimate aim of being dictator.

In the *Comentarii* there is a visible shift in Caesar's attitude "...and perception of the Gauls in a negative manner...to justify his first battle with the Helvetians."⁸⁰ His commentaries make Caesar come forth as an appealing ruler rather than a ruthless one who succeeded in the subsequent elections. Caesar also led campaigns for unconventional yet popular reforms for the general public of the empire "...including the founding of new settlements" for the needy, helping with financial easing, "setting up public works projects to lower unemployment at home and abroad" and granting religious freedom.⁸¹ This acted as a backdrop for popularity in the general Roman public.

Caesar's propaganda did not stop at the written text but extended into spoken word. Although his speeches have hardly any fragments documented, "Cicero, himself a master of oratory, remarked on the "chaste, pellucid, and grand, not to say noble" quality of Caesar's eloquence as a speaker."⁸² Caesar also used his propaganda to manipulate poetic hostility at the grassroot level in his favour, as the poets, crucial in

⁷² *Julius Caesar's Propaganda in the Civil War* | ipl.org. www.ipl.org/essay/Julius-Caesars-Propaganda-In-The-Civil-War-PCU3TLUZT.

⁷³ Benario, Herbert W. "Caesar, Propaganda, and the Poets." *The Classical Weekly*, vol. 50, no. 2, 1956, pp. 22–24. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4343857>. Accessed 20 Dec. 2023.

⁷⁴ Plutarch. *Plutarch's Life of Julius Caesar*. 1915.

⁷⁵ Davies, Hugh. "The Rise of Julius Caesar | Kinnu." *Kinnu*, 22 Aug. 2023, kinnu.xyz/kinnuverse/history/the-history-of-ancient-rome/the-rise-of-julius-caesar.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* .

⁷⁷ *Historpedia - Caesar's Rise to Power in Rome (Fall 2012)*. sites.google.com/a/umn.edu/historpedia/home/specific-individuals/caesar-s-rise-to-power-in-rome-fall-2012.

⁷⁸ Latin word for 'Peace with gods' in the Roman Republic

⁷⁹ *Historpedia - Caesar's Rise to Power in Rome (Fall 2012)*. sites.google.com/a/umn.edu/historpedia/home/specific-individuals/caesar-s-rise-to-power-in-rome-fall-2012.

⁸⁰ *Julius Caesar Propaganda Analysis - 1145 Words | 123 Help Me*. www.123helpme.com/essay/Julius-Caesar-Propaganda-Analysis-PJJYQHT3T.

⁸¹ "Book Review: Maybe Caesar Wasnt Such a Bad Guy, After All." *People's World*, 6 Oct. 2016, www.peoplesworld.org/article/book-review-maybe-caesar-wasnt-such-a-bad-guy-after-all.

⁸² Epstein, Joseph. "Big Julie | Joseph Epstein." *First Things*, 1 Apr. 2019, www.firstthings.com/article/2019/04/big-julie.

forming public opinion, were “bitterly opposed to him.”⁸³ It was not until later that even resentful poets like Catullus started writing more neutrally about Caesar’s exploits in c.54 BCE because “the proconsul had his way.”⁸⁴

The people of Rome elected Caesar consul in 59 BCE because he brought with him the show of power and the change that the Roman Republic needed for its transition to the Roman Empire. The military parade in a show of political strength after the victory against the Gaul was enough to prove to the people that he would cater to what they require.⁸⁵

Caesar gained popularity in the transitioning empire as he was the medium to connect the existing values of “superiority of its institutions, its language, army”⁸⁶ that were intrinsic to the Roman Republic with the deemed values of “... the demonstration of force, ...an ostentatious public manifestation of the potential as a military force” [which] Caesar had.”⁸⁷ This substantiated Caesar's political prowess which gave him the respect of the nation and its generals, post the two wars. His public image improved to a point where historians like Parenti have rebuked Cicero’s traditional elitist criticism of Caesar's reformative policies.⁸⁸ The Romans were also enthused with Caesar’s capability as a leader which backed his claims for dictatorship despite the begrudging senate of the Republic.

Caesar’s popularity with the working class of Rome because of his policies, helped him to be named Dictator for Life with full support of the Romans. Therefore, it is evident that Caesar used all the political means available to him to climb the ranks of the senate and he declared his military feats as a political catapult for ascension to dictatorship.

AMBITION:

Another argument put forth by German historian Christian Meir,⁸⁹ claims that the greed of absolute power led to Caesar’s ambitions extending to Roman lands and thus forming the first triumvirate with military generals Pompey and Crassus between 60-53 BCE.⁹⁰ Caesar’s ambition according to Professor G. Goodlad, of being “... the first man in a village...[rather] than second at Rome,”⁹¹ combined with his military strategies extending the Roman empire till the Atlantic coast were proof of his political ambitions. “Caesar was a notably ambitious leader, whose accomplishments and legacy stem from his drive for power, sense of self, and natural ability as a leader”⁹² bringing forward the claim that despite the tactical

⁸³ Benario, Herbert W. “Caesar, Propaganda, and the Poets.” *The Classical Weekly*, vol. 50, no. 2, 1956, pp. 22–24. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4343857>. Accessed 6 Sept. 2023.

⁸⁴ Spaeth, John W. “Caesar’s Friends and Enemies among the Poets.” *The Classical Journal*, vol. 32, no. 9, 1937, pp. 541–56. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3291468>. Accessed 20 Dec. 2023.

⁸⁵ “Julius Caesar - Claremont Review of Books.” *Claremont Review of Books*, claremontreviewofbooks.com/colossus/#:~:text=For%20some%2C%20he%20was%20indeed,w%20inevitable%20and%20even%20welcome.

⁸⁶ “Propaganda of the Ancient Roman World.” *Brewminate: A Bold Blend of News and Ideas*, 4 Sept. 2018, brewminate.com/propaganda-of-the-ancient-roman-world.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ Parenti, Michael. *The Assassination of Julius Caesar*. The New Press, 2004.

⁸⁹ Meier, Christian. *Caesar*. CUP Archive

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ Goodlad, G. (2019, July 7). *Great commanders: Julius Caesar*. The Past. <https://the-past.com/feature/great-commanders-julius-caesar/#:~:text=Caesar%27s%20greatest%20achievement%2C%20between%2058,a%20century%20before%20Caesar%27s%20birth>.

⁹² “Julius Caesar Ambitions.” *952 Words | Internet Public Library*, 19 Feb. 2021, www.ipl.org/essay/Julius-Caesar-Ambitions-FC7GDDGZT.

military strategies and political boosts, Caesar's own ambitious personality played a huge role propelling his rise. According to Billows, professor of History at Columbia University, despite being a patrician Caesar's lack of wealth contributed to his poor social hierarchy in the system.⁹³ Caesar's ambition set him apart from his peers who were trying to achieve a similar if not a domineering position in the emerging Empire of Rome. Much like Crassus and Pompey, Caesar coveted the position of power as consul to begin his journey "yet Pompey sought applause and fame rather than power and influence, whereas Caesar, the more ambitious man, sought and eventually gained all four."⁹⁴ Caesar's ambition was not unfounded, his strategic talent and oratory skills that were even acknowledged by Cicero laid the groundwork for the same. "Julius Caesar was one of those rarest of rare human beings whose talent was up to his ambition, and in his case that ambition was towering."⁹⁵ With the amount of military aggression Caesar portrayed it would be assumed he was out of favour with the general public but instead William Sinniger stated, "although he was ruthless and cold-blooded... his personal charms... [brought him the] loyalty and solidarity among his political adherents."⁹⁶ Caesar, as a military general before a politician, was thus a perfect fit for the Republic's need of a disciplined leader due to its tumultuous state of political reformation. He appealed to these augmenting sentiments through his documentaries as well as "present[s]ing himself as disciplined and imperturbable."⁹⁷

Mommsen believes that "It goes without saying that Caesar was a passionate man, for without passion there is no genius; but his passion has never been more powerful than he."⁹⁸ Despite being a prolific writer, he only utilised his expertise for dictatorial ambitions keeping aside his mortal hobbies and focus on his drive and ambition for power. Majority of Caesar's political and/or military feats were encouraged by his ambition to be in power and be the leader. As mentioned by Plutarch his aggressive and confident approach against his enemies were based on his ambition and passion to make Rome the greatest.⁹⁹ His personality was what appealed to the Republic and its people, with historians like Suetonius often referring to Caesar as the ideal Roman.¹⁰⁰ Suetonius believes "that '...benefactions, and public works are commonly listed... as imperial virtues'"¹⁰¹ and Caesar embodied all of his criterias. In his *commentariis*, "comparing himself to the great king, [...] Alexander"¹⁰² goes to show his want for a similar kind of fame and power, playing into his personality as a key element for his ambition.

Ironically, his own unchecked ambition set the precedent for his fall, Caesar "was surrounded by the conspirators at a meeting of the senate and cut down with twenty-three stab wounds"¹⁰³ under just a year of his title as Dictator for Life in 44 BCE. His ambition was not only limited to power, it extended into his

⁹³ <https://bmc.brynmawr.edu/2009/2009.07.29/>

⁹⁴ Epstein, Joseph. "Big Julie | Joseph Epstein." *First Things*, 1 Apr. 2019, www.firstthings.com/article/2019/04/big-julie.

⁹⁵ Epstein, Joseph. "Big Julie | Joseph Epstein." *First Things*, 1 Apr. 2019, www.firstthings.com/article/2019/04/big-julie.

⁹⁶ Baird, Kelly. "Lessons in Leadership: Julius Caesar, Niccolo Machiavelli, and Napoleon Bonaparte." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, Elsevier BV, 1996. *Crossref*, doi:10.2139/ssrn.3226610.

⁹⁷ Caesar's Civil War – Bryn Mawr Classical Review." *Caesar's Civil War – Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, bmc.brynmawr.edu/2007/2007.08.03.

⁹⁸ Theodor Mommsen, *Roman History*, Volume 3

⁹⁹ *Plutarch • Life of Caesar*. penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Caesar*.html.

¹⁰⁰ Bradley, K. R. "Review Article: The Rediscovery of Suetonius." *Classical Philology*, vol. 80, no. 3, 1985, pp. 254–65. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/269862>. Accessed 20 Nov. 2023.

¹⁰¹ *ibid*

¹⁰² Forbes, James. "James Forbes on Not Losing the Prophetic Perspective." *Tikkun*, vol. 24, no. 1, Duke UP, Jan. 2009, pp. 54–56. *Crossref*, doi:10.1215/08879982-2009-1030.

¹⁰³ *Roman Emperors - DIR Augustus*. roman-emperors.sites.luc.edu/auggie.htm.

need for validation by the Romans, he paraded around Rome wearing his wreath rather than a crown to show humility and remain in people's favour.¹⁰⁴ "Caesar's unrelenting lust for conquest and achievement drives his career"¹⁰⁵ aptly summing up the crucial role ambition played in his ascension to power.

CONCLUSION:

Caesar's leadership bejewelled the crown of the Roman Republic's legacies despite the multifarious obstacles of the contemporary era disrupting his path. The structure of the Roman Republic itself was crumbling due to its need for transition; thus, besides political propaganda and military achievements "Caesar's ambition is [thereby] presented as part of the larger historical forces of his time."¹⁰⁶ He utilised all the resources at his disposal to build and attain the position he desired in the Roman Republic.

Romans flourished under Caesar's leadership, he took the approach to prove himself as the people's leader rather than the political senate's which undeniably granted him the advantage of public support at the grassroots level in the Republic. With *military strategies* and *political acumen* in his arsenal, it can be rationally concluded that Caesar worked thoroughly to satisfy his *ambitions* within the framework and conditions provided by the Republic aiding him in achieving his goal of becoming dictator.

Caesar's military victories characterised his strategic intelligence, discipline and capacity to find the favour of the military faction. However, it was his grasp of political stratagem that permitted him to use to his advantage the flaws in the pertaining Roman Republic. His speeches, writings like the *commentariis*, and propaganda helped present him as a dynamic and capable leader. Caesar's desire, propellant for his unquenchable thirst for power pushed him to achieve all that he did despite the hurdles in his military and political life.

It is unjustifiable to fully credit Caesar's ascendancy to one of the three factors, granted the complexity of each of them. Rather, his dictatorship came into being due to an amalgamation of the mutually beneficial link between his military might, political manoeuvring and unrelenting ambition. Thus in response to the research question "*To what extent were Caesar's military tactics more effective than political propaganda and leadership in the establishment of his dictatorial regime? (44 BCE)*" it can be safely concluded that it was a synthesis of all military and political propaganda inculcated into ambition which led to the establishment of Caesar's dictatorial regime.

The scope of this investigation was **limited** to researching the *causes* of his dictatorship, with not much emphasis on the *continuity* of his leadership, ideology and philosophies. Another limitation of the research is the lack of exploration into the socio-cultural background to Caesar's rise which on many occasions had an important bearing on his ultimate rise, rationalising his ascend from a foundational level.

The **scope for future research** extends to the study of Caesarism or the philosophies and ideologies of Caesar himself which determined the pathway for future dictators. Caesar was instrumental in sparking the transition of Rome from a Republic to an Empire, and influenced modern governance, leadership and public administration, providing insight into the legacies of modern day executive authority, which too will provide scope for future research.

¹⁰⁴ Plutarch. *Plutarch's Life of Julius Caesar*. 1915, p.585-587

¹⁰⁵ Buszard, Bradley. "Caesar's Ambition: A Combined Reading of Plutarch's 'Alexander-Caesar' and 'Pyrrhus-Marius?'" *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974-), vol. 138, no. 1, 2008, pp. 185-215. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40212079>. Accessed 20 Nov. 2023.

¹⁰⁶ *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*. bmc.brynmawr.edu/2007/2007.08.03.

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First Reflection

I developed a fascination for Julius Caesar while reading the play in IB English. Studying Hitler in IB History led me to connect the similarities between their ascension, sparking an intrigue about the process of rise and consolidation of dictators through centuries. My initial research led me to question the scarce historical evidence contrasted with overwhelming literary sources available for the Roman leader. So my biggest challenge was to remain confined to history and not get swayed by literature! The librarian introduced me to 'The Twelve Caesars' and 'Always I am Caesar,' providing a historical background to the dictator. I had to carefully articulate a RQ and maintain the historical focus even though on initial research historiography and primary documentation were lacking. 123

Interim Reflection

As I anticipated, most of the sources fictionalised and romanticised most details about Caesar prompting me to dig further for actual historical sources as recommended by my supervisor. Once I discovered these sources I was spoiled for choice, but I had to remain focussed on material relevant for my exploration, namely factors relating to personality and the military. After my initial exploratory research I recognised the value of cross-checking my claims at multiple levels due to abundant falsities and interplay of fact and fiction. Another prominent and recurring challenge I faced was related to getting accurate translations of ancient historians Plutarch and Suetonius' works, who had written in ancient Greek. This led me to articles, and research papers along with the mandatory dictionary. These roadblocks led me to re-evaluate the RQ and I decided to have a clearer focus by further dividing personality into propaganda and ambition which aligned better with the available sources. 153

Final Reflection:

Completing my essay went from an exciting feat to an overwhelmingly satisfying one. This process has taught me to be reflective, open-minded while remaining principled. Initially disenchanted with the lack of credibility of the information available on the internet that I browsed, I am proud that I persevered and learnt the vital skill of research- to curb my instincts to flood the essay with irrelevant and spurious sources but remain focussed on the RQ at all times. Another personal take-away is that I attained peace with my inner child who used to read Percy Jackson to gain knowledge about the Greco-Roman world! My personal victory lay in acknowledging that self-management was not my strong point and needed attention- as I constantly had to rush to adhere to deadlines. The completion of this essay was a pertinent symbol of my personal growth as a history student, and aspiring historian, having been enthused by the subject since my preteens. My EE made me conscientious of the fine line between history and historical literature- making me interpret information in a more scholarly manner. The final conclusion that the rise to power of Caesar was a healthy combination of his persistent ambition, political strategies and military acumen teaches a vital lesson that history is never created single-handedly but is a result of efforts from all quarters. 222

Teachers' Comments

Even though initially my student displayed only a literary interest in the topic, by the end of the process it was a pleasure to see her immerse herself completely in the analysis. A complete U-turn in her critical thinking and communication skills was another important learning. Her ability to take up the challenge of re-evaluating her sources to get to the core of the exploration and making extensive notes on her mind-map were beneficial as she managed to internalise her material thoroughly. As a supervisor I was impressed by her overall growth graph.