

The Fall of the Roman Republic

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How did crises change ancient societies?

How did key individuals contribute to such events?

How might we judge the historical significance of these crises and the individuals who took part in them?¹

Historical significance

Why did the Roman Republic fall? This question was of great interest to the Romans themselves, both at the time and later. The best starting point is Andrew Lintott's chapter 1, 'The crisis of the Republic: sources and source-problems' in *CAH* 9 (that is, volume 9 of the second edition of the *Cambridge Ancient History*, published in 1992).² Roman explanations were primarily moral rather than structural, which at first glance might seem to lack explanatory power. Yet these explanations are worth thinking through, and not simply dismissing: often today we might posit psychological conditions as one factor in creating history, or at least in creating the parameters within which historical actors make their choices, and that is a similar explanation. One of the Roman explanations took as its theme the growth of empire. One version of this blamed the moral corruption arising from greed and luxury: Romans increasingly tended to their private desires rather than public duty. Another version was that the destruction of Carthage in 146, and Rome's position as undisputed hegemon of

the Mediterranean, meant there was no longer anyone for the Romans to fear, which in turn meant that Rome lost her discipline. Another theme blamed greed and ambition for Rome's problems: greed and success had made some men very rich and others very poor. The rich had appetites which the Republic could not contain, while they also became corrupt, and the poor had nothing to lose from change. A similar theme blamed the ambitions of the great men who brought down their Republic: they were no longer content to be renowned in a free state, but wanted to dominate their fellow-citizens.

Most modern scholars have not accepted these explanations. But many causes have been blamed for the collapse of the Republic, too many to list here. Lintott's *CAH* chapter briefly outlines some of them, but the *Blackwell Companion to the Roman Republic* is a better source. Such companions tend to be uneven, but this one is excellent, and thoroughly recommended. The first chapter (by Martin Jehne) and the last (by Robert Morstein-Marx and Nathan Rosenstein) are particularly useful here.³ They point to three of the better known explanations over the past half-century: Peter Brunt's, Christian Meier's, and Erich Gruen's. Brunt's is contained implicitly in his book *Social Conflicts in the Roman Republic* (which has been widely used as a textbook), but his ideas are distilled in a long (90-page) essay in his 1988 book *The Fall of the Roman Republic*.⁴ For Brunt, the basic cause was that, during the late second and first centuries, the senatorial government had managed to alienate many politically important groups: the tax-farmers, the army, the urban poor, and so on, so that these groups lost faith in the Senate's ability to respond to their grievances and so were willing to give support to individual politicians working outside the Senate. The most important of these were Pompey and Caesar, who together brought the Republic down.

1 This article addresses one of the key questions in Area Study 2 of the new VCE Ancient History course (Units 3 & 4), specifically Rome in the 'People in Power, Societies in Crisis' section.

2 Lintott (1992).

3 Jehne (2006); Rosenstein & Morstein-Marx (2006).

4 Brunt (1971), (1988).

Meier's argument (presented in German in his 1966 book *Res publica amissa*) is more sophisticated, and responds to the fact that no-one we know of consciously wanted to destroy the Republic.⁵ Rather, because Romans were unable to conceive of an alternate form of government, they were unable to correct the political process when that process prevented certain problems from being addressed. This in turn meant that the problems facing Rome became bigger and more insoluble, until the Republic collapsed in war. Another point of view is presented by Erich Gruen's 1974 book *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic*, particularly the introduction and the chapter 'The coming of civil war'.⁶ Gruen's interpretation is, explicitly, born of his own observations while teaching in San Francisco in the late 1960s - that in the midst of revolutionary and countercultural change, it is the continuity of institutions and practices which is most striking. For Gruen, the Republic was successfully confronting the problems it experienced until the late 50s. Then, owing to a confluence of circumstances and individual intransigence, Caesar began a civil war against enemies, and it was as a result of that war that the Republic was destroyed. That is, civil war caused the end of the Republic, not the other way around.

Morstein-Marx and Rosenstein, in the chapter already mentioned, pose the interesting question that we might be mistaken in looking for the 'Fall' or 'End' of the Republic. Rather, it might be more helpful to think of a transformation in the Roman political system, over the course of the first century BCE - this leads us away from trying to pinpoint just when the Republic 'fell'. Harriet Flower, in her short and very interesting 2010 book *Roman Republics*, makes a similar point: we routinely speak of 'the crisis' of the Republic from the Gracchi onwards, but it is silly to speak of a

'crisis' lasting for a century.⁷ She suggests that rather than positing a 'Roman Republic' lasting from 509 to 27, we are better thinking of several republics, more or less successful. For Flower, 'the Republic of the *nobiles*' (aristocratic families) was destroyed by Sulla's march on Rome in 88: Sulla subsequently created a new republic system as dictator, which lasted in modified form for another generation, before civil war and a transitional triumviral period were eventually followed by the new, stable, Augustan Principate. Flower's book is certainly stimulating, and it seems to me she is right to point to the civil wars of the 80s as a turning point as significant as the civil wars of the 40s. Even speaking of earlier modern interpretations, the best of them considered the resolution of Rome's first-century instability by Augustus as a useful end-point (Brunt's 1988 essay, mentioned above, is very good on this). It is clear that taking this slightly longer view is more helpful (in terms of understanding the period) than simply saying that 'the Republic' ended in 49, or 44, or 31, and was immediately followed by 'the Empire'. That might be a useful way of dividing Roman history, but does not help us understand how the one was transformed into the other.

But for many historians, the outbreak of civil war in 49 is regarded as the main turning point (which is a valid point of view), and so discussions about how and why it happened have served as useful placeholders for discussions of historical causation. As should be clear, Gruen's explanation emphasises the role of accident and contingency in shaping the course of history: a particular political situation in 50 and 49 created a civil war, after which the Republic no longer existed, because the Republic was above all a civilian way of making political decisions. Meier's explanation leaves much more room for thinking about the grand processes of history, and is much closer to Marx's dictum that men make their own history, only not under circumstances of their own choosing. Still other explanations,

⁵ Meier (1980).

⁶ Gruen (1995).

⁷ Flower (2010).

such as Brunt's, involve a weakening of Rome's institutions, so that the Republic was not able to withstand the shocks that history confronted it with. Other explanations speak of preconditions for collapse, and triggers which activated them. All of these have some truth, depending on the questions one asks - there is certainly no consensus among Roman historians about how historical events are caused.

Another important question to ask is: what actually changed? How was the Rome, even the Roman politics, of (say) 23 BCE different from 133 BCE? To put it in Roman terms, the *res publica* ('public thing', or 'commonwealth', or 'state') had become a *res privata*: Augustus alone now made all the important decisions. However much he might not parade his power, no intelligent contemporary could fool himself that Augustus did not rule the world. To put it in Marxist terms, had there been a social revolution? Yes and no. While there had been no great change of class control, there had been, under Sulla's dictatorship (82-79) and even more in the early years of the triumvirate (43-36), enormous transfers of land ownership in Italy. In both 133 and 23 there was a ruling class based on ownership of land, but in between there had been great discontinuity in this class. That discontinuity had been accompanied by violence: losing one's land often meant losing one's head, too. For several decades, Roman historians were focused on tracing the individuals who made up the ruling class and their careers, a style of history called prosopography. The best English-language representative of this school is Sir Ronald Syme's 1939 book, *The Roman Revolution*.⁸ Syme aimed to explain Augustus' success as the triumph of the Augustan 'party' (his supporters). While many of Syme's beliefs about Roman politics appear outdated, I still thoroughly recommend this book: it is a superb account of the dramatic few years after Caesar's death, and it has a (deserved) reputation as the most stylishly written work of

Roman history in English.

Individuals - the Gracchi to Sulla

On Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, I turn initially to the *Blackwell Companion to the Roman Republic*, and to Konrad's chapter on the Gracchi and the following period: Konrad makes clear that it was not so much Tiberius' and Gaius' particular policies which aroused so much opposition, as their methods and especially the Senate's fear that, by seeking reelection to the tribunate, both men sought to perpetuate their power.⁹ The aristocracy's fear, then as always, was of an individual's *regnum* (domination, tyranny). Tiberius' agrarian law does not seem to have been disturbed after his death (although some parts of its implementation were opposed), and many of Gaius' laws survived him too. The greater significance of the brothers lies in the manner of their deaths and in how they were remembered. Tribunes were sacrosanct: the plebs swore an oath to avenge any harm done to them. Yet Tiberius' death (killed by a senatorial lynch mob led by the *pontifex maximus*) as well as Gaius' (forced to suicide by the consul operating under an extemporised senatorial decree authorising him to do whatever he felt necessary) grossly violated this sacrosanctity. The precedent was set (as has often been noted): political violence was normally initiated by the *optimates* (a term which is best rendered simply by its translation: the best men). We see here an example of what Meier argued: attempts at reform led to reactions which damaged the political process. One's attitude to the deaths of the Gracchi became something of a litmus test over succeeding generations: if there was a substantial difference between *optimates* and *populares* it lay here as much as anywhere. For example, in his correspondence and senatorial speeches Cicero speaks approvingly of Gaius Gracchus' suppression and the violence which accompanied it. Yet in his speeches to the People he represents the Gracchi as

8 Syme (1939).

9 Konrad (2006).

heroes and true benefactors to the Roman People (see Morstein-Marx's *Mass Oratory and Political Power*, a groundbreaking book on the way that public oratory functioned in the late Republic).¹⁰

The next significant figure is C. Marius, who received a largely negative press in antiquity - mainly because history was written by his enemy Sulla. Yet Marius' hero status in Rome can be discerned. It is fair to say that the place of military success in the ancient world was comparable to that of economic prosperity in the modern world: periods of victory brought wealth and confidence, while periods of defeat normally brought despair and political conflict. Rome's military fortunes in the second half of the second century were generally bad: the Spanish wars were an ulcer, unpopular and costly, while there was regular pressure in Macedonia, topped off by the disasters against the Cimbri and Teutoni at the end of the century. These culminated in the catastrophic defeat at Arausio in 105, in which upwards of 50,000 Italians died.¹¹ It is no wonder then that the nobility was under the popular pressure which Sallust describes in the *Jugurthine War*. C. Marius was Rome's saviour at this point - he defeated Jugurtha and then saved Italy from the barbarians, and it is vital to understand the background of defeat in order to properly appreciate just how much Marius' victories meant to Rome. Marius has not been prominent in recent scholarship, but Rawson gives a good account of the complicated religious situation in which his campaigns against the Cimbri took place.¹² Marius was the first of the great men of the late Republic to have a strong personal religious presence in Roman life, something which continued and expanded with Sulla, Pompeius and Caesar.¹³ A traditional area of interest is Marius' army

reforms: enlisting the poorest men in the army, changing the basic unit from the maniple to the cohort and making some changes to the heavy javelin (*pilum*).¹⁴ Marius' reforms have often been seen as the main reason why Rome was so much more successful militarily in the first century than it had been in the mid and late second. This may be the case. But it is also reasonable to suggest a higher standard of leadership: with the exception of Caesar, all the men responsible for Rome's military successes in the late Republic had served (whether as junior or senior officers) in the crucible of the Social War, a war in which the difference between good and bad generals was starkly apparent.

L. Cornelius Sulla is always the counterpart to Marius, and on Sulla there has been a great deal of work in recent decades. Sulla's march on Rome in 88 is traditionally seen as a turning-point in the fall of the Republic: as it was clashing armies which brought down the Republic, the first time that Roman soldiers attacked their own country is obviously very important. This event has been seen as the birth of the revolutionary, mercenary army, loyal to its general rather than to the state - as Badian put it, Marius had created an army of the landless with no tie to the *res publica*, but it was Sulla who turned it into a revolutionary force.¹⁵ But this thesis has been modified in recent years. Keaveney notes that soldiers viewed their commanders primarily as magistrates rather than as patrons - at least until circumstances of civil war offered up rivals to defect to.¹⁶ And Morstein Marx points similarly to the appeals by Sulla in 88 and Cinna in 87 to their soldiers, appeals which were much more about a soldier's (and a voter's) loyalty to the elected consul than a mercenary's loyalty to his paymaster.¹⁷ Indeed

¹⁰ Morstein-Marx (2004).

¹¹ Flower (2010), ch. 6.

¹² Rawson (1974).

¹³ Beard and North (1998), 1.140-9; Flower (2010), 107-8.

¹⁴ On Marius' reforms see Gabba (1976), chs 1 and 2; Keppie (2005) ch. 2; and Cagniard (2007).

¹⁵ Badian (1970), 15-16; cf. Gabba (1976), ch. 2.

¹⁶ Keaveney 2007.

¹⁷ Morstein-Marx (2011).

Morstein Marx challenges the way Gabba and others characterise Sulla in 88 or Caesar in 49. These men were not ‘rebels’ challenging ‘the state’, but high-ranking public officials: all the civil wars of the first century were born in, and fundamentally about, *crises of legitimacy*. They arose because it was not clear who was in the right among the various men and institutions which collectively made up the *res publica*, and so there was no obvious *political* authority for soldiers to obey. This is still a relatively new way of looking at the civil wars (and note that legitimacy is not the same thing as legality), but potentially a very fruitful one. Morstein Marx elaborates these ideas in his 2009 article, but that may be harder to find.¹⁸

Sulla returned as dictator in 82, the victor in the civil war. The Italian citizenship question was now firmly settled (although the Italians were probably not all registered until 70). But Sulla’s dictatorship fundamentally reshaped the Rome of succeeding decades, in two ways. First, through his proscriptions, which remade the landowning class. The best treatment of this is still Hinard’s (in French); Santangelo treats the proscriptions in some detail in English.¹⁹ The proscriptions served two functions for Sulla: punishing his enemies (i.e. those on the losing side in the civil war) and rewarding his friends. By changing the ownership of much of Italy, Sulla made a revolution - the dispossessed, or rather their surviving children, remained on the margins in the next generation. Also, the proscriptions made clear that wealth and property were not secure: they depended upon access to political power. The second effect of Sulla’s dictatorship was in his administrative reforms. Santangelo and Flower describe Sulla as Rome’s new founder, as a lawgiver: a man reshaping the state and setting it back on its feet.²⁰ It is uncertain just what counts as a Sullan reform, whether Sulla conceived of his reforms working together or

just made individual improvements, whether he made radical changes or just enshrined recent developments in law. In fact, owing to the source problems there is a tendency to believe that if part of the government structure worked one way in Livy, and another way in Cicero’s letters and speeches, then the change must have been made by Sulla, but often this is a mere guess. The key changes were the suppression of the tribunate and the restoration of the courts to the Senate: the probable effect of these were that consuls rather than tribunes were expected to take the lead in lawmaking in Rome, and that the Senate was as much a pool of jurors as a consultative, policy-making body. But Sulla’s aims might have been as much moral as administrative. In considering the Sullan constitution, we need to recall that Sulla died in 78 and that what followed may or may not have been to his design. Moreover, it is important to differentiate between Sulla’s own actions and his later significance: Sulla served as a model or cautionary example (or both) to Pompey, Caesar, Octavian and many later figures.²¹

Personalities: the post-Sullan Republic

The 30 years between Sulla’s dictatorship and Caesar’s are the best documented period in ancient history, and so we tend to think of them as the Ciceronian period or the age of Caesar. To a contemporary Roman, however, Cicero was not the most important man in Rome. Nor was Caesar, despite his importance to posterity - until the last few years of this period, Caesar was a relatively minor player. No, Roman public life was dominated by the figure of Cn. Pompeius Magnus - Pompey. The best biography of Pompey is Seager’s, although the titles of Greenhalgh’s two-part biography best capture the two phases of Pompey’s career: the first volume is entitled

18 Morstein-Marx (2009).

19 Hinard (1985); Santangelo (2007), 78-88.

20 Santangelo (2007); Flower (2010).

21 On Sulla, Keaveney (1982) is a good starting point; an alternative is Seager (1992a), while see Badian (1970) for an older but thoughtful appraisal.

‘The Roman Alexander’ and the second ‘The Republican Prince’.²² The relevant chapters of the *Cambridge Ancient History* are also useful.²³ If Sulla tried to restore Rome to normality and order after the civil wars, from the start Pompey’s place was outside that order: until 61 as the great troubleshooter and conquering hero, and in the fifties as Rome’s godfather figure, not powerful or ambitious enough to rule but too powerful and too ambitious to allow the system to function without him. Pompey’s *modus operandi* is best illustrated by Vervaet, who also explores Augustus’ use of the same techniques of getting his way.²⁴

The creation of the First Triumvirate in 60 is often heralded as the beginning of the end for the Republic: according to this viewpoint, the alliance of Pompey, Crassus and Caesar wielded so much power that the Republic ceased to function.²⁵ But this has been disputed - Seager makes the good point that the objectives of the three were short-term - and really the Triumvirate only held good until late in 59 and then again from mid-56 until Crassus’ departure from Rome at the end of 55.²⁶ Meier has the best account: the basic political conflict after Pompey’s return to Rome in 61 was between Pompey on one side and on the other those leading senators who had gained control of the Senate - chief among whom was the young Cato.²⁷ This meant that Pompey was forced to build up a power base outside the Senate - of which his alliance with Crassus and Caesar was the most eye-catching example, but not the only one - in order to get anything done. This in turn meant that Pompey was indirectly responsible for much of the violence and dysfunction which

plagued Roman politics in the fifties. A deal between Pompey and his enemies was finally struck in 52, after the anarchy had reached such an extent that Cato and his group were willing to give ground, and the consequence was an immediate return to order in Rome. At that point it might have seemed as though the troubles which had plagued the Republic were gone, and that stable government might be the future, under the aegis of this alliance between Pompey and the *boni* (or Good Men, as this faction in the Senate was called). But a key figure was not included: Caesar, the proconsul of Gaul.

Caesar is of course much the most famous figure in this period. New biographies on him appear every year, and it can be difficult to choose between them. Some students might head to the podcast series ‘Life of Caesar’, which is good for thinking through some of the major themes, and treats the issues in a lot of depth, but it is created by non-historians who frequently misunderstand Roman society and get basic facts wrong.²⁸ Two biographies to look for are Christian Meier’s and Jeff Tatum’s.²⁹ Meier is good on the events and on Caesar’s significance, both in Roman history and in world history more generally. Tatum’s is not a straight biography, but is a good way of using Caesar’s life as a means of explaining the Roman world he lived in. It is, moreover, written with students very much in mind.

Caesar’s life continues to fascinate historians. There is a strong German tradition (seen in Meier) of viewing Caesar’s life as almost a commentary on Rome, as though he was destined (consciously or unconsciously) to destroy the Republic. But it is well to remember that, until the 50s BCE, he was a minor figure in Roman politics, and during the 50s he was absent in Gaul. He only became the centre of his world as dictator. Until then, he can be viewed as one of a number of aristocratic

22 Seager (2002); Greenhalgh (1980), (1981).

23 Seager (1992b); Sherwin-White (1992); Wiseman (1992a) and (1992b).

24 Vervaet 2010.

25 Syme (1939), 35-6.

26 Seager (2005), 85.

27 Meier (1996), 353.

28 Reilly and Harris (2014).

29 Meier (1996); Tatum (2008).

Roman figures (such as Catiline, or Clodius) who gambled recklessly with their lives and careers and with the Republic itself, although Caesar had two advantages on such men: he was talented, and he was lucky. Some of the major debates around Caesar's life are: why did he cross the Rubicon and go to war in 49? This question has tended to become sidetracked by what is known as the *Rechtsfrage*, or legal question: when did Caesar's command in Gaul legally expire and thus (by extension), was he legally in the right or in the wrong? Generally, the tendency has been to see Caesar as automatically in the wrong - as a 'rebel' who led his army against 'the state'. Yet recent work has tended to avoid the issue - Morstein-Marx's is the main article in English, as much of the other relevant work is in German.³⁰ Morstein-Marx makes the point that 'legality' is an unhelpful concept in civil war, as it privileges those who happen to hold the levers of power. More useful is the idea of 'legitimacy', which has as its judges the Roman people - and in their eyes, Caesar had a case. This approach also makes sense of the otherwise baffling fact that Caesar makes his wounded *dignitas* (dignity, private reputation) one of the main justifications for invading Italy (Caes. *Civ.* 1.7).

Another key question is about what Caesar intended for the long term after he won the civil war. He was named dictator for life early in 44, but was that how he intended to hold power? Did he want to be King of Rome - was he to become a Roman version of the Hellenistic kings of Macedonia or Egypt? Connected to this is the issue of his religious status in Roman life, on which Weinstock is still the standard text.³¹ Was Caesar to be worshipped as a god while still alive? Did he make any plans for beyond his death - he was, after all, now in his mid-50s, with no living (legitimate) children? There are a few tantalising hints, but the field has been open for the speculations of modern historians. There are many works to consult:

30 Morstein-Marx (2009).

31 Weinstock (1971).

a few good ones are listed in the footnotes.³² There is more of a tradition on this in German, where Martin Jehne has written extensively on Caesar's dictatorships. Finally, as Caesar was murdered mainly by enemies he had pardoned, was his clemency his undoing, or was it rather the only hope for allowing Rome to heal itself after civil war?

One of the great things about the late Republic is that it is full of larger-than-life figures. One of the most interesting is M. Porcius Cato. Little has been written on him in particular, although his speech in Sallust's *Catilinarian War* is a good starting point (Sall. *Cat.* 52), as is Cicero's complaint in a letter that Cato approached politics like he was living in Plato's Republic, not the cesspool of Romulus. The key question to my mind is, how did Cato reach a position of such political influence so young? From his early 30s he was regarded as a key person, someone whom even Pompey desperately wanted to ally with. He was not alone in living his philosophical education (rather than simply discussing it), although probably no-one else did to his extremes. Yet it seems unfair to dismiss him as a rigid ideologue, because he was also a practical politician. As legendary as he was to contemporaries, his reputation was sealed forever by the manner of his suicide at Utica during the civil war. Indeed it seems odd that a man who prided himself on reclaiming old Roman virtues would become that most un-Roman of creatures: a political martyr.

While Cato was a central figure to contemporaries, for us this period is dominated by Cicero, who provides the vast bulk of the evidence we have, in the best-documented period in the whole of ancient history. Consequently, it is hard not to see Rome through Cicero's eyes. He is, moreover, an easy figure to make fun of: we possess hundreds of his letters and dozens of speeches and so can read, for example, how he could warmly compliment a man in one speech and then violently abuse him in another, or mount

32 Meier (1996), ch. 14; Rawson (1992); and Gardner (2009).

a passionate character defence of a governor on trial when we know that Cicero privately thought him a criminal and an idiot. Such examples do not inspire confidence, nor does Cicero's evident and monumental vanity or his frequent loss of nerve. But he was a highly intelligent and educated man, worried about the direction his beloved Rome was travelling in and determined to do what he could to save her. Against these excuses, however, it must be admitted that when, in the final year of his life, Cicero found himself in a position of political influence, he used that influence to try to restart the civil wars and crush Mark Antony. There are many modern biographies of Cicero, but it is usually better to approach him through his own words. Good starting points are the speech for Caelius, the speeches against Catiline, the second Philippic against Antony, and his letters to Atticus of late 50/early 49 (revealing his pain at the outbreak of civil war) and 45 (after the death of his daughter Tullia, which crushed him). All of these are available for free online (although usually in older translations) at the Perseus Project and elsewhere.³³

The final figure of note in the late Republic is M. Licinius Crassus. He is an easy figure to stereotype and often appears as Mr Moneybags, the typical rich and greedy man. Yet he was more complex: his father and brothers had been killed in the Marian terror in 87 and he had to rebuild the family fortunes during the Sullan proscriptions. His failure and death against the Parthians in 53 obscures his successful military commands as a younger man: he was largely responsible for winning the major battle of the civil war in 82 and in 71 quickly and comprehensively defeated Spartacus and his massive army. Crassus was the sort of politician which is a recognizable type today: very comfortable as a backroom operator, creating obligations and building alliances, who seems less impressive in the full glare of public view. We might label him as the kingmaker who, late in life, wanted

to be the king. Crassus has not attracted much recent attention: he is discussed at length by Gruen (in various places), while two useful biographies are by Marshall and Ward.³⁴

Individuals: the triumviral era

Until 44 BCE, M. Junius Brutus was a common type in late Republican Rome: a man with an impressive name whose achievements did not match it. He was well connected: his great-uncle had been the reforming tribune of 91, M. Livius Drusus. Cato was his uncle (and, posthumously, his father-in-law), while his mother Servilia (one of the truly impressive women in Roman history) was Caesar's longtime mistress. He was also a good friend to Cicero, and was closely involved in Cicero's philosophical works in the 40s. Yet until the conspiracy of the Ides of March, Brutus' main claim on the attention of historians was his role as an extortionate moneylender in Cyprus. But along with Cassius, he was at the heart of the conspiracy to murder Caesar (a man who had done him conspicuous favours). The reasons why are complex: Brutus later issued coins with images of liberty and tyrannicide, while the memory of his ancestor who had founded the Republic and expelled tyranny, also named Brutus, hung over him. There is no (recent) full-length work on Brutus in English, although Tatum provides a good introduction to the philosophical and political atmosphere in which the assassination took place.³⁵

The triumviral era proper, or at least its modern memory, is dominated by three figures: Mark Antony, the young man of many names whom we call (in this period) Octavian but who called himself Caesar, and the Queen of Egypt, Cleopatra VII. This is partly because, with Cicero's death in late 43, our flood of evidence is reduced to a trickle. There were other men of some importance: the other triumvir M.

³³ (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper>).

³⁴ Gruen (1995); Marshall (1976); Ward (1977).

³⁵ Tatum (2008), ch. 7.

Aemilius Lepidus (soon sidelined), the semi-outsider Sextus Pompeius (now the subject of a wonderful biography by Kathryn Welch), and various lieutenants or relatives such as M. Agrippa, L. Antonius, Octavia and Fulvia.³⁶ Yet the three key figures really did decide the fate of the world.

Mark Antony is hard to find beneath his Augustan caricature. We know something of his loose living as a youth from Cicero (who hated him), which appears to be true: late in life he wrote a reply to Octavian's propaganda called *On his own drunkenness*. He had been one of Caesar's main deputies (not always reliable), but he was consul on the Ides of March and thus absolutely central to everything that happened after, until his suicide fourteen years later. The best account of this period is Pelling's first chapter in *CAH* vol. 10, which does a good job of explaining the uncertainty of the period.³⁷ Two great questions are repeatedly asked about Antony over this period. First, was he infatuated with Cleopatra to his own loss, or was it also good policy to support a friendly queen? And second, why did he lose the supremacy to Octavian - was it a slow-building transfer of primacy based on Octavian's good fortune and his own bad luck and miscalculation, or did the fate of the world really just come down to the outcome of the naval campaign of Actium in 31? It is true that by 31 his fate and Cleopatra's were entwined and that Octavian made use of this, but as late as 33 when it came to war a large part of the Senate had come across to Antony, and objectively he must have appeared the more likely to win. He had achieved massive military glory as the victor of Philippi in 42, glory which was partly spent by his failures against the Parthians. Antony remains a fascinating and attractive figure, appropriately favouring Dionysus to Octavian's emphasis on Apollo. The best introduction to Antony (and also to

the Egyptian queen) is by Goldsworthy.³⁸

Cleopatra is perhaps the most romanticised figure in the ancient world, and much of what people think they know about her is rubbish. Even so, what we can reconstruct of her life gives great material for this romance. Culturally and ethnically she was Greek-Macedonian: the ruling Ptolemies had retained their Hellenism. Many of the great stories are (probably) true or largely true: how she smuggled herself in to see Caesar in a soldier's kit-bag, how she sailed upriver at Tarsus to meet Antony on a golden barge, and how she poisoned herself to escape being paraded in Octavian's triumph. She owed her throne to Romans, as had her father and grandfather before her, and her main policy priority was to gain the support of the powerful Romans of the day. To that end she bore Caesar a son and children to Antony as well, eventually. But the nature of these relationships is difficult to disentangle behind Octavian's propaganda: he lambasted her as the wicked witch of the east, enchanting Antony's mind against his country and ensnaring him in oriental luxury. There was also the fact that she was a woman, and many of the tropes used on Cleopatra are standard for negatively depicting female power. But it is important to consider her as herself, and as the Queen of Egypt, not simply as Mrs Mark Antony. She was a powerful political player in a time when this was essential for survival. And even in defeat she won, against Octavian, by managing to die on her own terms. Goldsworthy is again the best starting point, although Thompson gives a good introduction to the Egypt she was born into and ruled.³⁹

Which brings us finally to Augustus. Almost alone among the people studied here, he died peacefully in his bed as an old man, secure in the power he had possessed, undisputed, for more than forty years. There is a huge amount to say about Augustus, but I will focus here on

³⁶ Welch (2012).

³⁷ Pelling (1996).

³⁸ Goldsworthy (2010).

³⁹ Goldsworthy (2010); Thompson (1992).

his role in the end of the Republic. It cannot be emphasised enough that, when Caesar died and C. Octavius (as he then was) found himself a player in the snake pit that was Roman power politics, he was only 18. He was not born into the high aristocracy: his father was only a praetor but died prematurely, and the family came from municipal Italy. Augustus is the small-town boy made good. He made good through a youth of extreme violence, betrayal and opportunism, and had he died in the early 30s he would be remembered as a savage gangster. Another key point is that he started off only with his adopted name, Caesar, and a bit of money, and it was incredibly unlikely that he should have emerged as triumvir at the end of 43. The ‘real’ Augustus is almost impossible to recover, although there has been a recent splurge in activity on him, occasioned by the bimillennium of his death in 2014. The best book I know on Augustus is a collection of articles by different authors, although it is aimed at a scholarly audience.⁴⁰ Two recent biographies are a good start: Goldsworthy’s is aimed at a general audience, while Galinsky’s is more in depth and better on the world of Augustan Rome (including the literature of the Golden Age).⁴¹ It is also always worth the trouble to go back to Syme, who viewed Augustus through the lens of the Europe of his day.⁴² The debates around Augustus are usually much the same. How should we judge him: as the ruthless triumvir, or as the bringer of peace? Did his service to Rome outweigh his (many) crimes? Just what was the base of his power in Roman society: was he speaking the truth when he concentrated on his own *auctoritas* (authority, influence) rather than his power? Or was all that simply a way to disguise and make palatable the rule of the man who controlled the legions?

⁴⁰ Edmondson (2009).

⁴¹ Galinsky (2012); Goldsworthy (2014).

⁴² Syme (1939).

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