

## **Octavian and Antony: Images of Rome Verses the ‘East’**

### ***Topics:***

- ***The Failed ‘Restoration’***
- ***Mark Antony: Proconsul and Enemy of the State***
- ***The Peculiar Legitimacy of Octavian***
- ***The New Triumvirate***
- ***Philippi and the Defeat of Cassius and Brutus***
- ***Octavian as Caesar of the West; Antony ‘King’ of the East***

### **1. The Failed ‘Restoration’**

Brutus and Cassius probably hoped that the murder of Julius Caesar, followed by a general amnesty and the confirmation of his public acts, would be sufficient to stabilize the state and avoid civil war. It is unlikely that a pristine return to the Roman ‘Republic’ could be achieved. However, a central role for the Senate might have been envisaged along with electoral processes free from the patronage of a single dominant leader or Dictator. Such processes might have received the support of ‘moderates’ such as Cicero (see Plutarch *Brutus* 19), perhaps with the support of the new consuls Pansa and Hirtius.

However, it would be unwise to speak of a Republican party as such, since the *res publica* as used at this time did not equate with modern Republican notions, and the policies of Cato the Younger and Brutus were directed more against the dominion of an individual rather than suggesting particular constitutional reforms. The degree to which Julius Caesar had undermined ‘republican’ processes can be seen by the way he manipulated elections: -

He [Julius Caesar] called the assemblies only to have them vote in the affirmative on laws constructed in his offices and to elect the candidates he commended. He nominated the consuls and half the other offices, leaving the people free to choose the others – that is the way the annoying tribunes got in. His scorn of the constitution was shown by an event of the last day of 45, two and a half months before his death. Word came that a consul in office had suddenly died, and Caesar hastily called the centuriate assembly and had it elect on his commendation a man to serve part of a day. (Taylor 1975, p173)

A total of some 60 senators may have been involved in the plot (never involving more than 7% of the Senate), though on the day there were only 23 wounds on Caesar’s body (Goldsworthy 2006, pp500-509). Some of those who had assassinated Julius Caesar partly did so partly out of personal interest and in revenge for particular slights and losses, e.g. Lucius Tillius Cimber, whose brother had been exiled as an ‘ardent Pompeian’ (Goldsworthy 2006, p508). Most, especially leaders such as Cato and Brutus, had opposed the idea of one man dominating political life and sought a more open form of government focused on competitive elections and the free operations of Senate (Goldsworthy 2006, p500; Taylor 1975, p175). However, these ideals and a sense of moral outrage did not provide a coherent raft of policy, nor an effective coup d’état. Cicero had only given grudging and limited support to this project of a morally

invigorated political life. Cicero had not been brought directly into the plot, but Brutus may have hoped that the 'elder' statesman would take the lead in settling affairs (see Goldsworthy 2006, p509). As a whole, the plotters seem to have underestimated the vested interests of the diverse group that comprised the 'party of Caesar'. This included a large section of the Roman plebeians (mobilized into outrage over the bloody death of their benefactor, Julius Caesar), ex-soldiers from Gaul, a sizeable number of knights (*equites*) who had benefited from Caesar's patronage, and a smaller group of older Senators (Syme 1974, p73, p77, pp79-80). This group, led diversely at first by Octavian and Mark Antony, were not content to let the 'Liberators' inherit real power in the state. As noted by Ronald Syme, most of the new nominees in government were powerful *equites* from municipal Italy; these men provided a strong interest group that would not be satisfied with their 'proper' place in the kind of *concordia ordinum* envisaged by a moderate conservative such as Cicero (see Syme 1974, pp81-82).

Furthermore, the support of the plebeians, the city mob, soldiers and ex-veterans for Julius Caesar may have been stronger than someone such as Brutus could imagine. It was mixed group that became inflamed when the body of Caesar was about to be removed from the Forum, and instead demanded that he be cremated there. In the summary by Adrian Goldsworthy: -

The mood was hysterical. The actors hired to dress in the triumphal and magisterial regalia of Caesar and his ancestors now tore these off, ripped them into pieces and tossed them into the flames. His veteran soldiers through their weapons and armour into the blaze, while women added their finest jewelry. Occasionally crowds had protested against Caesar, but this had always been over a specific grievance. Their affection for him, as a man who throughout his career consistently advocated measures for the benefit of the wider population and not simply the narrow elite, had never seriously wavered. (Goldsworthy 2006, p510; see Suetonius *Julius Caesar* 84-85)

## **2. Mark Antony: Proconsul and Enemy of the State**

One of the men least satisfied with a peaceful settlement was Mark Antony, long-time associate of Julius Caesar and a consul about to take up his proconsular command in Cisalpine Gaul. Antony had been Master of Horse for a time under the Dictator Caesar, and was now the most prominent leader of 'Caesarian' party. He had come from a noble family (meaning that they had in the past held high office) but of an impoverished plebeian background, though his grandfather was a great orator (Plutarch *Mark Antony* 1). He had gained prominence with Julius Caesar as a fine cavalry leader, a successful general in command of one of the wings at the Battle of Pharsalus. In 49 B.C.E. Antony had been a tribune of the plebs, and represented Caesar's interests in Rome just before the start of the civil war between Caesar and Pompey. He was one of the key supporters of Julius Caesar, but it was not certain to what extent he had intended to inflame the crowds during the funeral of Julius Caesar (see Suetonius *Julius Caesar* 84; Plutarch *Mark Antony* 14, contra the manipulative and dramatic view presented in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*). During this early period Antony's policies were moderate, and he did not attempt to prosecute the assassins of Caesar. He even seemed friendly towards Cassius and Brutus (Plutarch *Mark Antony* 14). Indeed, Antony argued that the title of Dictator

should be abolished forever, perhaps merely as a superficial gesture of reconciliation (Syme 1974, p107).

Mark Antony as consul and a leading man of the Caesarian 'party' was technically head of the Roman government and its highest official. However, he also knew that he had powerful opponents both within and outside Rome, and he might have been considered for assassination as well if Brutus had not been aware of the need to limit their violence to the Dictator (Goldsworthy 2006, p504). Mark Antony proceeded to buttress his position. First, he took hold of the extensive note-books of Julius Caesar from his widow, Calpurnia, thereby securing a propaganda tool concealing the desire, plans and intent of dead Caesar. Next, Antony secured the support of key Caesarians such as Balbus, Hirtius (to be consul next year) and Lepidus, the current Master of the Horse (Syme 1974, p97, p109), who would soon take up a military command in Spain. Although Lepidus had some family connections with Brutus, he was secured the post of *pontifex maximus* by Antony, who also betrothed his daughter to Lepidus' son (Syme 1974, p109). Next, Antony insured that the prestige of Julius Caesar was enhanced, tolerating the popular cult to Caesar which had sprung up in the Forum (Suetonius *Julius Caesar* 85; for Julius Caesar's popularity with his soldiers, see *Ibid.* 68). Last, but most importantly, Antony was to take up a proconsular command in Macedonia, with Caesar's six veteran Balkan legions (Syme 1974, p107). This command was later prolonged to 39 B.C.E. Antony also proposed that he retain the Balkan army and be given the provinces of Gallia Cisalpina and Gallia Comata (central France) instead of Macedonia, a proposal that was passed on 1<sup>st</sup> June 44 B.C.E. (Syme 1974, p115). Here Antony was assured the support of powerful legions under his legal command, while the forces in Cisalpine Gaul were not too far from Rome to provide some leverage on affairs there.

The meeting of the Senate on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 44 B.C. ratified all the acts of Julius Caesar and accorded him further honours. What became clear was that 'the acts and the party of Caesar had survived his removal' (Syme 1974, p99). Brutus and his followers, brought up with the notions of *libertas* and ancient examples of regicide (the killing of tyrannical kings, Plutarch *Brutus* 1), had not been able to distinguish between an assassination and a proper *coup d'etate* which could destroy the power of a faction holding power. Nor was the Senate as a collective body strong enough to assert its leadership (Syme 1974, p164). It has been bled dry by the civil wars, and most its stronger members were either already partisans of Antony or the Liberators, or were playing a cautious game, like Cicero. Cicero, at this early stage, was not prepared to support publicly Brutus and Cassius, whatever his private sentiments (Syme 1974, p100). He in fact waited to see which way the wind would blow, not fully trusted by either the followers of Caesar or by the Liberators. He was perhaps lulled by a temporary softening attitude on the part of Mark Antony, who seemed to be co-operating with the Senate (Plutarch *Cicero* 43). As the Liberators had not planned to directly seize power, they left real power in the hands of men like Mark Antony, the moderate Hirtius, and the flexible Lepidus.

Antony soon decided that this frozen state of affairs could not continue, and left Rome circa 21<sup>st</sup> of April to resettle some of Caesar's veterans in the Campania. In fact he had

found that his talents as a public demagogue were somewhat limited, and secured for himself a bodyguard. Thereafter, by May, he had managed to gain the support of some 6,000 veterans from the Campania region (Huzar 1986, p86).

Cicero himself soon left the city, fearing for his safety, and perhaps veering towards the cause of the Liberators. He returned to Rome only on then 31<sup>st</sup> of August to much criticism, especially from Antony. It was at this stage that Cicero decided he should wage war against Antony, fearing the man's power and the possibility that he would take up where Julius Caesar had left off. The opening shot was Cicero's speech, now called the *First Philippic*, sardonically named after the speeches of the Athenian orator Demosthenes against the dominance of Philip II, the Macedonian king who controlled Greek affairs in the fourth century B.C.E. It was Cicero, apparently, who had first given them this title (Plutarch *Cicero* 48). The analogy was not well chosen: Demosthenes and Athens had been no match for Philip. To the ancient mind, the histories of civil wars did repeat themselves.

The *First Philippic* makes some interesting proposals; it argued against inserting the name of Caesar along with the gods in the regular thanksgiving (Cicero *First Philippic* 5), argued for keeping Caesar's laws including the strict limit on proconsular commands of no more than two years (Cicero *First Philippic* 6-8), argued fiercely against the validity of appeal in the case of treason and rioting (Cicero *First Philippic* 9-11), and openly praised M. Brutus (Cicero *First Philippic* 14-15). The war of words had been launched. The *Second Philippic*, however, is full of invective, personal insult and misrepresentation, all standard political tools (Syme 1974, p104), but perhaps of little effect against Antony's supporters. From now on, Cicero was engaged in a war of words designed to erode Antony's prestige, and to prevent any reconciliation between him and other groups. Cicero claims that he will not treat Antony 'as a consul: he has not treated me even as a consular. Though he is in no way a consul, whether as regards his life, or his administration of the State, or the manner of his appointment, I am without any controversy a consular.' (Cicero *Second Philippic* 5). This inverted logic is not just abuse. It is an attack on the *auctoritas* and *dignitas* of Antony, thereby an attempt to undermine Antony's ability to use the formal *imperium* granted him in his office as consul and proconsul. *Dignitas* can be viewed as 'rank, prestige and honor', thereby reinforcing the authority and power of a leader (see Taylor 1975, p163, following Syme). In contrast, Cicero looked back to his own role as former consul when had used his power to overturn earlier conspiracies against the state (see Ferguson 1996).

Against the group supporting Antony, Cicero had little to offer the Senate. He had not brought in or raised many new men from his 'beloved Italia' (Syme 1974, p88), in contrast with the four *novi homines* whom Caesar had raised to the consulship between 48 and 44 B.C.E. (Syme 1974, p94). Nor was Cicero entirely trusted by Cassius and Brutus, who had no wish to take up the honorary exile implied in the options offered them by Antony. They had been offered, first of all, a special commission to secure the corn supply (June 44 B.C.E.), then in August they were offered the weak provinces of Crete and Cyrene, i.e. governorships without the control of large armies (Syme 1974, p116). Instead, Brutus was soon seen listening the lectures of the academician

Themnestus and the peripatetic (following the philosophical school originally formed by Aristotle) Cratippis in Athens, perhaps a cover for his successful negotiations to secure the allegiance of the legions in Macedonia (Plutarch *Brutus* 24). Cassius left Italy at a later date, and managed to secure the loyalty of the seven legions in Syria, along with four legions that marched north from Egypt (Syme 1974, p171). Both these men refused to accept the friendship and tolerance of Antony as more important than their own *libertas* and independence (see Wirszubski 1968 for these concepts). D. Brutus, prior to this, had taken up his command in Cisalpine Gaul, but raised no more than the two legions assigned to this province. Antony decided to assume his proconsular command in Cisalpine Gaul earlier than usual (Syme 1974, p124). D. Brutus, however, refused to yield command of the Cisalpine forces to Mark Antony, setting the stage for direct conflict.

### 3. The Peculiar Legitimacy of Octavian

Cicero found a surprising new weapon in his struggle against Antony, which may account for the confident tone of the later *Philippics*. Octavian, the great nephew of Julius Caesar, had been adopted as the son and heir of Julius Caesar. His adopted name was C. Julius Caesar Octavianus, though the young man preferred to drop the Octavianus to emphasize his connection with the dead Dictator (as noted by E.A. Judge of Macquarie University). The young man, who had been trained in the oratorical and military arts since an early age, had been in Albania when Julius Caesar was killed, preparing for Caesar's projected campaign in the East against Dacia and Parthia (Suetonius *Augustus* 8). Octavian returned to Italy and in Campania he seems to have had meetings with Balbus, former secretary of the Dictator, and perhaps with Hirtius and Pansa, rallying some support from his Caesar's friends and clients (Syme 1974, p114). Furthermore, Octavian began to write to, and visit, Cicero, who thought the young man was 'most attentive and friendly' to him (Cicero *Ad Atticum* 14.12, 22 April 44 B.C.E.).

Octavian now began a campaign to promote his own prominence through devoting honours to the dead Caesar. He sought to publicly exhibit the emblems of Caesar's power (a golden chair Caesar used to sit on, placed between the consuls, the royal crown Caesar refused to accept, etc.) during the games held in honour of the victories of Caesar, the *Ludi Victoriae Caesaris*, against the wishes of Antony (Syme 1974, pp116-117; Goldsworthy 2006, p494). A comet was seen on that day and was proclaimed as a sign of the Divine Caesar (Suetonius *Julius Caesar* 88). Octavian gained much support from the plebeians of Rome, and was making a claim for pre-eminence in the 'party' of Caesar, though an open breach with Antony was avoided at this stage (Syme 1974, p118). Octavian also gained the support of fine commanders such as M. Agrippa, the Etruscan millionaire C. Maecenas, and the influential ex-secretary of Julius Caesar, Balbus.

Octavian's policy was astute:

It was the aim of Octavianus to seduce the moderate Caesarians by an appeal to their loyalty towards the memory of the Dictator, to their apprehensions or envy of Antonius: through them he might hope to influence neutral or Republican elements. The supreme

art of politics is patience – to rob adversaries of their adherents and soldiers, their program and their catchwords. If the process goes far enough, a faction may grow into something like a national party (Syme 1974, p120)

Meanwhile, Cicero began to view Octavian as worth promoting. In a letter written towards the end of May 44 B.C.E., Cicero states that he could not refuse the request ‘of a young man so thoroughly promising, and so worthy in every way of Caesar as he is’ (Cicero *Ad Familiares* 11.28.6). It is likely that Cicero, as the ‘elder statesman’, wished to advise and guide younger Octavian.

However, what Octavian needed most of all was an army. This he had first built up illegally, without Senatorial sanction, from the clients of his family and Caesar’s ex-veterans. At first he managed to muster some 3,000 men, giving them 500 denarii as an inducement (twice the normal yearly pay), and promised a further 5,000 denarii upon retirement (Syme 1974, p125). In November, Octavian marched into Rome with these men and occupied the Forum. However, he did not find the support in the Senate he had hoped for (Syme 1974, p125), and had to reply upon a tribune to present him to the people where he verbally attacked Mark Antony.

Antony, meanwhile, was attempting to bring his legions over from Macedonia, and was probably prepared to declare Octavian a public enemy. But he soon found that Octavian was more popular than he had expected. One of Antony’s legions, the *legio Martia* declared for Octavian, as did the Fourth Legion shortly afterwards. Antony found himself forced to head for Cisalpine Gaul to muster fresh levies. Meanwhile, all of Campania now declared for Octavian. It is interesting to note that Antony publicly attacked Octavian’s motives, but did not declare him a public enemy, perhaps fearing that his own troops would not readily attack the heir of Julius Caesar (Syme 1974, p127). Instead, Antony turned on the forces of D. Brutus, which he had surrounded in the city of Muntina before the end of 44 B.C.E.

Moderate men such as Hirtius and Pansa might have hoped to use Octavian to limit the power of Antony, but Cicero (and perhaps consulars such as Philippus and Marcellus) hoped to use Octavian to completely destroy the power of Antony and the ‘Caesarian party’, thereafter discarding Octavian (see Plutarch *Cicero* 44; Syme 1974, pp134-137). By July 44 B.C.E. regular correspondence seems to have been established between Octavian and Cicero, who gives moderate support to the younger man (Syme 1974, p143; Cicero *Fifth Philippic* 50). This group organized the Senate to recognize Octavian’s levying of troops and to accord him official status (Plutarch *Mark Antony* 17).

In the *Third Philippic* Cicero returned to his written attack on Antony. Cicero demonstrated via emotional sophistries that since Antony was opposed by Octavian, the true saviour of the *res publica*, then Antony must not be a ‘true’ consul but in act an enemy of the state (Cicero *Third Philippic* 2). Antony was thereby guilty of treason. In the speech before the people on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December, Cicero used the phrasing ‘. . . it must be the case, citizens of Rome, that either these who have raised troops against the consul are criminals, or he is an enemy against whom arms have been justly raised’ (Cicero *Fourth Philippic* 1).

Ironically, the actions of Octavian were not so different to those of Catalina (Syme 1974, pp162-3), whom Cicero had suppressed earlier in his career. In effect, Cicero was now seeking the legitimation of private adventurer against an elected consul and proconsul with formal *imperium*. It was a reversal of normal constitutional principles, pretexted on the argument that this was the only way to 'save' the state. Cicero was using the standard propaganda approach commonly found in the late Republic 'to win an appearance of legality for measures of violence, to seduce the supporters of a rival party and to stampede the neutral or non-political elements.' (Syme 1974, p154).

From 1<sup>st</sup> January 43 B.C.E. the Senate debated for four days as to whether it should authorize war against Antony. Cicero won out against Calenus, who spoke for Antony, and overwhelmed the moderation of L. Piso (Syme 1974, p167). The troops of Brutus and Octavian (and later on of Cassius) were recognized as legitimate state forces. Octavian was admitted to the Senate and given the equivalent rank to a pro-praetor (Suetonius *Augustus* 10; Dio Cassius 46.29.2). Meanwhile, envoys were sent to Antony, who negotiated to give up Cisalpine Gaul, but sought to hold Comata Gaul for a five-year period until Cassius and Brutus had been consuls and then given up whatever proconsular commands they might have taken (thus Antony could ensure his own safety). Once again, a military leader was seeking to buttress himself against military and legal attacks by retaining an extra-ordinary command in a province. This time it was not Cato or Pompey who refused to negotiate, it was Cicero and Octavian who now felt they had the upper hand.

The Senate therefore rejected Antony's proposals and passed its 'ultimate decree' (*senatus consultum ultimum*), instructing the consuls and Octavian to see to the security of the state. Furthermore, the Senate soon recognized the military usurpations of M. Brutus in Macedonia, to which he was appointed as 'proconsul'. Cicero also tried to frighten Lepidus away from his support for Antony (Syme 1974, p173). Cicero would soon find that the continued victories of Octavian (followed later on by the death of the two current consuls) would leave the young man in a strong if not yet dominant position within the state. Indeed, it was probably this alliance between Cicero and Octavian, who had sworn to avenge the death of Julius Caesar, that prevented M. Brutus returning from Macedonia to Italy, even though he had been requested to return by the Senate and Cicero himself (Syme 1974, p183). Furthermore, M. Brutus was reluctant to engage in a civil war against Mark Antony or Lepidus at this stage. M. Brutus, in fact, felt that Octavian was more of a danger to the Republic than Antony. He also argued that Cicero was not using the young leader; instead Cicero was merely finding himself a convenient master (Syme 1974, p184).

The combined legions of the consuls and Octavian marched north to engage Antony's forces. Antony was defeated in a number of engagements, but his forces were not entirely destroyed. He withdrew towards Transalpine Gaul. Lepidus, perhaps fearing that his troops would not obey an order to destroy Antony, soon surrendered the command of his forces to the more popular leader, thereby giving Antony the support of his Spanish legions. During these engagements the two consuls had died on the battlefield, leaving

Octavian as the foremost 'senatorial' commander in Italy (aside from D. Brutus). However, things did not go well for D. Brutus: he was outmanoeuvred by the veteran legions of Mark Antony, Lepidus, and the forces which Pollio had brought from Further Spain. Betrayed by his own troops, D. Brutus fled north into the Alps, only to be killed by a Gallic chieftain (Syme 1974, p180).

At this stage Octavian revealed his hand, perhaps prompted by feelers that the Senate was putting out for the return of M. Brutus from the east (Plutarch *Brutus* 27). A deputation of four hundred soldiers and centurions marched into the Senate and demanded that their general be given the consulship (even though he was under age and had not held the required earlier posts, though he had been granted previously the powers of a *propraetor*). The demand was refused and Octavian again marched on Rome, this time with several legions (Suetonius *Augustus* 26). With his legions just outside the city, it was not surprising that Octavian was appointed consul.

Octavian immediately began to entrench his power. A special court declared Cassius and M. Brutus public enemies, now allowing war to be waged freely against men who held commands only recently confirmed by the Senate. Octavian also opened the treasury, and offering a payment of some 2,500 denarii (ten years' pay) to his soldiers, secured the loyalty of the eleven legions he controlled. He left Rome for the north, but now aimed at some accommodation with Antony. Octavian of course, could not come to terms with Brutus and Cassius (an option which would clash with the *pietas* he owed his adoptive father), but he knew that his forces alone would not be sufficient to overwhelm their legions. It was likely that Octavian also knew that certain members of the 'senatorial' party intended to get rid of him once his usefulness was over (Suetonius *Augustus* 12). On the way north Octavian revoked the decrees outlawing Antony and Lepidus (Syme 1974, p188), and arranged a meeting among the three commanders in which they divided up the world as if it had been 'a family inheritance' (Plutarch *Mark Antony* 19). They had arrived at the accommodation known as the Second Triumvirate, in part to combine against Cassius and Brutus and to avoid a battle in which the 'Caesarians' would decimate themselves. Apparently Lepidus was the main mediator (Huzar 1986 p115).

#### 4. The New Triumvirate

This second triumvirate, unlike the first private arrangement between Crassus, Julius Caesar and Pompey, was the public control of the Roman state for five years. It was based on the pretext of a board to set the Republic in order, *tresviri rei publicae constituendae*, and was thereafter approved by a law passed in the Senate (Syme 1974, p189; Huzar 1986, p115). Antony was to retain control of Cisalpine and Central Gaul, while Lepidus retained Gallia Narbonensis and most of Spain. To Octavian fell Africa, Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica, weak and problematic commands, thereby suggesting his initial junior position in the trio. Sextius Pompeius in fact had already occupied parts of these islands with his naval forces. The legions were to be divided among them, though Antony may have had the strategic advantage in Italy (see Huzar 1986, p117).



With this new unity of purpose, the triumvirs decided to remove their enemies as well as add to their own wealth. They set up a list of proscriptions (those to be executed). Numbers in the ancient sources vary from 200 (Plutarch *Brutus* 27) up to 300 senators (Appian *Civil War* 4.5.20), though up to 2,000 *equites* may have been targeted (Syme 1974, p7). The triumvirs were keen to remove serious opposition, silence their opponents, settle some old scores, and meanwhile enrich themselves by confiscating the estates of proscribed individuals. Other capital taxes were levied (Syme 1974, p195) to maintain their unusually large legionary forces (43 legions in total). This was needed because Cassius and Brutus had cut off the revenues usually derived from Greece and the East. The triumvirs also set aside land from 18 regional cities in Italy to settle some of the legions after they had defeated the 'Republicans', with land from another 16 cities added later (Syme 1974, p196; Huzar 1986, p117).

One of their first victims was Cicero, whose *Philippics* had made him too dangerous a man for Antony to tolerate. Cicero left it too late to leave Italy and was caught on the road by Antony's agents, who cut off his head and right hand as a warning to those who would speak or write against the new regime (Plutarch *Mark Antony* 20; Plutarch *Cicero* 48). His end was dignified, if lacking the grandeur of true tragedy. Cicero had tried to be a power-broker among men he either disliked or underestimated (see Ferguson 1996). The Senate he appealed to and might have wanted to rejuvenate was full of men who had either been 'made' by Julius Caesar or were pandering to those they thought to be the new strong men of the time. Many fled east to Cassius and Brutus, other voted honours to the new triumvirs.

Syme sees this as the true end of the Republic:

The Republic had been abolished. Whatever the outcome of the struggle, it could never be restored. Despotism ruled, supported by violence and confiscation. The best men were dead and proscribed. The Senate was packed with ruffians, the consulate, once the reward of civic virtue, now became the recompense of craft or crime. (Syme 1974, p201).

This may be an exaggeration, but it was clear that no mere manipulation of military leaders was enough to ensure the constitutional and political operation of the Republic. The Senate was easily divided and cowed, the courts became the arena of political jousts, and the assemblies and tribunes readily sidelined by the preparation for civil war (see for example Suetonius *Julius Caesar* 78).

Furthermore, this was an age of ambition which readily lead to violence:

The combination of high risks and the potential for almost limitless success fuelled both ambition and fear amongst Caesar's generation. All had seen some men rise spectacularly high and others fall to ruin or death. Most men had neither the inclination nor favourable opportunity to advance their career through intimidation or open violence, but no one could ever be sure that his rivals would not choose such methods. Senators were ready to believe rumours of revolution or assassination plots. Once civil war actually broke out even remaining neutral was not always a safe option as the proscriptions have shown. The higher a man rose and the greater risks he took, the harder his fall was likely to be, and the more he worried that his enemies would turn savagely on any sign of weakness. The overweening ambition of so many of the famous figures in the Late

Republic is obvious, but it is too easy to forget the nervous climate in which they lived and struggled for power. (Goldsworthy 2006, p514)

## 5. The Battle of Philippi and the Defeat of Cassius and Brutus

The forming of the triumvirate indicated that the 'Caesarian' party would soon turn its attentions to the Libertors still at large. Brutus was shamed by the death of Cicero but not surprised. He was particularly critical of the actions of the Senate of the friends of Cicero in buckling under to the triumvirate. As expressed in Plutarch:

He [Brutus] said it was not their oppressors but their own actions that had made slaves of them, and they had allowed themselves to look on tamely at deeds which they should have considered it intolerable even to hear of (Plutarch *Brutus* 28)

The Caesarians were delayed in their revenge against the Liberators. Octavian became enmeshed in a slow and difficult campaign against Sex. Pompeius in Sicily, but then returned to Italy and crossed over to Dyrrhachium in Albania. From the start, Antony and Octavian found themselves hindered by the superior naval forces under the 'Republicans' L. Staius Marcus and Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus, who soon had some 130 warships at their disposal (Pelling 1996, p5).

Meanwhile, Cassius and Brutus had strengthened their forces militarily and financially, and in 42 B.C.E. brought their joint command across the Hellespont into Greece. They advanced until the plain of Philippi, establishing well-defended positions for their camps. Antony and Octavian soon closed on their location and managed to force an encounter even though Cassius had hoped to use delay and guile to wear down his opponents in a long campaign (Plutarch *Brutus* 39). To date, these were the two largest armies that had ever faced each other in battle (Plutarch *Brutus* 38). The triumvirs had transported a total of 28 legions into Macedonia, while the Liberators had some 19 legions, not all up to full strength (Warry 1980, pp178-9). After initial marches the armies faced each other at Philippi in north-east Greece.

Brutus managed to break through Octavian's forces, cutting to pieces three legions (Plutarch *Brutus* 41-42), with his troops sweeping around the enemy flank. However, they then made towards the enemy's exposed camp rather than taking full advantage of their position, which could have given Brutus a decisive victory (Plutarch *Brutus* 44). Octavian only just managed to vacate his tent in time to avoid being killed. Cassius, meanwhile, had been forced back by Antony, and had to abandon his camp. Too late Brutus realized his colleague's danger, and sent a relieving force of cavalry. Despairing, and mistaking the relief force for enemy soldiers, Cassius took his own life (Plutarch *Brutus* 42-3), too soon, too easily. Plutarch records that he killed himself with the same dagger he had used on Julius Caesar (Plutarch *Caesar* 69). However, the result of this first battle (23<sup>rd</sup> October 42 B.C.E) was indecisive, with Brutus still on the field with large forces.

In the following battle Brutus' sub-commanders allowed one of his wings to become too extended and his centre became too thin. The centre was penetrated and his army flanked and then destroyed, even though Brutus' own charge had been successful (Plutarch *Brutus* 49). In this action Marcus, the son of Cato the Younger, died fighting, refusing to surrender or flee (Plutarch *Brutus* 49). Brutus retreated off the field with some friends, and after careful deliberation decided to take his own life, certain that he could not longer win and unwilling to continue the bloodshed. Brutus thought he had no hope of victory and committed suicide (Plutarch *Caesar* 69). There was a certain irony here, since Brutus' fleets had destroyed a large convoy of reinforcements and supplies heading for Octavian's army, but the news had not been passed on (Plutarch *Brutus* 47). This report might have changed Brutus' interpretation of his situation, though the prospect of capture by the enemy was also a motivation.

For later commentators this was a fated outcome:

But the day of the Republic was past, it would seem, and it was necessary that the rule of a single man should take its place, and so the gods, wishing to remove from the scene the only man who could oppose the destined master of the world, kept from Brutus the knowledge of his success, although even so it almost reached him in time. (Plutarch *Brutus* 47).

Here we might contrast Brutus with other opponents of the Caesarian regime (as created by Julius Caesar and then mobilized as a faction by Octavian); Cato (who opposed Julius Caesar's domination of political life), Cassius and Cicero. Of the four men, Brutus stands most securely in the mold of ancient Republican virtues. Though he had joined the forces of Pompey, the man who had executed his father, this seems to have been based on the principled assessment that Caesar would do more damage to the public good (Plutarch *Brutus* 4). Furthermore, his part in the assassination of Julius Caesar was primarily based on his hatred of the permanent Dictatorship (*dictator perpetuo*), not on the more personal envy that may have motivated Cassius (Plutarch *Brutus* 8; Goldsworthy 2006, p503). Likewise, he seems to have been a more astute political and military leader than Cato (95-46 B.C.E., see Plutarch *Cato The Younger*). Brutus was also motivated by a range of secondary factors:

He [Brutus] does seem to have been one of the last to join the conspiracy, spurred on by anonymous pamphlets and slogan painted on the walls asking whether Brutus was asleep. Rome's last king had been deposed and expelled by a Brutus, and the family boasted of descent from this man, although even among the Romans there was considerable doubt over the veracity of this claim. A keen student of philosophy, especially Stoicism with its emphasis on stern duty, he was well aware of the praise given to tyrannicides in Hellenistic literature. Family pride also encouraged him to act, reinforced by his growing adulation of his uncle Cato. (Goldsworthy 2006, p503).

Brutus was a man who could be trusted, who was prepared to engage his enemies on the battlefield only when other alternative had been exhausted, who showed clemency to his enemies, and mercy to his friends at the end by not prolonging the uneven struggle. He made a more convincing leader than Cato or Cicero, and sustained a more concerted effort against his enemies than Cassius once war was inevitable. He suffered only from a certain naivete first in reconciling with Julius Caesar, and then in his hopes for the

outcomes of the Dictator's assassination. Plutarch presents him in the mold of a tragic Republican hero:

Just before the final crisis in his fortunes, he [Brutus] wrote to Atticus that his affairs stood in the best situation that fortune could devise, since he would either conquer and restore freedom to the Roman people, or die and be released from slavery, and that, while all other issues had been safely settled for him and his supporters, one thing alone remained uncertain, whether they would live and be free, or die (Plutarch *Brutus* 29).

## 6. Octavian as Caesar of the West; Antony 'King' of the East

At this stage Octavian returned to Italy and began the difficult task of disbanding some veteran legions and settling them on land that he had appropriated from allied towns in Italy. Serious civic disturbances followed with armed uprisings in Umbria, Etruria and some Sabine areas (Suetonius *Augustus* 14; Appian *Civil War* 5.3.12). These difficulties were utilized by the brother of Antony, the consul Lucius Antonius (41 B.C.E.), and by Mark Antony's wife Fulvia, who raised legions against Octavian but soon found themselves besieged in Perusia (one of the affected towns), north of Rome. Lucius Antony at last admitted that he was fighting on behalf of Mark Antony, his slingers inscribing that name as their *imperator* on their lead sling bullets (CIL xi 6721, in Syme 1974, p211). Other bullets were inscribed with abuse of Fulvia, L. Antony and of Octavian:

- 1106. I'm aiming for Fulvia's cunt.
- 1108. I'm aiming for Octavian's ass.
- 1109. Octavian, sit on this!
- 1111. Baldy Lucius Antonius, you're dead. Gaius Caesar; victory.
- 1112. Baldy Lucius Antonius and Fukvia, open your asses. (ILLRP 1106-1112, 41-40 B.C.E., in Jones 2006)

Antonian generals such as Pollio and Plancus failed to relieve L. Antony and he had to capitulate to the mercy of Octavian, who sent him away to govern Spain (Appian *Civil War* 5.35.139). Other opponents were not so well-connected or lucky: aside from the prominent citizens of Perusia, a large number of knights and senators were 'judicially' murdered (Syme 1974, p212), though the figure of 300 stated in Suetonius *Augustus* 15 seems exaggerated. Octavian found himself in a position to take control of the 11 legions remaining in Gaul when the supporter of Antony, Calenus, died. Soon all the resources of Italy and the Western provinces were in Octavian's hands, radically altering the balance of power that had been established in the triumvirate.

From 38 B.C.E Octavian took to calling himself 'Imperator Caesar', as indicated in coins struck in Gaul (Syme 1974, p113). This title of military honour now was used almost as a first name, a habit that would later on be adopted by the line of following 'emperors' (see Judge 1987; 1985). Though a ploy designed to capitalize on Julius Caesar's authority and prestige in Gaul and Italy, the claim to hold pre-eminent power was premature.

Both Mark Antony and Octavian found themselves in precarious situations. None of their legions seemed particularly keen to fight in another civil war, especially against powerful and respected leaders, both of whom came from the ‘Caesarian’ party (Appian *Civil War* 5.59.246; Syme 1974, p217). Both leaders were aware that they had not established their own political and geographical bases sufficiently to be certain of victory in another round of major conflicts. With the help of Pollio (representing Antonius) and Maecenas (representing Octavian), the ‘triumvirate’ was reestablished. Italy was to be common ground, Octavian was to hold the western provinces including Illyricum, Antony was to receive the eastern provinces including Macedonia, while their supporters were to hold the consulship in turn (Plutarch *Mark Antony* 30). As a further guarantee, Antony married Octavian’s sister, the widow Octavia. Lepidus, as a rather minor partner, was left with Africa.

The impact of these settlements was crucial in averting civil war for the time being. It is likely that Virgil’s *Fourth Eclogue*, welcoming in a new world peace, was composed to celebrate the marriage between Antony and Octavia (Syme 1974, pp21-29; Plutarch *Mark Antony* 31). In a rather premature optimism, it states: -

Time has conceived and the great Sequence of the Ages starts afresh. Justice, the Virgin, comes back to dwell with us, and the rule of Saturn is restored. The Firstborn of the New Age is already on his way from high heaven down to earth.

With him the Iron Race shall end and Golden Man inherit all the world . . .

And it is in your consulship, yours, Pollio, that this glorious Age will dawn and the Procession of the great Months begin. (Virgil *Ecl.* 4.5-12, translated by E.V. Rieu, in Ogilvie 1980, pp118-119).

The agreement between the two major players would be patched up again in a meeting at Tarentum in 37 B.C.E., with their arrangement extended to 33 B.C.E. Antony even dispatched naval forces to help Octavian against Sex. Pompeius in Sicily. This Sicilian war would be one of Octavian’s hardest, lasting eight years (43-36 B.C.E.) with Octavian losing several fleets (Suetonius *Augustus* 16).

Antony, meanwhile, proceeded to reorganize affairs in the Eastern parts of the empire. He extracted heavy tributes from these regions (Appian *Civil Wars* 5.4.15), perhaps aware of the demands that would soon be placed on his resources. In 40 B.C.E. he had been visited by Cleopatra in Cilicia (Plutarch *Mark Antony* 25-6), confirming her place on the throne and extending her territory. Antony at this stage entered into a brief liaison with Cleopatra. In 36 B.C.E. he would return to Egypt and publicly ‘marry’ Cleopatra, accepting her two children as his own. The myth soon arose that he had fallen madly in love with Cleopatra (Plutarch *Mark Antony* 36), and that this was the start of his downfall. Later sources suggested that he was besotted by a corrupt Cleopatra and willing to become an eastern king (see Florus 2.14.4 & 2.21.1-3 in Jones 2006). We should be careful in accepting this image of moral decline – it was part of the careful propaganda campaign waged by Octavian against his colleague.

Through 39-38 B.C.E. Antony was engaged in a major campaign against the Parthians, who had used this period of civil unrest within the Roman Empire to overrun parts of the Roman East, including Asia Minor, Syria and Judaea. Antony first sent his general

Ventidius against them, who defeated incursive Parthian forces in major battles between 39 and 38 B.C.E. Antony then launched an invasion, using the north-eastern route through Armenia into Media. He was successful until his supply routes through Armenia were threatened by a revolt, and he was forced to withdraw with the loss of 2 legions and several thousand other men (see Sicker 2000, pp155-156; Plutarch *Mark Antony* 50-53). He had defeated the Parthians in numerous battles, but was unable to either hold territory or destroy the enemy (Plutarch *Mark Antony* 50). Nonetheless, images of eastern conquests may have formed part of some long-term notion of his sovereignty of the east.

By 35 B.C.E. there were few other contenders for power left: Antony and Octavian were the dominant and political authority and military leaders. Lepidus had been moved out of the most important commands, with Africa left as a token holding. When he tried to assert his strength against Octavian using his African legions combined with those in Sicily, he was stripped of his command entirely (Suetonius *Augustus* 16). The soldiers would follow a new Caesar, not an old Lepidus. He was retired to the resort island of Circeii in permanent exile. Sex. Pompeius, likewise, was too weak to deal with Octavian by himself, and soon offered his naval services to Antony (Appian *Civil War* 5.52.217). This intrepid and ruthless son of Pompey the Great was at last killed in 35 B.C.E. during an abortive attempt to seize parts of Asia Minor from Antony's control (Huzar 1986, pp144-5).

Several years were now spent by Antony and Octavian in preparation for civil war. The fighting was opened by a war of words. Antony himself held a kind of triumph for his victories in Armenia, and then made a public 'donation' of parts of the east to Queen Cleopatra, including Cyprus, Libya and part of Syria. He went on to nominate his son (by Cleopatra), called Alexander, the king of Armenia, Media and Parthia (though none of these were actually conquered). His other son was to receive Phoenicia, Syria and Cilicia. (Plutarch *Mark Antony* 54) Antony also recognized Caesarion as the legitimate heir of Julius Caesar, thereby attacking the legitimacy of Octavian's adoption. The campaign, however, would backfire. Antony was too closely associated with an eastern queen, his claims too dynastic in nature. Antony could be portrayed as putting Roman interests at the mercy of the greed of a Ptolemaic queen, with the further possibility that the entire block of eastern provinces could be lost to Roman control (Huzar 1986, p199).

Octavian had learned a clever strategy concerning will and documents from his elder mentor, none other than Antony himself, who had used the written notebooks and the will of Julius Caesar to support his own program in 44-43 B.C.E. In 32 B.C.E. Octavian turned the tables:

Eventually Augustus [Octavian] broke his friendship with Mark Antony, which had always been a tenuous one and in continuous need of patching; and sought to prove that his rival had failed to conduct himself as befitted a Roman citizen, ordering the will he had deposited at Rome to be openly and publicly read. It listed among Antony's heirs the children fathered by on Cleopatra. (Suetonius *Augustus* 17).

Antony could be portrayed as a Roman who had become orientalized, and who was supporting a foreign queen's interest above those of Rome and her people. Tempted by

the enormous resources and opportunities for command, he had been drawn into this role of ruler of the east, gradually becoming divorced from Rome and the western provinces (Huzar 1986, p185). Octavian, in turn, would play the role of the saviour of Italy, the West and Roman values. If this was high farce at first, it was headed towards tragic outcomes. The Battle of Actium was not far away (see further Ferguson 1995).

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