

LATN 3100: Readings in Julius Caesar

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M307

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Office Hours: MWF 1:30-2:30; and by appointment

Textbooks: Readings in Julius Caesar (copy packet)
Latin-English dictionary

Each reading in the textbook begins with a short introduction explaining the passage to be read and the history surrounding it, often with quotations drawn from ancient and modern authors whose summary and analysis of the period and subject add context to the reading. The passage itself with notes and some vocabulary follows. At the end of the earlier lessons are a few exercises and sentences designed as a review of Latin formation and syntax. Further drill may be added as necessary.

Tests and Grades: 3 Tests 75%
Attendance 25%

There will be three tests of equal weight, each constituting a quarter of your final grade. Tests will consist of prepared and sight translation, with grammar questions appended. A sample test will be handed out before the first test. The remaining quarter of your grade will be based solely on attendance and preparation. For each day you miss without a reasonable excuse given to me before class or for any day you are unprepared to translate, I will subtract one half-point from your final grade. Attendance is essential to your success in this class. Make-ups and incompletes will be given only in strict accordance with university policy. Students must abide by the standards of Academic Honesty as stipulated in the Schedule of Courses (p.103). The final will be administered only at the appointed time (Monday, December 10, 9:30 -11:20 p.m.; Main 323L). The grading scale will be: A (100-92), A- (92-90), B+ (90-88), B (88-82), and so on. F represents a grade below 60 and is Unsatisfactory.

During the course of the term I reserve the right to make changes in this syllabus as necessary. Any such alterations will be announced in class, on the course web site or via email. Students are responsible for keeping abreast of changes.

Qualified students with disabilities may be eligible for reasonable accommodations. All accommodations are coordinated through the Disability Resource Center (DRC) in Room 101 of the University Inn, 797-2444 voice, 797-0740 TTY, or toll free at 1-800-259-2966. Please contact the DRC as early in the semester as possible. Alternate format materials (Braille, large print or digital) are available with advance notice.

Introduction

In this class we will read selections from ancient authors on the life and times of Julius Caesar. Moving chronologically through his life, we will watch Caesar rise from a broken aristocratic family to hold the highest office in the Roman Republic, from a free-spending man-about-town to become one of the finest generals and perhaps the most brilliant military strategist in Roman history, and from general to overwhelm the government of Rome itself and assume a dictatorship for life, only to fall at the hands of men whom he himself had preserved from destruction. A living enigma -- savage and gentle, charming and tactless, general and author, highly intelligent but obstinately blind to what he did not want to see -- Caesar reshaped his world and ours as few in history have done.

The text is divided into three parts. First, Caesar's early life, his personality and early career, culminating in his consulship in 59 B.C. Second, his conquest of Gaul (France) and the aftermath from 58-50 B.C. Third, his conflict with the other great military leader of the day, Gnaeus Pompey, which resulted in his overpowering the Roman State itself and his demise on the fateful Ides of March, 44 B.C. The passages are drawn from Caesar's own writings, various Roman historians, the poets Catullus and Lucan and the biographer Suetonius.

Before launching into the tumultuous years of Caesar's life, we should review briefly the historical backdrop to the first century B.C. Our picture of early Rome is blurry and based largely on myth. The Romans' ancestors supposedly derived from Aeneas, a Trojan who fled the sack of Troy (ca. 1200 B.C.). According to legend, the city Rome was founded in 753 B.C. by a certain Romulus. Beginning with him a succession of kings ruled Rome until 510 B.C., when the Romans rose up in revolt and threw the kings out. They established a Republic controlled by two elected consuls and a body of elders called the Senate. This Republic saw Rome through many crises: a long conflict between the aristocratic families and lower classes, a series of wars with Carthage and the establishment of Roman control over Italy and many of the lands bordering the Mediterranean Sea.

Just prior to Caesar's day and during his first decades of life, the Romans found themselves at war with themselves more often than foreigners. Upheavals in government led to the slaughter of two brothers, the Gracchi, who had sought to reform Roman agricultural policy. Soon Rome was divided into two factions represented by the generals Sulla and Marius. Sulla prevailed and was elected dictator, but he resigned his dictatorship and died soon thereafter (of natural causes). Caesar was born into the family of the losing side, the Marians. In his climb to power he bore the stain of Marius' defeat, and in the bitter rivalry of aristocrats for the highest offices and prestige he had to make an extraordinary effort. That he succeeded at all is a credit to his energy and persistence; that he outstripped all his peers is nothing short of incredible.

Ronald Syme, a modern historian, describes the situation prior to Caesar's birth (?102 B.C.) and during Caesar's early years (The Roman Republic, 16-17):

With the Gracchi all the consequences of empire -- social, economic and political -- broke loose in the Roman State, inaugurating a century of revolution. The traditional contests of the noble families were complicated, but not abolished, by the strife of parties largely based on economic interest, of classes even, and of military leaders. Before long, the Italian allies were dragged into Roman dissensions. The tribune M. Livius Drusus hoped to enlist them on the side of the dominant oligarchy. He failed, and they rose against Rome in the name of freedom and justice. On the Bellum Italicum supervened civil war. The party led by Marius, Cinna and Carbo was defeated. L. Cornelius Sulla prevailed and settled order at Rome again through violence and bloodshed. Sulla decimated the knights, muzzled the tribunate, and curbed the consuls. But even Sulla could not abolish his own example and preclude a successor to his domination.

Sulla resigned power after a brief tenure. Another year and he was dead (78 B.C.). The government which he established lasted for nearly twenty years. Its rule was threatened at the outset by a turbulent and ambitious consul, M. Aemilius Lepidus, claiming to restore the rights of the tribunes and supported by a resurgence of the defeated causes in Italy. The tribunes were only a pretext, but the Marian party - the proscribed and the dispossessed - was a permanent menace.